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HUNGARIAN LESSON

Hungarian Alphabet 1 · Chapter 8

· Vowel Harmony 1

Hungarian Alphabet 1

Chapter 8 · Vowel Harmony 1: Back or Front?

Vowel Harmony — Why Endings Change

Hungarian has no prepositions. Instead of words like "in", "to" and "from", it adds **endings** to the noun: ház (house), házban (in the house). Most endings come in two versions, a **back** one and a **front** one, and the word's own vowels decide which. That matching is called **vowel harmony**, and with the 14 vowels you now know, you're ready for it.

The Rule in One Line

Look at the vowels in the word. If they're **back** vowels (a á o ó u ú), use the **back** ending. If they're **front** vowels (e é i í ö ő ü ű), use the **front** ending. That's all: házban but kertben.

The Six Two-Way Endings

These endings each have two forms. The back form uses a / o; the front form uses e / ö-type vowels.

MEANING	BACK FORM	FRONT FORM	SAY IT
in (where?)	-ban	-ben	-bawn · -behn
into (where to?)	-ba	-be	-baw · -beh
out of (where from?)	-ból	-ből	-bohl · -beuul
onto, on to	-ra	-re	-raw · -reh
off; about	-ról	-ről	-rohl · -reuul
to; for (the receiver)	-nak	-nek	-nawk · -nehk

Rounded Front Vowels Count as "Front"

For these two-way endings, **ö ó ü ű** behave exactly like **e é i í**: they all take the front form. The rounded/unrounded difference only matters for the three-way endings (like *-hoz / -hez / -höz*), which come in Chapter 9. So *hűtő* (fridge) takes *-ben*: *hűtőben*.

Practice Words — Back and Front

Each row adds all six endings to one word. The back-vowel words are on top; the front-vowel words are below.

WORD	IN	INTO	OUT OF	ONTO	OFF / ABOUT	TO / FOR
ház (house)	házban	házba	házból	házra	háZRól	háZnak
tó (lake)	tóban	tóba	tóból	tóra	tóról	tónak
autó (car)	autóban	autóba	autóból	autóra	autóról	autónak
út (road)	útban	útba	útból	útra	útról	útnak
kert (garden)	kertben	kertbe	kertből	kertre	kertről	kertnek
víz (water)	vízben	vízbe	vízből	vízre	víZRól	víznek
kéz (hand)	kézben	kézbe	kézből	kézre	kéZRól	kéznek
hűtő (fridge)	hűtőben	hűtőbe	hűtőből	hűtőre	hűtőRól	hűtőnek

Hol? Hová? Honnan? — Where, Where To, Where From

Three of the endings answer three different questions, and Hungarian has a separate question word for each. This trio is one of the most useful patterns in the language.

QUESTION	SAY IT	ENDING	BACK EXAMPLE	FRONT EXAMPLE
Hol? (where?)	<i>HOL</i>	-ban / -ben	házban (in the house)	kertben (in the garden)
Hová? (where to?)	<i>HO-vah</i>	-ba / -be	házba (into the house)	kertbe (into the garden)
Honnan? (where from?)	<i>HON-nawn</i>	-ból / -ből	házból (out of the house)	kertből (out of the garden)

A Spelling Rule: Final a and e Lengthen

When a word ends in a short **a** or **e**, that vowel becomes **á** or **é** before most endings: **alma** (apple) → **almában** (in the apple); **ruha** (clothes) → **ruhában**; **búza** (wheat) → **búzában**; **kefe** (brush) → **kefében**. The back or front choice still follows the vowel family (**á** is back, **é** is front).

Little Words You'll Need

HUNGARIAN	SAY IT	ENGLISH	NOTE
itt	<i>ITT</i>	here	<i>double t: held</i>
ott	<i>OTT</i>	there	<i>Chapter 2</i>
otthon	<i>OT-thon</i>	at home; home	<i>ott + hon</i>
hol	<i>HOL</i>	where	<i>Chapter 2</i>
hová	<i>HO-vah</i>	where to	<i>long á</i>
honnan	<i>HON-nawn</i>	where from	<i>double n: held</i>
és	<i>AYSH</i>	and	<i>s is said "sh"</i>
is	<i>IHSH</i>	also, too	<i>comes after the word it adds to</i>

Mini-Dialogs

① In the Fridge — A hűtőben

A:

Hol a víz?

HOL aw VEEZ?

Where is the water?

B:

A hűtőben.

aw HUUE-teuu-behn.

In the fridge.

A:

És a sör?

AYSH aw SHEUR?

And the beer?

B:

A hűtőben is!

aw HUUE-teuu-behn IHSH!

In the fridge too!

② Friend and Car — A kertben, az autóban

A:

Hol a barát?

HOL aw BAW-raht?

Where is the friend?

B:

A kertben.

aw KEHRT-behn.

In the garden.

A:

És az autó?

AYSH awz AW-u-toh?

And the car?

B:

Az autóban.

awz AW-u-toh-bawn.

In the car.

③ Where, Where To, Where From

A:

Hol?

HOL?

Where (is it)?

B:

A házban.

aw HAHZ-bawn.

In the house.

A:

Hová?

HO-vah?

Where to?

B:

A kertbe.

aw KEHRT-beh.

Into the garden.

A:

Honnan?

HON-nawn?

From where?

B:

A kertből.

aw KEHRT-beuul.

From the garden.

Real Hungarian Tip — No Prepositions, Just Endings

Where English says "in the house", Hungarian says *a házban* ("the house-in"). Because the ending carries the meaning, Hungarian words can look long: a single noun with an ending (*házból*) replaces a whole English phrase ("out of the house"). Vowel harmony is what keeps those long words easy to say: the vowels in the word and its ending always belong to the same family.

Review: Chapter 7 Words

Cover the English and read these again: **tű** (needle) · **fű** (grass) · **tűz** (fire) · **fül** (ear) · **üveg** (glass) · **ül** (sits) · **ünnap** (holiday) · **hűtő** (fridge) · **tüdő** (lung) · **bűn** (sin) · **kürt** (horn) · **füst** (smoke).



Try It Yourself — Gyakorlatok

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

1. What is the rule for choosing between *-ban* and *-ben*?

▼ Show answer

Back vowels in the word → **-ban**; front vowels → **-ben**.

2. Sort these words into back and front: **tó** · **víz** · **út** · **kéz** · **autó** · **hűtő**

▼ Show answer

Back: **tó**, **út**, **autó**. Front: **víz**, **kéz**, **hűtő** (ű is front rounded, which counts as front).

3. Add "into" (-ba / -be): **ház** · **kert** · **autó** · **hűtő**

▼ Show answer

házba · **kertbe** · **autóba** · **hűtőbe**

4. Add "off / about" (-ról / -ről): **tó** · **víz**

▼ Show answer

tóról (back) · **vízről** (front).

5. Give the three forms (in / into / out of) for **tó** and **kéz**.

▼ Show answer

tóban · **tóba** · **tóból**, and **kézben** · **kézbe** · **kézből**.

6. Add "in" to **alma** and **ruha**. What happens to the final vowel?

▼ Show answer

almában · **ruhában**: the final short *a* lengthens to *á* before the ending.

Coming Up in Chapter 9

Chapter 9 adds the **three-way endings**, where front rounded vowels get their own form: *-hoz / -hez / -höz* ("to") and *-on / -en / -ön* ("on"). It also arranges all the "where" endings into three sets: inside, on a surface, and near.