

VIETNAMESE · STARTER GUIDE

Vietnamese From **Zero**

This book is not for memorising. Each day just skim through, pick one sentence you like, and start using it.

Simple · Easy to understand · Easy to practise

GB Explained in English

⚡ 5 minutes a page

🗣️ Say-it-like-this spelling

🖨️ Printable pocket card

6

tones, decoded

12

sentence patterns

6

real-life scenes

30

days, planned

Saying it wrong is fine. Nobody here is grading you — they are just happy you tried.

1

Why Vietnamese is easier than you think

⌚ 2 min

Four grammar headaches from your own language – Vietnamese simply does not have them.

👉 **Verbs never change. That is the entire grammar lesson.**



Verbs never change

One form. Forever.

tôi ăn · bạn ăn · họ ăn

1

No plurals

No "-s". Add a number if you need one.

hai cà phê = two coffees



No gender, no articles

No le/la, no der/die/das, no a/the.

nhà = house / a house / the house



Tense = one small word

Drop it in front of the verb.
Done.

đã ăn · đang ăn · sẽ ăn

SAME SENTENCE, THREE TIMES

VIETNAMESE	SAY IT	MEANING
Tôi đã ăn.	toy dah an	I ate.
Tôi đang ăn.	toy dahng an	I am eating.
Tôi sẽ ăn.	toy seh an	I will eat.



The trade-off: grammar is easy, sound is the work. Spend your energy on tones, not rules.

The sounds that trip everyone up

Only the letters that behave differently from English. Northern (Hanoi) sound; Southern noted where it matters.

👉 **đ sounds like English d. d sounds like z. Those two fix half your words.**

CONSONANT TRAPS – LEARN THESE 10

LETTER	SAY IT LIKE	EXAMPLE	MEANING
đ	English d in "do"	đi (dee)	to go
d	z in "zoo" · South: y	dạ (zah / yah)	yes, politely
gi	z · South: y	giá (zah)	price
r	z · South: rolled r	rồi (zoy)	already
x	s in "see"	xin (sin)	please / to ask
th	hard t with a puff – never English "th"	thêm (tem)	more
kh	ch in German "Bach"	không (khawng)	no / not
ph	f	phở (fuh)	noodle soup
nh	ny in "canyon"	nhà (nyah)	house
ng / ngh	ng in "singer" – yes, at the start	ngon (ngawn)	delicious

VOWELS THAT LOOK THE SAME BUT ARE NOT

a · ă · â

a = "ah" (father) · **ă** = same but cut short · **â** = "u" in "but"

ăn · âm · an

e · ê

e = "e" in "bed" · **ê** = "ay" in "day", no glide

em · êm

o · ô · ơ

o = "aw" in "law" · **ô** = "oh" · **ơ** = "er" in "her", no r

con · cô · cơ

u · ư

u = "oo" in "food" · **ư** = "oo" with *flat, unrounded* lips

tu · tư



Mirror trick for u: say "oo", then pull your lips flat without moving your tongue.

3 The 6 tones, in one page

🕒 3 min

Same letters, six meanings. Tone is not decoration – it is part of the word.

👉 Up, down, drop. Three gestures carry all six tones.

ma

NGANG · LEVEL



Flat, mid. Like holding one note.

ghost

má

SẮC · RISING



Shoot up sharply, like a question.

cheek · mum (South)

mà

HUYỀN · FALLING



Start low, sigh downward.

but · that

mả

HỎI · DIPPING



Dip down, then curl back up.

grave

mã

NGÃ · BROKEN



Rise with a small catch in the throat.

horse · code

mạ

NẶNG · HEAVY



Short, low, dropped – cut it off.

rice seedling

🎵 Three gestures, that is all: up (á) · down (à) · drop and stop (ạ). ả and ã can wait a month.

⚠️ Tone matters more than speed. cà phê is coffee. cá phê is nothing. Slow and correct always wins.

A REAL PAIR YOU WILL MEET TODAY

WORD	SAY IT	MEANS
bánh	bahn	cake, bread, pastry
bạn	bahn (dropped, low)	friend · you
cám	kahm (rising)	bran (animal feed)
cảm ơn	kahm uhn (dipping)	thank you ✅

4

Who am I talking to?

⌚ 3 min

No neutral "you" here. You pick a word by age – and your own name for yourself changes with it.

👉 Older man = **anh**. Older woman = **chị**. You = **em**. Start there.

