

READING & WRITING THAI:

A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners

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This book is an easy-to-use guide for beginning-level learners to learn how to read and write Thai without any prior knowledge. It is designed for both self-study and use in a classroom setting. The beginner can begin with the basics and then move on to intermediate lessons within the same book.

The primary focus of this book is to provide systematic guidelines which take beginning learners from tracing and copying letters to writing complete words and sentences. Plenty of exercises and writing practice are also included to reinforce the lessons throughout the book.

The content will be divided into three main parts:

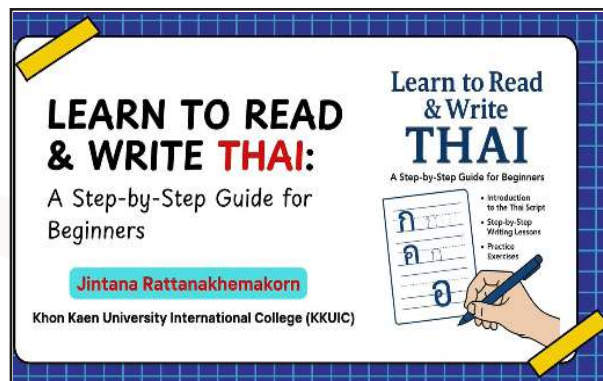
Part 1: An introduction to the basic Thai writing system and pronunciation guide using Romanizations to help identify and pronounce every Thai consonants and vowels.

Part 2: The main body of the book contains 8 lessons which teach beginners how to write Thai consonants, vowels and tone marks, and will build up to writing and reading words, complete sentences, and short paragraphs. The first three lessons will give you step-by-step guidelines on how to write each character neatly in the correct stroke order, with generous spaces provided for handwriting practice. Each lesson has a set of exercises for reviewing and reinforcing your ability to read, write, and comprehend Thai.

Part 3: A final review gives you additional practice, and at the end of the book audio recordings and printable flashcards will be provided for download. Appendices at the back also allow you to learn some of useful vocabulary and English meanings.



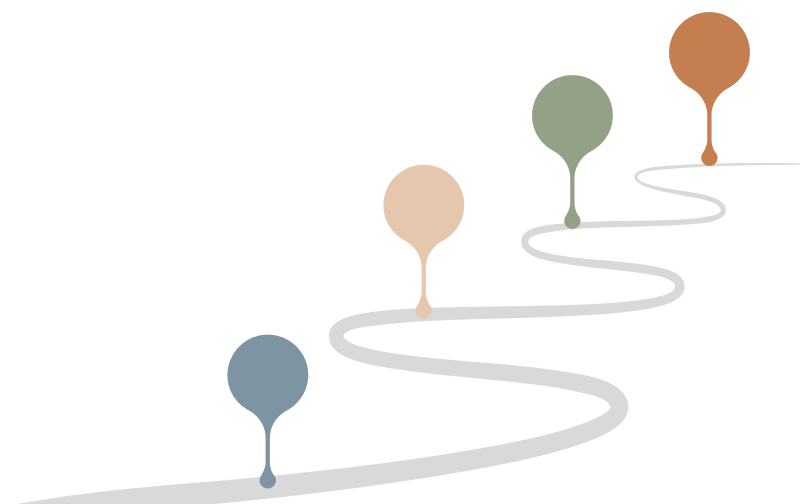
Learning to read and write a new language can be a challenge as you need to go through a fair amount of rote memorization. However, this book contains everything to help you become confident in reading and writing Thai. The lessons will guide you and explain in detail how Thai writing system works. You may find it easier than you expect after all.



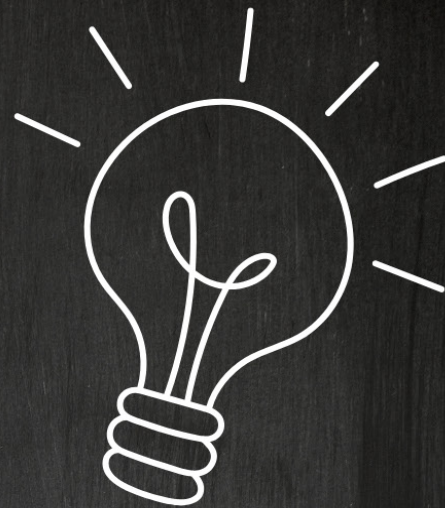
Video: Introduction to Reading and Writing Thai

