

Sanskrit Notation and Pronunciation

The notation used in these documents is intended to be read easily by the uninitiated, while still giving full information. It is essentially the International (IAST) Sanskrit system with the following exceptions:-

Notation used in these documents	IAST or ISO 15919
-śh eg Śhiva, Śhrī, Gaṇeśha	-ś - Śiva, Śrī, Gaṇeśa
-ṣh eg. Viṣṇu Kṛiṣhṇa	-ṣ - Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa
-ch eg. Chandra, gachchhami	-c - Candra, gacchami
-chh eg. Chhandas, gachchhami	-ch - Chandas, gacchami
-w when compounded: eg. swāmī, tvam	-v - Svāmī, tvam
The vowel ṛi or ṛu eg. Kṛiṣhṇa, Amṛut	-ṛ - Kṛṣṇa, Amṛt.

IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) symbols are in square brackets [ə].

Sanskrit Pronunciation

The Short Version (1½ pages)

Consonants are roughly the same as in English, apart from those listed below, but the vowels are more tricky.

- Vowels:** The symbols ā, ī and ū are used for long vowels. Long ā and short a are different sounds. Long ī and ū are the short sounds lengthened.
 - **Short a** [ə] is the hardest vowel because it is so short, like the u in **but** [bat] or a in **local** [ləukəl] – or like saying the consonants with no vowel; **Ganapati** is ‘g-n-p-ti’ roughly like ‘gunner-putty’. a is never hard as in **bat**.
 - **Long a** [a:] as in **fāther** (UK style [fa:ðər]) or **Aachen** [a:kən].
 - **Long ī** as in **beet** [bi:t]. **Short i** as in **bit** [bit].
 - **Long ū** as in **pool** [pu:l] (eg **Mūlādhāra**). **Short u** as in **pull** [pul], not as **fun** - which is short a (unless you come from Yorkshire!).
 - **e** and **o** are always long, as in **maid** [meid] and **modem** [møudem], and never short as in **modern**. **Moksha** is ‘moke-sha’, **Om** rhymes with ‘home’ but more closed and lower in the throat. **Eka** sounds like English ‘acre’; **klem** like ‘claim’. Words ending in e are always pronounced long é.

- **au** and **ai** are diphthongs; **au** as in ‘proud’ [*praud*] and **ai** as in ‘pride’ [*praid*].
- 2 **Consonants** with dots under **ṭ, ṭh, ḍ, ḍh, ṇ, ḷ** and **ṣh** are pronounced with the tip of the tongue curled back against the roof of the mouth, with a half-r sound. (as in **Gaṇeśha, Iḍa Naḍi**, etc.)
- 3 There are no fricatives (*English th, v or f*) in Sanskrit.; **ṭh** is an aspirated **t** as in **boathook** eg. **Aṭharva**. **Ph** is aspirated **p** as in ‘top-hat’ and not **f**. eg. **Phala** – ‘fruit’.
- 4 Both **v** and **w** are used in transliterating Sanskrit but are the same letter. Normally **w** is used when joined with another consonant, eg. **twam, swami** and **v** is used when on its own, eg. **Shiva, Viṣṇu**. The sound is halfway between **v** and **w** like ‘vw’ i.e. **tvam**. Try saying it as ‘w’ with the upper teeth touching the lower lip.
- 5 Final **ḥ**, as in **namaḥ**, is an aspiration of the final vowel and not an extra syllable. There is an echo of the final vowel with the aspiration. The main effect is to strengthen the final short vowel which otherwise would be swallowed.
- 6 **ṛ** is a vowel, usually written **ṛi**, as in **ṛiṣhi** or **Kṛiṣṇa** and sometimes **ṛu**, as in **amṛut** or **gruha**. Properly it should be written **Kṛṣna, amṛt** or **grha**. Be aware that there is no full vowel sound after the **ṛ**.
r as a vowel or a consonant should be rolled in the Scottish manner with the tongue curled back and not with the English tendency to elongate the vowel and drop the **r** (ie. ‘dark’ being pronounced ‘daak’)
- 7 The composite letter **jñ** is written **gñy** (eg. **Āgñyā, gñyāna**-‘knowledge’) It is pronounced –**gya** with the **g** nasalised.
g is always pronounced as in **begin** and not as in **vegetable**, which is **j** [*dʒ*].
- 8 In Hindi and Marathi short **a** at the end of words and before long syllables is dropped so **Rāma** becomes **Rām**, **Sulabhā** becomes **Sulbhā** etc. This is not done in Sanskrit.
- 9 **s** is always unvoiced, like **hiss** and not **his**.

