

EP59: What do you need to know to read Thai and how long will it take?

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<https://www.patreon.com/posts/ep59-what-do-you-98571505>

- Check out my reading course at: <https://thaiwithgrace.com/readthai>
- Check out my new website that we created to help you learn Thai: <https://completethai.com/thai-grammar-points/a1-grammar-points/>

What do you need to know to learn to read Thai?

1. The Thai language has its own script which is mainly the combination of consonants and vowels.

Regarding the consonants, most of them produce sounds which are similar to what English has. Such as the 'd' sound, the 's' sound, and so on.

The 3 consonant sounds that can be difficult to pronounce for English speakers are the 'ng', strong 'd', and strong 'b' sounds.

1. "ng" sounds

- a. เงิน (money)

ngern

- b. งู (snake)

ngoo

2. "d" sound

- a. Strong 'd' = ตา (eyes)

dtaa

- b. Normal 'd' = ต่ำ (to scold)

daa

c. Normal 't' sound = ทา (to paint, to apply)

taa

3. "b" sound

a. Strong 'b' = ภาย (A city in the North of Thailand)

bpaai

b. Normal 'b' = บาย (bye bye)

baai

c. Normal 'p' sound = พาย (to row a boat)

paai

Regarding vowels, it can be difficult because of 3 reasons.

1. long and short

a. ไป vs. ภาย ("to go" vs. "a City in Northern Thailand")

bpai vs bpaai

b. ตี vs. ดี ("to criticize" vs. "to hit")

dti vs dtee

2. Some vowel sounds don't exist in English

a. มือ (hand)

meu

b. เกลือ (salt)

gleuua

3. Thai vowels can be located before/after/on top/ under a consonant or **a combination of everything** so it's important to recognize them as blocks.

a. เด (e vowel comes before the consonant)

day

b. เา (e-a vowel is before and after the consonant)

dao

c. เตีย (e-ai vowel is before, after, and on top of the consonant)

diia

2. Tones are essential in learning to read Thai. There is a set of rules and a few tone symbols that you need to memorise in order to read with correct tones.

3. Fill in the gaps:

1. True clusters: Two consonants that can be pronounced as if they are connected.

Some examples of true clusters are:

a. เกลือ (salt)

gleuua

b. กลัว (afraid)

gluua

2. Non clusterable: Two consonants that can't be pronounced as if they are connected, so there is a small "a" sound in between. For example:

a. สมุย (an island in the south of Thailand)

sa-mǎi

*Not '*smǎi*'

3. False clusters: Letters that when together produce a completely different sound.

For example:

a.ทราย (sand)

saai

* ท is a 't' sound. ร is a 'r' sound. But when together they produce a 's' sound.

Why should you learn to read Thai instead of relying on your ear or transliteration?

- There's a limit to consonants, vowels and reading rules. Once you recognize them, you can combine them, then you can read everything in Thai. It's not like Chinese characters where you have to memorize thousands of characters.
- In Thailand, the road signs, the food menu, electricity bill, billboard sign are all in Thai.
- For most people, knowing how to write and spell a word also helps with memory. When you can write, or visualize how the word is written, you can memorise new words easier compared to just using your ear and memorising the sound.
- There are consonants and vowels in Thai language that don't exist in English so if you don't know how to read Thai it will be hard to learn the new sounds.
- Most Thai people don't know transliteration. That means that you will not be able to ask Thai people to write in transliteration for you with correct tones because they only know how to write correctly in Thai. There's no standard for transliteration.
- I also wrote an article regarding this topic:
<https://thaiwithgrace.com/should-i-learn-to-read-thai-alphabet/>

How long will it take?

- It will take you 3 weeks to 3 months depending on how much you practice at home.