SAFE FOR DAY ONE

tôi = I (neutral, always fine) bạn = you (polite, same age-ish)

THEN UPGRADE TO THIS – LOCALS WILL WARM UP INSTANTLY

THEY LOOK...	CALL THEM	SAY IT	CALL YOURSELF
Man, slightly older than you	anh	ahn	em
Woman, slightly older than you	chị	chee	em
Clearly younger, a teenager, a child	em	em	anh / chị
Woman around your mother's age	cô	koh	con / em
Man around your father's age	chú	choo	con / em
Older than your parents	bác	bahk	con
Grandparent age	ông / bà	awng / bah	con / cháu



When in doubt, guess younger for them, older for you. **chị** instead of **cô** is a compliment. The reverse is not.



Add ạ at the end and almost anything becomes polite. One syllable, a lot of goodwill.

5 12 sentence patterns, plug & play

🕒 3 min

Memorise the frame, swap the blank. Twelve frames cover a whole week.

👉 Cho tôi ___ orders anything, anywhere in Vietnam.

#	PATTERN	SAY IT	USE IT
1	Tôi là ___	toy lah	I am ___ Tôi là Anna.
2	Đây là ___	day lah	This is ___ Đây là vợ tôi.
3	Cho tôi ___	chaw toy	I'll have ___ Cho tôi một cà phê.
4	Tôi muốn ___	toy moo-awn	I want ___ Tôi muốn đi chợ.
5	Tôi không ___	toy khawng	I don't ___ Tôi không ăn thịt.
6	___ ở đâu?	uh doh	Where is ___? Nhà vệ sinh ở đâu?
7	Bao nhiêu tiền?	bow nyew tyen	How much? Cái này bao nhiêu tiền?
8	Có ___ không?	kaw ... khawng	Do you have ___? Có wifi không?
9	___ được không?	duhk khawng	Is ___ possible? Bớt một chút được không?
10	Cái này là gì?	kigh nay lah zee	What is this? – point and ask
11	Tôi không hiểu.	toy khawng hyew	I don't understand.
12	Nói chậm lại nhé.	noy chum ly nyeh	Please speak slower.

TWO WORDS THAT DO A LOT OF WORK

...không?

At the end of any statement = a yes/no question.

Ngon không? = Is it tasty?

...nhé / nha

Softens a request into a friendly one. Instantly less blunt.

Dừng ở đây nhé.



Word order is like English: One difference: **adjectives come after the noun.** cà phê sữa đá = coffee · milk · ice.

Prices come fast and carry many zeros. Ten minutes here saves you all month.

👉 15 is **mười lăm** – **never** mười năm.

1 TO 10 – THE WHOLE FOUNDATION

1 **mộtmawt** 2 **haihi** 3 **babah** 4 **bổnbawn** 5 **nămnahm** 6 **sáusow** 7 **bảybuy**
 8 **támtahm** 9 **chíncheen** 10 **mườimuh-ee**

THEN IT IS PURE LEGO

NUMBER	VIETNAMESE	LITERALLY
11	mười một	ten one
20	hai mươi	two ten
34	ba mươi bốn	three ten four
100	một trăm	one hundred
1,000	một nghìn (North) · một ngàn (South)	one thousand



Two traps nobody warns you about.

- 5 inside a compound becomes **lăm**: 15 = **mười lăm**, 25 = **hai mươi lăm** – never "năm".
- 1 after a ten becomes **mốt**: 21 = **hai mươi mốt**, 31 = **ba mươi mốt**.

MONEY STREET - SPEAK

"chục" = ten thousand

Vendors drop the zeros.

tám chục = 80,000 đ

"k" is spoken too

Young people and apps say it out loud.

ba mươi k = 30,000 đ

Bargaining line

Smile, never argue. Walk away slowly if needed.

Bớt một chút được không?

Check the bill

Ask for the total at the end.

Tính tiền ạ. (teen tyen ah)

7 6 scenes from a real day

🕒 4 min

Read each one once out loud. Tomorrow, use one. That is the whole method.

👉 Anh ơi! / Chị ơi! is how you call anyone, anywhere.

☕ 1. Ordering coffee

YOU **Chị cho em một cà phê sữa đá ạ.**
chee chaw em mawt kah feh suh-uh dah ah
One iced milk coffee, please.