Sanskrit Pronunciation

The Long Version (6 pages)

Sanskrit is written in **Deva-nāgarī** -'from the city of the gods' script, also called **Nāgarī**. This developed from an earlier script called **Brahmi**, and reached its present form around 1000 CE. **Devanāgarī** letters have fixed sounds and one can be fairly sure of the pronunciation from the spelling.

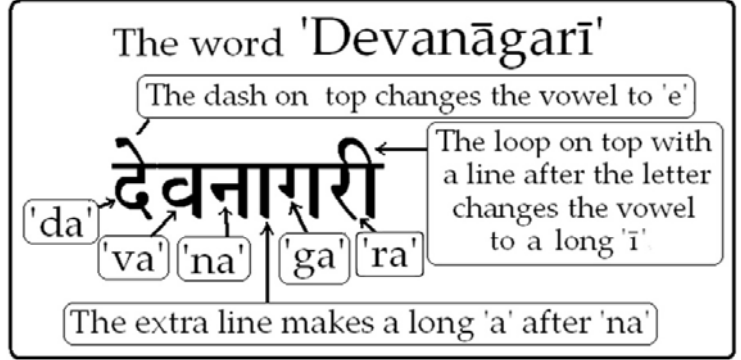
Two types of letters which are not differentiated in English are

the Cerebral and Dental. Cerebral consonants are said with the tongue curled up to touch the soft palate (*roof*) of the mouth. These are written with a dot under; ढ, ढ्ह, ढ, ढ्ह, ढ, ढ, ढ and ढ्ह. The Dental t, th, d, dh, n, l and śh are said with the tongue touching the back of the teeth. In English these are pronounced about half-way between with the tongue touching the ridge in the middle of the mouth (*called Alveolar*) and sound like Cerebral consonants to Indians. Listen to the way Shri Mataji says 'Īḍa Nāḍī' - it sounds like 'Irā Nārī'

Differentiating between aspirated and un-aspirated consonants is tricky for westerners as most initial consonants in English are pronounced half aspirated anyway; 'down the garden' for example, has an aspirated dental **d** in 'down' but an un-aspirated cerebral **ḍ** in 'garden'. The aspirated consonants are pronounced Irish-style -'drown the garden'. Un-aspirated consonants are more often found in French, for example **qui** is unaspirated while the English **key** is aspirated.

IPA (*International Phonetic Alphabet*) symbols are in square brackets [ə].

1. **Vowels:** **Devanāgarī** has only 14 vowels as opposed to 23 vowel sounds in English, and three of those are virtually unused. It is important to know whether **a**, **i** or **u** are short or long, partly because long vowels are stressed.



The symbols **ā**, **ī** and **ū** are used for long vowels as in **cart**, **keen** and **pool**. **a**, **i** or **u** written without a line on top are short. Long **ā** and short **a** are different sounds whereas long **ī** and **u** are the short sounds lengthened.

The short **a** [ə] is like the **u** in **but** [bat] or the **a** in **local** [ləukəl] and never hard as in **bat** (this hard **a** sound (**mat**, **flat**) does not exist in any Indian language) It's like saying the consonants without any vowel sound: **Gaṇapati** is 'g-n-p-ti' roughly like 'gunner-putty'.

Short **i** is as in **bit** [bit] and the long **ī** as in **beet** [bi:t].

Short **u** is as in **pull** [pʊl] and not as in **fun** (which is a short **a**, unless you come from Yorkshire) and the long **ū** as in **pool** [pu:l].

e and **o** are always long, so **med-** is like English 'maid' [meɪd] and **mod-** like 'mode' [məʊd] and never short as in 'modern'. **Om** rhymes with 'home' but more closed and lower in the throat.

Where a word ends in **e**, it is always pronounced long **é** or **eh**.

- **au** and **ai** are the diphthongs (double sounds) **a-u** and **a-i**, so **praud** = 'proud' [praʊd] and **praid** = 'pride' [praɪd] ('prayed').

