

# Fast Nepali

## Sounds, Characters, and Alphabet

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## INTRODUCTION

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### 1 – PRONUNCIATION AND ROMANIZED SCRIPT

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Before you decide to learn the Devanagari script in which Nepali is written, you can use a Romanized form of writing. The letters and their pronunciation are shown below, as extracted from [www.jaspell.uk/sounds\\_dev\\_unicode.htm](http://www.jaspell.uk/sounds_dev_unicode.htm) and [www.jaspell.uk/devanagari/pron.pdf](http://www.jaspell.uk/devanagari/pron.pdf).

Click on a character in the following chart to hear its sound.

## CLASSIFICATION OF DEVANAGARI SOUNDS

C O N S O N A N T S						V O W E L S		
Family	Hard	Soft	Soft	Soft	Hard			
	Held Huffed	Held Huffed	Nasals	Semi- vowels	Spirants	Short	Long	Diphthongs
Guttural	ka kḥa	ga gḥa	ṅa	ha	ḥ	a	ā	e ê (ai/ei)
	क ख	ग घ	ङ	ह	ः	अ	आ	ए ऐ
					kaḥ	ka	kā	ke kê (kai/kei)
					कः	क	का	के कै
Palatal	ca cḥa	ja jḥa	ña	ya	śa	i	ī	
	च छ	ज झ	ञ	य	श	इ	ई	
						ki	kī	
						कि	की	
Cerebral	ṭa ṭḥa	ḍa ḍḥa	ṇa	ra	śa	ṛ (rri)	[rrii]	
	ट ठ	ड ढ	ण	र	ष	ऋ		
		ra rḥa		-		ṛḥ (krri)		
		ड़ ढ		ळ		कृ		
Dental	ta tḥa	da dḥa	na	la	sa			
	त थ	द ध	न	ल	स			
Labial	pa pḥa	ba bḥa	ma	va, wa	(ka+)ḥ	u	ū	o ô (ow/au)
	प फ	ब भ	म	व	कः	उ	ऊ	ओ औ
Others			-	~	kạ̄=kā+~	ku	kū	ko kô (kau)
			-		काँ	कु	कू	को कौ
				~	kị̄=ki+~			ḳ (=k + no vowel)
					किँ			क्

Vowels are nasalized with a moon-dot (chandrabindu) or, if part of the vowel is above the bar, only a dot (bindu). For example, k̄ कँ and kị̄ किँ. The nasal mark is Romanized as ‘ ~ ’.

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## 2 – ALPHABET

The alphabet lists vowels and then consonants—in order of their sounds classification.

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### Vowels in Alphabetical Order of Devanagari

a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, ṛ, e, ê, o, ô, ḥ, ~

अ, आ, इ, ई, उ, ऊ, ऋ, ए, ऐ, ओ, औ, ः, ँ

क, का, कि की, कु, कू, कृ, के, कै, को, कौ, कः, कँ (trailing)

**a** sounds like ‘a’ in *along*; but like ‘o’ in *pot* in pa, pha, ba, bha, ma. (Compare ‘a’ in *mangetout* and *wander*.)

**ā** sounds long like ‘a’ in *past*, *father* or *palm*.

The rare English sound of ‘a’ in *apple* is contrived as a long **ā** with a chandra moon over it. We’ll show it as **ä**. However ‘yā’ may preferred in Nepali, is in tyāksī (taxi).

A similar English sound is contrived as a long **ē** with a chandra moon over it. We’ll show it as **ě**.

**i** sounds short like ‘i’ in *pill*.

**ī** sounds long like ‘ie’ in *believe*.

**u** sounds short like ‘u’ in *pull*.

**ū** sounds long like ‘oo’ in *pool*.

**ṛ** sounds short like ‘ri’ in *prickly* or *prismoidal*.

**e** sounds of medium length like ‘e’ in *pen* or ‘ay’ in *pay*.

**ê** is classified as a long **ē**, but we’re using **ê** to show that it becomes like a *diphthong* sounding like ‘ei’ in *feint* or ‘ai’ in *faint*. (Many books Romanize it as ‘ai’, but this can be confused with the juxtaposition of the short vowels ‘a’ and ‘i’.)

**o** sounds of medium length like ‘o’ in *told*.

**ô** is classified as a long **ō**, but we’re using **ô** to show that it becomes like a *diphthong* sounding like ‘ow’ in *now* or, rarely, in *owner*. (It is sometimes Romanized as ‘au’, but this could be confusing other vowels ‘a’ and ‘u’ occur together.)

**ḥ** (‘visarga’) is abruptly expelled like ‘uhh’ or as ‘ah’ in *Judah*.

˘ is our Romanization of the halant (or hasanta) mark (◌̣) that shows no vowel is present—as in paṛ`nu (to read).

˜ represents the nasalization of vowels, as in **a, ā; ā, ā; kā, kā**.

## Consonants in Alphabetical Order of Devanagari

(These are shown with the inherent vowel, ‘a’.)

Guttural:      ka, kḥa, ga, gḥa, ṅa  
                  क, ख, ग, घ, ङ

Palatal:        ca, cḥa, ja, jḥa, ña  
                  च, छ, ज, झ, ञ

Retroflex:     ṭa, ṭḥa, ḍa, ḍḥa, ṇa, ṛa, ṛḥa  
                  ट, ठ, ड, ढ, ण, ङ, ढ

Dental:        ta, tḥa, da, dḥa, na  
                  त, थ, द, ध, न

Labial:        pa, pḥa, ba, bḥa, ma  
                  प, फ, ब, भ, म

Semi-vowels: ya, ra, la, va  
                  य, र, ल, व

Sibilant:       śa, ṣa, sa  
                  श, ष, स

Aspirant:      ha  
                  ह

c is like ‘ch’ in chin.

ḥ is used to indicate that the associated consonant is huffed. (Compare ‘bh’ in the English word, ‘*abhor*’.)

h is a separate consonant, not like ḥ that is used to ‘huff’ consonants.

Foreign sounds are represented by adding a dot to the closest sounding Devanagari characters. fa = फ़, qa = क़, za = ज़ .

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### 3 – PRACTICE

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### 4 – MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

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Thanks to all who have assisted in preparation of this document, and best wishes to each reader.

*The Author*

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