THEM **Mang đi hay ngồi đây?**
mahng dee high ngoy day
Take away or sit in?

YOU **Mang đi ạ. Bao nhiêu tiền?**
Take away. How much?

THEM **Ba mươi nghìn.**
30,000 đồng. **example price**

🍜 2. Street food

YOU **Anh ơi!**
ahn uh-ee
Excuse me! — the correct way to call staff

YOU **Cho em một phở bò, không hành.**
One beef phở, no spring onion.

THEM **Có cay không?**
kaw kigh khawng
Spicy?

YOU **Ít cay thôi ạ.**
Just a little spicy.

AFTER **Ngon quá! Tính tiền ạ.**
So good! The bill, please.

🚗 3. Taxi / Grab

YOU **Anh đến đường Lê Lợi nhé.**

ahn den duhng...

Please go to Lê Lợi street.

THEM **Số mấy?**

saw may

What number?

YOU **Số hai mươi ạ.**

Number 20.

YOU **Rẽ phải. · Rẽ trái. · Đi thẳng. · Dừng ở đây ạ.**

zeh fy · zeh chy · dee thahng · zuhng uh day

Turn right · left · straight on · stop here.



4. Market, politely

YOU **Cái này bao nhiêu?**

How much is this?

THEM **Một trăm nghìn.**

100,000. **example price**

YOU **Đắt quá! Bất một chút được không?**

daht kwah · burt mawt choot duhk khawng

Too expensive! Could you come down a bit?

THEM **Tám chục đi.**

80,000 then. **example price**

YOU **Dạ, em lấy ạ.**

OK, I'll take it.



5. Meeting someone

THEM **Chào bạn. Bạn tên gì?**

chow bahn · bahn ten zee

Hello. What is your name?

YOU **Tôi tên Anna. Còn bạn?**

My name is Anna. And you?

THEM **Bạn là người nước nào?**

bahn lah ngerr-ee nook now

Which country are you from?

YOU **Tôi là người Pháp. Tôi đang học tiếng Việt.**

I am French. I am learning Vietnamese.

THEM **Bạn nói tiếng Việt giỏi quá!**
You speak Vietnamese so well!

YOU **Cảm ơn. Nói chậm giúp tôi nhé.**
Thank you. Please speak slowly for me.

6. When something is wrong

ASK **Nhà thuốc ở đâu? · Bệnh viện ở đâu?**
nyah thook uh doh · beng vyen uh doh
Where is the pharmacy / hospital?

SAY **Tôi bị đau bụng. · Tôi bị sốt.**
toy bee dow boong · toy bee sawt
I have a stomach ache. · I have a fever.

SAY **Tôi bị dị ứng với _ _ _**
toy bee zee uhng vuh-ee
I am allergic to _ _ _

URGENT **Giúp tôi với! · Gọi xe cứu thương!**
zoop toy vuh-ee · goy seh koo thuhng
Help me! · Call an ambulance!

8 What people will say to you

🕒 4 min

Every book teaches you to speak. The hard part is when they answer. These are the lines you will actually hear.

👉 **One line matters more than the rest of this book: Em đang học tiếng Việt, anh nói tiếng Việt với em nhé!**

👤 THEY SAY THIS – JUST RECOGNISE IT

YOU WILL HEAR	SAY IT	IT MEANS
Ăn gì ạ? / Uống gì ạ?	an zee ah	What will you have?
Mấy người ạ?	may ngerr-ee ah	How many people?
Ăn ở đây hay mang về?	an uh day high mahng veh	Eat in or take away?
Có cay không?	kaw kigh khawng	Do you want it spicy?
Hết rồi ạ.	het zoy ah	Sold out, sorry.
Đợi chút nhé.	duh-ee choot nyeh	One moment please.
Của bạn đây ạ.	koo-ah bahn day ah	Here you go.
Còn gì nữa không ạ?	kawn zee nuh-ah khawng	Anything else?
Anh đi đâu ạ?	ahn dee doh ah	Where are you going? (taxi)
Đến rồi ạ.	den zoy ah	We have arrived.

