

ไทย

THAI FOR SOCIAL LIFE

Foundations

ภาษาไทย พื้นฐาน

The sounds, the tones, and the tiny polite words that make a foreigner instantly likable. Get these right and **everything else gets easier.**

LESSON 0 OF 6

01 How Thai sounds — the five tones เสียงวรรณยุกต์

Thai is a **tonal** language. The same syllable, said at a different pitch, becomes a completely different word. You don't need to be perfect — Thai people are forgiving and delighted that you try — but knowing tones exist will save you from accidentally saying something strange.

There are five tones. The classic teaching example uses one syllable, **maa**, said five ways:

THAI	SOUNDS LIKE	ENGLISH	TO NE
มา	<i>maa</i>	to come	mid — flat, level
หมา	<i>mǎa</i>	dog	rising — like a question
ม้า	<i>máa</i>	horse	high — sharp, pitched up
ม่า	<i>màa</i>	(particle / low)	low — held low and steady
ม่า	<i>mâa</i>	(falling)	falling — starts high, drops

INFO — THE FIVE TONES AT A GLANCE

Mid (flat) · **Low** (held low) · **Falling** (high-to-low, like sighing "ohh") · **High** (pitched up, slightly strained) · **Rising** (low-to-high, like asking "huh?"). In this book the marks above vowels in the *sounds-like* column show the tone: **ǎ = rising**, **á = high**, **à = low**, **â = falling**, **a = mid**.

Another famous near-pair shows why this matters in real life:

THAI	SOUNDS LIKE	ENGLISH	NOTE
ใหม่	<i>mài</i>	new	low tone
ไหม	<i>mǎi</i>	...? (question word)	rising — turns a sentence into a yes/no question
ไม้	<i>mái</i>	wood	high tone
ไม	<i>mâi</i>	no / not	falling — negates the verb

TIP – DON'T FREEZE

If you mangle a tone, context usually rescues you and a Thai listener will gently repeat the right version. Mimic them back. Listening and copying beats memorizing rules.

The polite particles – your secret weapon ครับ / ค่ะ

This is the single most important habit in the whole book. Thai sentences end with a small politeness word. As a **man**, you end almost everything with **ครับ** *khráp*. It makes any sentence polite, warm, and respectful – even a one-word answer.

THAI	SOUNDS LIKE	ENGLISH	WHO SAYS IT
ครับ	<i>khráp</i>	(polite particle)	men – YOU use this, every polite sentence
ค่ะ	<i>khâ</i>	(polite particle, statement)	women
คะ	<i>khá</i>	(polite particle, question)	women, asking
ครับผม	<i>khráp-phǒm</i>	yes / sure! (warm)	men – friendly, eager agreement

CULTURAL NOTE – THE WAI

The **wai** (ไหว้, *wâai*) is the palms-together bow. Hold your hands at chest/chin level, head dips slightly, with a สวัสดีครับ *sà-wàt-dee khráp*. As a foreigner, you generally **return** a wai rather than initiate to younger people or staff. Wai people who are older, respected, or you're being introduced to. A warm wai + smile reads as classy, not awkward.

02 The script — and why you'll lean on romanization ตัวอักษร

Thai has its own beautiful alphabet — **44 consonants**, a stack of vowel symbols, and tone marks. Crucially, Thai is written with **no spaces between words**, which makes reading hard for beginners. Most social-life learners lean on romanization plus their ears, and pick up reading later.

You don't need to read Thai to date, flirt, and make friends. But it helps to recognize a few characters so a menu or a sign isn't pure mystery. Here's a tiny taste:

A few consonants พยัญชนะ

ก <i>g</i>	ข <i>kh</i>	ค <i>kh</i>	ม <i>m</i>	น <i>n</i>
ร <i>r</i>	ล <i>l</i>	ส <i>s</i>	พ <i>ph</i>	ท <i>th</i>

A few vowels สระ

า <i>aa</i>	ิ <i>ii</i>	ู <i>uu</i>	เ <i>e</i>	โ <i>oo</i>
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INFO — "PH" AND "TH" ARE NOT WHAT YOU THINK

In Thai romanization, **ph** is a hard **P** (as in "pin"), not an "f" sound. **th** is a hard **T** (as in "top"), not the "th" in "this." So **ผม** is "pom" and **ไทย** is "tai." Keep that in mind every time you see them below.

03 Pronouns & politeness สรรพนาม

Thai pronouns carry warmth and relationship. Choosing the right "you" is itself a kind of flirting and friendliness. The good news: a small set covers almost every social situation.

