

# Brief Guide to the Pronunciation of Bengali Characters

Several methods are in use for romanizing Bengali characters. Therefore, this guide shows more than one method, but you may see alternative forms elsewhere.

## BENGALI VOWELS

BENGALI VOWELS					
SHORT VOWELS					
অ   ক	ই   কি	উ   কু	ঋ   কৃ	এ   কে	ও   কো
a   ka (ă   kă)	i   ki	u   ku	ṛ   kṛ (r̄r̄   k̄r̄r̄)	e   ke (ē   kē)	o   ko (ō   kō)
Wash <b>ing</b> ton	pill	pull	drib <b>bl</b> e	<b>e</b> ver	pon <b>d</b>
LONG VOWELS					
আ   কা	ঈ   কী	ঊ   কূ		ঐ   কৈ	ঔ   কৌ
ā   kā (aa   kaa)	ī   kī (ii   kii)	ū   kū (uu   kuu)		ai   kai (ee/ê   kee/kê)	au   kau (oo/ô   koo/kô)
Far, fa <b>th</b> er	pizz <b>a</b>	pollut <b>io</b> n		poi <b>nt</b>	jaun <b>d</b> ice, shoul <b>d</b> er
EXTRA VOWELS					
অ্যা   ক্যা	্   ক্		ং   কং	ঃ   কঃ	ঁ   কঁ
yā   kyā (yaa   kyaa) ă   kă	“ ” with no vowel		ñ   kañ n°   kan°	ahh   kahh (aḥ   kaḥ)	(~   kã) (^   ka^)
app <b>le</b>	black <b>__</b>		sing	Judah <b>h</b> had	con <b>q</b> uer

Note in particular: -

- The vowels can be short or long.
- “a” is pronounced with the short “a” sound (~“ă”) in “Wash**ing**ton” (and a short “o” in “**o**ff”).
- “ā” or “aa” has a long sound like “aa” in “**a**ardvaak” (and “a” in “**f**ar”, “**f**ather”).
- “e” sounds like “e” in “J**e**hovah” and “**e**ver”.
- “ai” or “ee” has a long sound modified into a diphthong like “oi” in “p**oi**nt”. (Imagine “ê”.)
- To avoid confusion, “ai” represents a diphthong, but “a’i” is used where “-a” ends one syllable and “i-” begins the next syllable. Thus, “kai” differs from “ka’i”.
- “au” or “oo” has a long sound modified into a diphthong either like “**ou**” in “shoul**d**er” and “**ow**” in “p**ow**er” or like “**oa**” in “**oa**k”. (Imagine “ô”.)
- To avoid confusion, “au” represents a diphthong, but “a’u” is used where “-a” ends one syllable and “u-” begins the next syllable. Thus, “kau” differs from “ka’u”.
- The shape of a vowel in Bengali script when it trails a consonant can be very different from its independent form. See [Practice](#).
- If there is no vowel after a consonant, it is marked with a “ ” to represent a hasanta (or halant).
- See the note about chandrabinu stated after “Consonants” below.

## BENGALI CONSONANTS

BENGALI CONSONANTS						
1 - GUTTURAL						
<u>ক</u>	<u>খ</u>	<u>গ</u>	<u>ঘ</u>	<u>ঙ</u>	<u>হ</u>	<u>ঃ</u>
ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa (n¹a)	ha	ahh (ah)
keen	rockhhead	got	slagheap	donkey	happy	Judah had
2 - PALATAL						
<u>চ</u>	<u>ছ</u>	<u>জ</u>	<u>ঝ</u>	<u>ঞ</u>	<u>য</u>	<u>শ</u>
ca	cha	ja	jha	ña (n²a)	ya (ya)	śa (sha)
match	matchhead	Jehovah, joy	hedgehog	enjoy	yes	dishes
3 - CEREBRAL						
<u>ট</u>	<u>ঠ</u>	<u>ড</u>	<u>ঢ</u>	<u>ণ</u>	<u>র</u>	<u>ষ</u>
ṭa (ta)	ṭha (tha)	ḍa (ḍa)	ḍha (ḍha)	ṇa (ṇa / n³a)	ra	ṣa (ṣa)
alter	malthouse	holder	goldhammer	filename	red	rashly
		<u>ড়</u>	<u>ঢ়</u>		<u>য়</u> ক্+য=ক্য	
		ra (ra)	rha (rha)		ya (ya)	
		millrun	myrrh lump		joy	
4 - DENTAL						
<u>ত</u>	<u>থ</u>	<u>দ</u>	<u>ধ</u>	<u>ন</u>	<u>ল</u>	<u>স</u>
ta	tha	da	dha	na	la	sa
panting	anthill	beds	bedheads	bending	led	washroom
						<u>স্+ত</u> s+ta stop
5 - LABIAL						
<u>প</u>	<u>ফ</u>	<u>ব</u>	<u>ভ</u>	<u>ম</u>	<u>ব</u>	<u>ঃ</u>
pa	pha	ba	bha	ma	ba / (va)	aḥa (hha)
peace	uphold	bob	nibholder	mop	bob (advise)	Judah had
OTHER						
				<u>ং</u>	<u>ঁ</u>	<u>ওয়া</u>
				ṅ (n°)	ṅ̃ / ~ / (n^ / ṅ̃ / ṁ̃)	oyaa (waa)
				sing	tang	qualms, (web)

1. Guttural—in the throat
2. Palatal—on the palate
3. Cerebral—retroflexive, with the tongue bent back on the roof of the mouth
4. Dental—on the teeth
5. Labial—on the lips

Note in particular: -

- The consonants can be either held like “ka” or huffed (breathed) like “kha”. Imagine “kha” as “khā”, and so on.
- Related consonants may be soft like “ka” or hard like “ga”.
- “ga” sounds like “g” in “good” (not like “g” in “general”).
- “ca” sounds like “c” in “cello” and “tch” in “match” (not like in “cellar” or in “cook”).
- “ja” and “yā” both have the sound of “j” as in “jazz” or in “Jehovah”.
- When “yā” is combined after another consonant, its shape changes to a squiggly “jafala” (ক্+য=ক্য)
- “-oyaa” (a compound syllable in the absence of a “w” character in Bengali) sounds like “ua” in “qualms” or “wa” in “How are you?”
- The three different sibilants (sh, ś, s) all sound almost like “j” in “dishes”, but they do differ slightly.
  - “s” before “t”, “th”, “p”, or “ph” sounds hard like “s” in “stare”.
- “h” must always be heard, breathed with some force as in “happy” and “hi-fi”.
- The chandrabinḍu (“~”) is sometimes romanized more fully as ṅ or ṁ:
  - “ṅ” is used before guttural, palatal, cerebral, and dental sounds.
  - “ṁ” is used before all other sounds.
- In modern Bengali pronunciation when two consonants are combined, the first consonant is emphasized and the second consonant is almost lost. For example, k+ yā sounds more like “kka”—See [Conjunct hints](#).

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