🗣️ THEY WILL ASK YOU THESE – EVERY SINGLE DAY

THEY ASK	YOU ANSWER	MEANING
Bạn tên gì?	Tôi tên _ _ _	What is your name?
Bạn là người nước nào?	Tôi là người _ _ _	Where are you from?
Bạn làm nghề gì?	Tôi là giáo viên / kỹ sư / sinh viên.	What do you do?
Ở Việt Nam bao lâu rồi?	Tôi ở đây _ _ _ tháng rồi.	How long have you been here?
Bạn bao nhiêu tuổi?	Tôi _ _ _ tuổi.	How old are you? (normal here)

THEY ASK	YOU ANSWER	MEANING
Có gia đình chưa?	Rồi. / Chưa.	Are you married? (also normal)
Sao bạn biết tiếng Việt?	Tôi đang học.	How do you know Vietnamese?
Bạn thấy Việt Nam thế nào?	Tôi rất thích.	How do you find Vietnam?



Age and family questions are not nosy. People ask your age to know whether to call you anh, chị or em – without it they cannot address you at all.

WHEN YOU ARE STUCK – FOUR LINES THAT RESCUE YOU



Ask them to write it

Writing is easier than sound
– you can look it up later.

Anh viết ra giúp em được không ạ?



Ask them to type it

Especially for prices and addresses.

Anh gõ vào điện thoại giúp em ạ.



Point at it

Nothing to be shy about.
Everyone does it.

Cho em cái này ạ.



Ask for a repeat

Better than nodding and hoping.

Nói lại được không ạ?



The one line to memorise above all: Em đang học tiếng Việt, anh nói tiếng Việt với em nhé!
– without it people switch to English to be helpful, and you lose the practice.

9 100 words you will actually use

🕒 4 min

Not a dictionary – the words that show up in almost every real conversation. One row a day.

👉 Ten words a day beats a hundred in one night.

🙏 POLITENESS – START HERE, TODAY

- 👤 xin chào · hello 🙏 cảm ơn · thank you 😞 xin lỗi · sorry ✅ dạ / vâng · yes
- ❌ không · no 💜 ạ · politeness tag 🙏 làm ơn · please 🙌 không sao · no problem
- 😊 không có gì · you're welcome 👐 tạm biệt · goodbye

👤 PEOPLE

- 😊 tôi · I 👉 bạn · you 👤 anh · older man 👤 chị · older woman 👤 em · younger
- 👤 cô · aunt-age woman 👤 chú · uncle-age man 👤 bác · older uncle/aunt
- 👤 người · person 👤 bạn bè · friends

🍽️ EAT & DRINK

- 💧 nước · water ☕ cà phê · coffee 🍵 trà · tea 🍺 bia · beer 🍚 cơm · rice
- 🍜 phở · noodle soup 🥖 bánh mì · bread 🍝 bún · rice noodles 🍖 thịt · meat
- 🐮 bò · beef 🐔 gà · chicken 🐷 heo / lợn · pork 🐟 cá · fish 🍤 tôm · shrimp
- 🥬 rau · vegetables 🥚 trứng · egg 🧂 muối · salt 🍬 đường · sugar 🧊 đá · ice
- 🥛 sữa · milk

👤 DOING

- 🍴 ăn · eat 🥤 uống · drink 🚶 đi · go 📍 đến · arrive 💬 muốn · want 👤 có · have
- 💎 là · be 🧑 làm · do / work 🗣️ nói · speak 💡 hiểu · understand 🧠 biết · know
- ❤️ thích · like 🛒 mua · buy 💰 trả · pay 🆘 giúp · help

👤 DESCRIBING

- 😊 ngon · delicious 🌶️ cay · spicy 🍬 ngọt · sweet 🧂 mặn · salty 🔥 nóng · hot

 lạnh · cold  đắt · expensive  rẻ · cheap  to · big  nhỏ · small

 nhiều · a lot  ít · a little  tốt · good  đẹp · beautiful  mệt · tired

PLACES & TIME

 nhà · house  chợ · market  đường · street  khách sạn · hotel

 sân bay · airport  bệnh viện · hospital  nhà vệ sinh · toilet  ở đây · here

 kia · there  hôm nay · today  mai · tomorrow  hôm qua · yesterday

 bây giờ · now  sáng · morning  tối · evening

GLUE WORDS – SMALL BUT EVERYWHERE

 và · and  nhưng · but  với · with  của · of  rồi · already

 chưa · not yet  đã · past  đang · now doing  sẽ · future  cũng · also

 quá · too / so  rất · very  nhé · softener  thôi · only / that's all

 được · can / OK

10

8 mistakes foreigners make

⌚ 2 min

All fixable in a minute – and worth more than another hundred words.