THAI	SOUNDS LIKE	ENGLISH	WHEN TO USE
ผม	<i>phǒm</i>	I / me (male)	YOUR word for "I" — always
คุณ	<i>khun</i>	you (polite)	safe, respectful default for anyone
เธอ	<i>thoe</i>	you (intimate / "dear")	close friends, flirting, a date — soft and sweet
พี่	<i>phīi</i>	you/them (older)	someone a bit older than you; also for staff respectfully
น้อง	<i>nóng</i>	you/them (younger)	someone younger; affectionate
เรา	<i>rao</i>	we / us (also casual "I")	friendly, inclusive, low-pressure

CULTURAL NOTE — พี่ AND น้อง EVERYWHERE

Thais constantly use **phīi** (older sibling) and **nóng** (younger sibling) with people who aren't family — it signals warmth and a little hierarchy. Calling a slightly older woman พี่ or a younger person น้อง is friendly, not weird. People often call themselves by their nickname instead of "I" too — adorable, and you can copy it once you know hers.

TIP — THE GOLDEN RULE

End every polite sentence with **ครับ (khráp)**. If you forget half the vocabulary in this book but remember to say *khráp*, you'll still come across as a gentleman.

04 Survival phrases & backchannel ประโยคจำเป็น

Ten phrases that get you through almost any first encounter — plus the little "I'm-listening" sounds that make a conversation feel alive. Master these before anything else.

THAI	SOUNDS LIKE	ENGLISH	NOTE
สวัสดีครับ	<i>sà-wàt-dee khráp</i>	Hello / Hi	also goodbye; pair with a wai
สวัสดี <i>sà-wàt-dee</i> hello ครับ <i>khráp</i> (polite, m.)			
ขอบคุณครับ	<i>khòop-khun khráp</i>	Thank you	use it generously
ขอบคุณ <i>khòop-khun</i> thank you ครับ <i>khráp</i> (polite, m.)			
ไม่เป็นไร	<i>mâi pen rai</i>	No worries / it's fine	the national catchphrase — relaxed, gracious
ไม่ <i>mâi</i> not เป็น <i>pen</i> be ไร <i>rai</i> anything			
ขอโทษครับ	<i>khǎw-thôot khráp</i>	Sorry / excuse me	to apologize or get attention
ขอโทษ <i>khǎw-thôot</i> sorry ครับ <i>khráp</i> (polite, m.)			
ใช่ครับ	<i>châi khráp</i>	Yes / that's right	simple agreement
ใช่ <i>châi</i> yes ครับ <i>khráp</i> (polite, m.)			
ไม่ครับ	<i>mâi khráp</i>	No	soften with a smile
ไม่ <i>mâi</i> no ครับ <i>khráp</i> (polite, m.)			
ไม่เข้าใจครับ	<i>mâi khâo-jai khráp</i>	I don't understand	honest and disarming
ไม่ <i>mâi</i> not เข้าใจ <i>khâo-jai</i> understand ครับ <i>khráp</i> (polite, m.)			
พูดอีกทีได้ไหมครับ	<i>phûut iik thii dâai mâi khráp</i>	Can you say that again?	asks for a repeat
พูด <i>phûut</i> say อีกที <i>iik thii</i> again ได้ไหม <i>dâai mâi</i> can you? ครับ <i>khráp</i> (polite, m.)			
นี่อะไรครับ	<i>nîi à-rai khráp</i>	What's this?	great for menus & markets
นี่ <i>nîi</i> this อะไร <i>à-rai</i> what ครับ <i>khráp</i> (polite, m.)			

THAI	SOUNDS LIKE	ENGLISH	NOTE
อร่อยมากครับ	<i>à-ròi mâak khráp</i>	Very delicious!	wins hearts at any meal
อร่อย <i>à-ròi</i> delicious มาก <i>mâak</i> very ครับ <i>khráp</i> (polite, m.)			

Backchannel – sounding like you're listening รับฟัง

THAI	SOUNDS LIKE	ENGLISH	NOTE
อ้อ	<i>ăaw</i>	Ahh, I see	realization
จริงเหรอ	<i>jing rǎe</i>	Really?	interested surprise
จริง <i>jing</i> true เหรอ <i>rǎe</i> (question)			
เหรอครับ	<i>rǎe khráp</i>	Oh yeah?	keeps her talking
เหมอ <i>rǎe</i> (question) ครับ <i>khráp</i> (polite, m.)			
ดีนะ	<i>dii ná</i>	That's nice	warm approval
ดี <i>dii</i> good นะ <i>ná</i> (softener)			
โอเคครับ	<i>oo-khee khráp</i>	Okay	easygoing
โอเค <i>oo-khee</i> okay ครับ <i>khráp</i> (polite, m.)			

CULTURAL NOTE – JAI YEN & THE SMILE

Two ideas run through everything: **ใจเย็น** *jai yen* ("cool heart" — stay calm, never lose your temper publicly) and the famous Thai smile, which can mean joy, apology, or smoothing things over. Keep your cool, keep smiling, end with *khráp*, and you're already winning.