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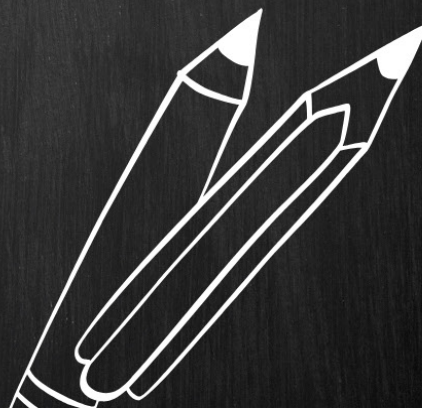


A B C



Part 1

The Thai Writing System & Pronunciation





Introduction to the Thai Writing System

The earliest Thai writing was found in Sukhothai period, by King Ramkamhaeng in 1283. He devised “The Sukhothai Script” based on the ancient Khmer and Mon scripts, which were derived from southern Indian scripts through the spread of the Buddhist religion and trade contacts in Southeast Asia. Later in the early periods of the Ayutthaya Kingdom, the script called "King Narai script" was reformed and has been used as the national Thai script up to the present.

Thai, like other Indian-based scripts, lists consonants and vowels separately. The Thai script has very complex rules on how letters are pronounced. Often multiple letters represent the same sound. On the other hand, the sounds of many Thai letters differ depending on whether the letter occurs at the start or the end of a syllable.

In Thai writing, syllables, words, and sentences are written and read from left to right without intervening spaces. Vowels can appear before, above, after, or below a consonant. The consonant always sounds first when pronouncing or reading the syllable. In addition, there is no distinction between uppercase and lowercase letters, and the end of a sentence is marked by a space.

The official language of Thailand, known as Standard Thai, is based on the language spoken in central Thailand. Most people living in central part of Thailand use Standard Thai as their common language, while people in southern, northern, and northeastern regions are bilingual speakers of Standard Thai and their regional dialects.



Video: Thai Writing System & Pronunciation



Basic Thai grammar

Thai grammar is very easy to understand when comparing with western languages. However, there are some aspects that need to be considered to create sentences.

- Different pronouns are used by male and female speakers. However, subject pronouns and object pronouns are the same (there's no difference between 'I' and 'me' or 'he/she' and 'him/her'). The commonly used personal pronouns are:

English Pronoun

I, me (for male speakers)
 I, me (for female speakers)
 you (polite)
 he, she, they
 we, us

Thai Pronoun

ผม phǒm
 ฉัน chǎn
 คุณ khun
 เขา khǎo
 เรา rao

Note: In casual conversation, it is very common that subjects are often omitted, especially “I” and “You”. Also, a nickname is often used to refer to yourself or the third person rather than using a personal pronoun.

- There are no articles like “a”, “an”, and “the”.
- Words are never modified or conjugated for tense, person, possession, singular/plural, gender, or subject-verb agreement.
- Thai sentences follow the same “subject-verb-object” word order as in English.
- No punctuation is used to indicate a question or the end of a Thai sentence.
- In order to form a question, you add a question word at the end of the sentence.

คุณหิวไหม

khun hǐw mǎi

Are you hungry?

คุณทำอาหารอะไร

khun tham-aa-hǎan à-rai

What are you cooking?

- When talking about quantities of things, you need to add a “classifier”, similar to “four sheets of paper” or “three bottles of wine” in English. In Thai however, the number and classifier come after the noun.

noun + number + classifier		
paper + four + sheets	กระดาษ 4 แผ่น grà-dàat sii phàehn	= four sheets of paper
wine + three + bottles	ไวน์ 3 ขวด waay sǎam khùat	= three bottles of wine

- Tenses are indicated mostly by using a “timeframe” or helping words at the beginning of or the end of the sentence. In order to state the past and the future in Thai, you can use the following optional words.

1) Using time words, such as now, today, yesterday, tomorrow, six o'clock, etc. For example,

เมื่อวานนี้ฉันไปวัด

Múeah-waan-níi chǎn pai wát

I went to the temple yesterday.

วันนี้ฉันเหนื่อย

Wan-níi chǎn nùeay

I feel tired today.