👉 **Fix tones first. Everything else is cosmetic.**

1

"I'll learn tones later"

Tones are the word. And later never comes.

2

English "th"

thêm is not "them". It is a hard t with a puff of air.

3

Adjective before noun

Not "đá cà phê". It is **cà phê đá**. Noun first, always.

4

"bạn" to an elder

Safe with peers, cold with older people. Use **cô / chú / bác**.

5

Adding -s and -ed

hai cà phê, not "hai cà phês". Verbs never change shape.

6

Mixing ơ / ô and ư / u

cơ ≠ **cô**. Two different words, two different reactions.

7

Forgetting ạ

Correct, but abrupt. One syllable fixes it.

8

Speaking louder, not slower

Volume does not fix tones. Slow down and separate each syllable.



Fix order: tones first, then vowels, then pronouns. Grammar fixes itself along the way.

15 minutes a day. Not more. The goal of each week is one thing you can do in the real world.

👉 15 minutes daily beats 3 hours on Sunday.

Week 1**Sound****Tones + the 10 tricky letters**

Say **ma má mà mả mã mạ** out loud every morning. Learn the 10 politeness words.

Win: order a coffee without pointing.

Week 2**People****Pronouns + patterns 1 to 6**

Decide anh / chị / em for every person you meet, silently. Introduce yourself three times.

Win: say who you are and ask where something is.

Week 3**Money****Numbers + patterns 7 to 12**

Read every price tag out loud in Vietnamese. Practise **lăm** and **mốt**.

Win: buy something at a market and ask for a discount.

Week 4**Real life****The 100 words + the 6 scenes**

Use one scene a day with a real person. Expect mistakes – they are the lesson.

Win: three real conversations, no English.

DAILY 15 MINUTES, SPLIT LIKE THIS

- ☐ 5 min – say the 6 tones out loud ☐ 5 min – review yesterday's 5 new words ☐ 3 min – read one scene aloud
- ☐ 2 min – use one sentence with a real person



The one rule that decides everything: speak on day one. A wrong sentence said out loud beats a perfect one in your head. Most people will meet you halfway.

★ Pocket card

Print this page, cut it out, keep it in your wallet. Twenty lines that cover a normal day.

Xin chào

sin chow

Hello

Cảm ơn ạ

kahm uhn ah

Thank you

Xin lỗi

sin loy

Sorry / excuse me

Dạ / Vâng

yah / vung

Yes

Không ạ

khawng ah

No, thank you

Tôi tên là _ _ _

toy ten lah

My name is _ _ _

Tôi không hiểu

toy khawng hyew

I don't understand

Nói chậm lại nhé

noy chum ly nyeh

Please speak slower

Cho tôi _ _ _

chaw toy

I'll have _ _ _

Bao nhiêu tiền?

bow nyew tyen

How much?

Đắt quá!

daht kwah

Too expensive!

Bớt một chút được không?

burt mawt choot duhk khawng

A little cheaper?

Tính tiền ạ

teen tyen ah

The bill, please

Nhà vệ sinh ở đâu?

nyah veh sing uh doh

Where is the toilet?

Có wifi không?

kaw wifi khawng

Is there wifi?

Dừng ở đây ạ

zuhng uh day ah

Stop here, please

Ngon quá!

ngawn kwah

So delicious!

Tôi không ăn thịt

toy khawng an theet

I don't eat meat

Giúp tôi với!

zoop toy vuh-ee

Help me!

Tạm biệt

tahm byet

Goodbye

Come and join us — it is free

This book is a gift, not a sample. The group is simply where the rest of it lives.

🌙 One small lesson every evening

Short enough to use the same night.

📁 Free materials and tools

Audio, exercises, printable cards.

💬 Someone answers when you are stuck

You are not working this out alone.



💬 Zalo group · Nhóm Zalo

zalo.me/g/s3gftdusk46edm3q6323

Scan the code or tap the link

Nothing is sold there. Nobody is chased. Stay if you like it, leave if you do not.

bản 3/10 · 17h40

This guide is free. Share it with anyone learning Vietnamese.

Pronunciation shown is Northern (Hanoi); Southern differences are marked where they matter.

Sách này miễn phí. Cứ gửi cho bất kỳ ai đang học tiếng Việt. Phát âm theo giọng Bắc (Hà Nội), có ghi chú miền Nam ở chỗ quan trọng.