Consonants

2. The cerebral consonants **ṭ**, **ṭh** **ḍ**, **ḍh**, **ṇ**, **ḷ** and **ṣh** are pronounced with the tip of the tongue curled back against the roof of the mouth. These letters are generally used for writing English in **Nāgarī** script (**aṅḍ**, **ṣṭore**, etc.).
3. There are no real fricatives (**th**, **f**, **v**) in Sanskrit, so **th** is not like 'the' but is an aspirated **t**, as in 'boathook' and is thus written **ṭh** eg. **Aṭharva**. Also **ph** is not **f** but an aspirated **p** (as in 'top-hat')
4. Both **v** and **w** are used in transliterating Sanskrit but are in fact the same letter. The sound is halfway between **v** and **w** like 'vw' i.e. **tvwam**. One suggestion is to pronounce 'w' with the upper teeth touching the lower lip. Normally **w** is used when the consonant is compounded, eg. **twam**, **swāmī**; and **v** when on its own, eg. **Śhiva**, **Viṣṇu**.

5. There are three sibilants in Sanskrit, a normal dental **s**, an aspirated cerebral **ṣh** which almost never starts a word (*except when meaning 'six'*) and is usually found compounded eg. **Viṣhṇu**; and an unaspirated dental **śh** as in **Śhiva, Gaṇeśha, Śhrī**, etc. with a soft **h**, formed in the front of the mouth, as in 'sure'. **s** is always unvoiced, like **hiss** and not **his**.
6. A common nominative case ending is an aspiration written **-ḥ** called **visarga**, as in **namaḥ**. This is described as an aspiration (*expulsion of air 'ha'*) as a very short **-ha** after **a, ā, u, ū, au** or **o**, and a very short **-hi** after **i, ī, e** or **ai**. The main effect is to strengthen the final short vowel which otherwise would be swallowed.
7. **ṛ** is a vowel, normally written **ṛi**, as in **ṛiṣhi, Kṛiṣhṇa** or **Sanskṛit** and sometimes **ṛu**, as in **amṛut**. There is no full vowel sound after the **ṛ**. Both the vowel **ṛ** and the consonant **r** are retroflex (*with the tongue curled back*) and should be rolled in the Scottish manner and not with the English tendency to elongate the vowel and drop the **r** (*ie. 'dark' being pronounced 'daak'*).
8. The composite letter **jñ** is written **gñy** (*as in gñyāna 'knowledge'*) to facilitate pronunciation. The **ñ** is 'up-the-nose' like 'ton' in French.
g is always pronounced as in **begin** and not as in **vegetable** (*which is j [dʒ]*).
y is always a consonant so a word like **śhriṣhtyādau** is only three syllables, although compounded of **śhriṣhti-ādau**.
9. In **Hindi** and **Marathi** short **a** at the end of words and before long syllables is dropped so **Rāma** becomes **Rām**, **Sulabhā** becomes **Sulbhā**, etc. This is not done in **Sanskrit**.
10. **Anuswāra** -'nasal' - **m̐**. This does not have a fixed sound but is a nasal agreeing with the following consonant; so in most cases the relevant **n** or **m** is written eg. **Sandhi, Saṅkat, Sañjay, Maṅḍala, Sampat**. Before **h** or **s** it is like saying **m** without closing the lips fully eg. **Samhita, Hamṣa**. At the ends of words it is pronounced **m**, eg. **Twam̐**.

Apostrophes and Hyphens

Apostrophes and hyphens are used to facilitate pronunciation and ease of reading. In all these cases, they should be run together as one word.

Apostrophe indicates a missing letter (*as in English*) showing that the vowel at the beginning of the second word also belongs to the end of the first, eg. **Gaṇ'ādim** = **Gaṇa** + **ādim**; but is also used in cases where a final vowel modifies to a consonant, eg. **Khalv'idam** = **Khalu** + **idam** or **Buddhy'aham** = **Buddhi** + **aham**.

Hyphens are used to separate words in a compound, eg. **Śhakti-dhara** – 'bearing a spear'.

Hyphen + Apostrophe indicates a dropped initial **a** after a long vowel, eg. **sthito-'si** (= **sthito-asi**). There is an S-shaped symbol for this in Devanāgarī and the long vowel is drawn out even longer than usual.

Sandhi (*euphonic combination*)

Sanskrit is written as it is spoken, with whole sentences run together as a continuous string of letters or sounds. In a phrase, which may a compound of many words, the word endings are modified to blend into the next word, which is called **Sandhi** - 'joining'.

In effect we do the same in English without writing it, so that 'Do you want to get a cup of tea?' if written as normally pronounced would be 'Jawannageddacuppatee?': in Sanskrit it would be written that way!