2) Using “láew”แล้ว (already) at the very end of the sentence to indicate that something was completed before or prior to the moment of speaking. For example,

ฉันกินแล้ว

Chǎn gin yaa láew

I've already taken medicine.

ผมอาบน้ำแล้ว

Phǒm àap-nám láew.

I've already taken a bath.

3) Using “jà” จะ(will) in front of verbs to indicate the future and sometimes you can also include the time word to emphasize when it is going to happen in the future. For example,

ฉันจะไปตลาด

chǎn jà pai tà-làat

I will go to the market.

เดือนหน้าคุณจะทำอะไร

Duean-nâa khun jà tham-à-rai?

What will you do next month?



Video: Thai Writing System & Pronunciation

Pronunciation Guide

Consonants

The Thai alphabet consists of 44 letters, representing 21 initial consonant sounds. This book uses **a customized transcription system** designed for ease of learning, using English letters and their familiar sounds to represent Thai pronunciation without diacritics or special symbols. Adapted from **the Royal Thai General System of Transcription (RTGS)** (Royal Institute of Thailand, 1999), it offers a simplified and practical way to represent Thai words in the Roman alphabet, emphasizing pronunciation over strict transliteration.

Thai Script	Consonant Symbol	Approximate Pronunciation	Thai Example
ก	g	as in <u>g</u> et	กับ gàp
ข ค ฆ	kh	as in <u>k</u> ind	ขาย khǎay
ง	ng	as in <u>sing</u> ing	เงิน ngrern
จ	j	as in <u>j</u> oy	ใจ jai
ฉ ช ฌ	ch	as in <u>ch</u> air	ชอบ chǎwp
ซ ศ ษ ส	s	as in <u>s</u> and	สอน sǎwn
ญ ย	y	as in <u>y</u> es	ยาย yaay
ฎ ด	d	as in <u>d</u> og	ใต้ dǎi
ฏ ต	t	as in <u>t</u> and	ตอน tawn
ฐ ฑ ฒ ณ ท ธ	th	as in <u>t</u> each	ทำ tham
ณ น	n	as in <u>n</u> eed	นอน nawn
บ	b	as in <u>b</u> us	บาย bàay
ป	p	as in <u>p</u> in	ปี pii
ผ พ ภ	ph	as in <u>p</u> ost	ผี phii
ฝ ฟ	f	as in <u>f</u> un	ฟัง fang
ม	m	as in <u>m</u> ore	แม่ mâeh
ร	r	as in <u>r</u> un	ร้อย róy
ล ฬ	l	as in <u>l</u> ong	เล่น léhn
ว	w	as in <u>w</u> et	วัน wan
ห ฮ	h	as in <u>h</u> ave	ห้า hǎa
*อ	*a/e/i/o/u	as in <u>o</u> t	อ้วน ôuan

*Note: The letter ‘อ’ acts as a silent vowel carrier (a/e/i/o/u) at the beginning of words that start with a vowel.



Consonant Clusters

In Thai, consonant clusters primarily occur at the beginning of a syllable (initial position). These clusters always consist of two consonants, with the first being a leading consonant and the second typically a liquid (/r/ or /l/) or a semi-vowel (/w/). Common consonant clusters in Thai include:

Form	กร	กล	กว	คร	คล	คว	ตร	ปร	ปล	พร	พล
Symbol	gr	gl	gw	khɾ	khɭ	khw	tr	pr	pl	phr	phɭ

Note: In spoken Thai, some consonant clusters are often simplified by dropping or modifying sounds.¹ For example, เป้า (p^làə) is commonly pronounced as ป่า (p^aàaw) in informal speech.



Ending consonants

Thai has eight ending consonant sounds, which are not fully voiced when they appear at the end of a word. In Thai phonology, final consonants are typically pronounced as unreleased or weakened sounds, often undergoing final devoicing²—where voiced sounds become voiceless at the end of a syllable.

¹ For further discussion, see Beebe, L. M. (1979). Initial consonant cluster reduction as a function of age group in Bangkok Thai speakers. *Papers in Southeast Asian linguistics No. 6: Tai studies in honor of William J. Gedney* (Vol. 6, pp. 11–36). Pacific Linguistics, The Australian National University.

² For further reading, see International Phonetic Association (1999). *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association: A Guide to the Use of the IPA*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 176, 192.