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HUNGARIAN LESSON

Hungarian Alphabet 1 • Chapter 1 • Meet the Alphabet

Hungarian Alphabet 1

Chapter 1 · Meet the Alphabet: A Á

Meet the Hungarian Alphabet — Az ábécé

Welcome to your first Hungarian lesson on reading and pronunciation. Hungarian looks fierce on the page, but its spelling is one of the most **regular** in Europe: once you know the sound of each letter, you can read any word aloud. By the end of this chapter you'll know how the alphabet is organised, where the stress falls, the first two vowels (**a** and **á**), and you'll read 12 real words.

The Alphabet at a Glance — 44 Letters

The Hungarian alphabet has **44 letters: 14 vowels and 30 consonant letters**. Some of those letters are written with two or three characters (cs, sz, zs, gy ...), but each counts as **one letter**. Today's two are highlighted.

a	á	b	c	cs	d	dz	dzs
e	é	f	g	gy	h	i	í
j	k	l	ly	m	n	ny	o
ó	ö	ő	p	q	r	s	sz
t	ty	u	ú	ü	ű	v	w
x	y	z	zs				

back vowels (6)

front vowels (8)

consonants (30)

. The letters q, w, x and y appear only in names and words borrowed from other languages.

The vowels come in **two families**, back and front, depending on where the tongue sits in the mouth. This course teaches the back vowels first (a á o ó u ú), then the front vowels (e é i í ö ő ü ű), and then shows how the two families control the endings of Hungarian words, a feature called **vowel harmony**.

🔑 Three Big Rules That Make Reading Easy

1

Spelling is phonetic

Each letter has one sound, and virtually every letter is pronounced: almost no silent letters and no tricky spellings. What you see is what you say.

2

Accents mean length

An accent mark on a vowel makes it **long**: *a* → *á*, *e* → *é*, *o* → *ó*. Length is real: it can change the meaning of a word.

3

Stress is always first

The stress falls on the **first syllable** of every word, however long the word is. Hungarian has no stress tricks to learn.

How Pronunciation Is Shown in This Course

Under each Hungarian word you'll see an English-style respelling, with **CAPITALS on the first (stressed) syllable**, like this: *apa* → **AW**-paw. In the respelling, **aw** is the *short, rounded* sound of the letter *a* (see below), and **ah** is the *long* sound of *á*. Consonants that look English sound English unless flagged. Letters we haven't met yet are explained when they come up.

🌟 Two New Vowels — a á

*These are the first two **back vowels**. They look like a short and long version of the same letter, but there's one surprise: they're **different sounds**, not just different lengths.*

a

A · a

short and rounded, like the "o" in *hot* or Scottish *cot* — respelled **aw**

back vowel · short

á

Á · á

long and open, like the "a" in *father* — respelled **ah**

back vowel · long

Mouth tip: open your mouth and round your lips slightly, as if you're about to say "hot", then keep it short. It is **not** the "a" of English *cat* or *father*.

Mouth tip: open wide, lips relaxed (not rounded), and hold the sound for about twice as long as *a*. The accent is a little flag that says "hold it".

a and á Are Different Sounds

English speakers often assume that *á* is just a stretched *a*. In Hungarian, the short **a** is a rounded "aw" (as in *hot*) and the long **á** is an open, unrounded "ah" (as in *father*). So *kar* ("arm") and *kár* ("a pity") differ in both length **and** sound. The same is true of *e* and *é*, which you'll meet in Chapter 4.

Short and Long Vowels — The Pairs

All Hungarian vowels come in short and long pairs. Here is the whole set, so you can see where today's pair fits.

SHORT	LONG	FAMILY	CHAPTER
a	á	back	1 (today)
o	ó	back	2
u	ú	back	3
e	é	front	4
i	í	front	5
ö	ő	front (rounded)	6
ü	ű	front (rounded)	7

Read It — Your First Words

*The consonants in these words are read as in English, with one note: the Hungarian **r** is **tapped** (one flick of the tongue, like a Scottish "r"), not the English "r". Stress is on the first syllable.*

#	HUNGARIAN	SAY IT	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	ház	HAHZ	house	long á
2	tál	TAHL	dish, plate	long á
3	ma	MAW	today	short a
4	apa	AW-paw	father	two short a's
5	alma	AWL-maw	apple	stress on AL
6	nap	NAWP	sun; day	two meanings
7	hal	HAWL	fish	short a
8	lap	LAWP	page, sheet	short a
9	kar	KAWR	arm	short a; tapped r
10	kár	KAHR	a pity; damage	same letters as kar, long á
11	ablak	AW-blawk	window	two short a's
12	barát	BAW-raht	friend (male)	short a, then long á

Real Hungarian Tip — "A" and "Az": The Word for "The"

Hungarian has one word for "the", and it has two forms. It's **a** (said "aw") before a consonant, and **az** (said "awz") before a vowel: *a ház* (the house), *a tál* (the dish), *az alma* (the apple), *az ablak* (the window). That's the first grammar rule you can use today.

Real Hungarian Tip — A Language Apart

Hungarian (*magyar*, said "MAW-dyawr") isn't related to its Slavic, German or Romanian neighbours. It belongs to the **Uralic** family, together with Finnish and Estonian, and it arrived in

the Carpathian Basin over a thousand years ago. That's why the vocabulary feels unfamiliar, but also why its spelling and grammar are so logical: they follow rules, with few exceptions.

Try It Yourself — Gyakorlatok

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. How many letters does the Hungarian alphabet have, and how many of them are vowels?

▼ Show answer

44 letters, of which 14 are vowels (and 30 are consonant letters, including *cs, sz, zs, gy* and so on).

2. What does an accent mark on a vowel (as in *á*) tell you?

▼ Show answer

That the vowel is **long**. (For *a* and *á* the sound itself also changes: "aw" against "ah".)

3. Read these aloud and say what they mean: ház · tál · hal

▼ Show answer

HAHZ (house) · TAHL (dish) · HAWL (fish)

4. How do **kar** and **kár** differ, in sound and meaning?

▼ Show answer

KAWR (short, rounded a) means "arm"; KAHK (long, open á) means "a pity" or "damage".

5. Where is the stress in **alma**, **ablak** and **barát**?

▼ Show answer

Always on the first syllable: AWL-maw, AW-blawk, BAW-raht.

6. Choose *a* or *az*: ____ ház · ____ alma · ____ nap · ____ ablak

▼ Show answer

a ház · az alma · a nap · az ablak (*a* before a consonant, *az* before a vowel).

Coming Up in Chapter 2

The back vowels continue with **o** and **ó**. You'll then read *ló* (horse), *tó* (lake), *hol* (where), *bor* (wine) and *sok* (many).