There are long complicated rules as to how this is achieved; **Sat chit ānanda** becomes **Sach-chid-ānanda** and **Jagat** – 'world' softens to **Jagan-mātā** and **Jagad-ambā** (*both meaning 'World-Mother'*). An **a** at the end of a word will coalesce with a vowel at the beginning of the next, so **ava uttarāt** becomes **avottarāt**. **Visarga** (*final aspiration -h*) modifies in composition, so **namaḥ namaḥ** becomes **namo namaḥ**, **Indraḥ twam** becomes **Indras-twam**, and **binduḥ utara** becomes **bindur-uttara**.

Pronunciation: The Indian way of saying mantras or indeed talking in general, is rather like playing the bagpipes, in that the vocal chords make a constant drone which is modulated into words in the mouth, rather than the more western style where each word or phrase is individually enounced; and thus a whole sentence becomes one piece.

One writer comments ‘The key to reciting Sanskrit is to dwell exaggeratedly on every heavy syllable (*and in particular to draw out long vowels to a great length*) while passing lightly and rapidly over all light syllables.’ A heavy syllable is one with a long vowel (*ā, ī, ū, e, o, ai, au*) or a short vowel followed by two or more consonants (*eg. the i in **Nirmala***). Aspirated **ṣh, dh** etc. are single consonants.

Stress: There is a stress in the form of a slight upward inflection musically which generally falls on the penultimate syllable of a word or phrase, if that syllable is heavy, or the syllable before that if that is heavy or even the one before that if heavy. So the stress on **namo namaḥ** is on the **o**, and the **namaḥ** is rather thrown away.

Sahaja Yoga mantras

Namaḥ -‘salutations’ is an indeclinable adverb which requires the Dative Case (*to...*) of the object being saluted. So it is correct to say ‘**Śhrī Nirmalā Devyai namo namaḥ**’ as we are saying ‘Salutations to Śhrī Nirmala Devi’ and **Devyai** is the Dative Case of **Devī** –‘Goddess’. This is how it is written and said in India (*and has been since the beginning of Sahaja Yoga*).

However to say ‘**Śhrī Nirmalā Devi namo namaḥ**’ is not incorrect. This is the Vocative meaning ‘O Immaculate Devi, salutations again and again’. Note: this is **Devi** with a short **i**. **Devī** (*long ī*) is the Nominative Case.

Nominative endings

Sahaja Yoga mantras do not follow strict grammatical rules of Sanskrit. In the usual mantra ‘**Śhrī Ganesha**’ is written in the caseless form. The Nominative case would be ‘**Śhrī Ganeśhaḥ**’. This aspirated ending is hardly heard but has the effect of lengthening and stressing the final vowel. Fortunately this is how westerners normally say it anyway.

The table below shows the common nominative endings. Words ending in long **-ā** or **-ī** are feminine and do not change in the nominative.

Nominative endings (singular)

Words ending in:-	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
-a	-aḥ	-ā	-am
-i (short)	-iḥ	-iḥ	-i
-in (eg. Swāmin)	-ī	-inī	-i
-an (eg. Rājan)	-ā (Rājā)	-nī (Rājnī)	-ni
-u (short) or ū (long)	-uḥ or -ūḥ	-uḥ or -ūḥ	
-ṛi (eg. Karṭṛi, Mātṛi)	-ā (Kartā)	-rī (Kartrī) or -ā (Mātā)	

Dative Endings

When saying a mantra in the form ‘**Om Śhrī Ganeśhāya namaḥ**’ or ‘**Om Twameva Sākṣhāt Śhrī Ganeśhāya namaḥ**’ (as in Havans) the dative ending **-āya** on the name **Ganeśha** is required by the adverb **namaḥ**.

The following is a table of dative endings for anyone wishing to inter-convert.

Dative endings (singular)

<u>Words ending in:-</u> (Caseless / Nominative)	<u>Masculine</u> and Neuter	<u>Feminine</u>
-a, -aḥ	-āya	-āyai
-ā, -āḥ (fem.)		-āyai
-i, -iḥ	-aye	-yai
-ī, īḥ (fem.)		-yai or -iye if monosyllabic
-ī, -in (masc.) (swāmī)	-ine	-inyai
-inī, inī (fem.) (swāminī)		-inyai (swāminyai)
-u, -ū, -uḥ (guru)	-ave (gurave)	-vai or -uve if monosyllabic (gurvai)
-ṛi (eg. karṭṛi)	-tre (kartre)	-tre
Consonants (eg. ātman)	-e (ātmāne)	-e