

Quick Guide to Pronouncing Sanskrit

For Pronunciation In-depth See Sanskrit & Chanting Vol. 1

VOWELS

Short Hrasva Long Dīrgha

Simple Vowels - Śuddha

a = love **ā** = water

i = sit **ī** = seat

u = duty **ū** = do

ṛ = pretty

Diphthongs - Samyukta

⇒ **e** = day

ai = night

⇒ **o** = home

au = now

The long vowels are all easily identifiable except “e” & “o” – these are also long – memorize them.

TONGUE PLACEMENT

Dental Dantya - No Dot

The tip of tongue should push forward between the front teeth.

ta, tha, da, dha, na & sa

Retroflex Mūrdhanya - With Dot

The tongue should curl back into the top of the mid-mouth.

ṭa, ṭha, ḍa, ḍha, ṇa & ṣa

ASPIRATION - “H”

Alpa Prāṇa - Restraint of Air

Virtually no air should be expressed while chanting - much like holding the breath.

Mahā Prāṇa - Burst of Air

“h” always means aspiration. a burst of air should be expressed from the bandhas.

c = chant

th = hothouse not the

kh = bunkhouse

ANUSVĀRA - ṁ = ṁ

“ṁ” & “ṁ” are the same. These are not “m’s” - listen to their pronunciation carefully. The anusvāra nasal will copy the location of the sound following it.

Pronounces as either **ñ, ñ, ṇ, n** or **m**

e.g. pinch = piṁc or piñc

uncle = uṁkḷ or uñkḷ

VISARGA - ḥ

Visarga “ḥ” is aspiration whose pronunciation depends on location and adjacent sounds. At the end of a phrase, it echoes the preceding vowel. Followed by a consonant, it blends into that consonant.

e.g. gurubhyaḥ = gurubhyaha

naḥ pūṣā = naf pūṣā

tataḥ kim = tatax kim

The phonetic system of writing Sanskrit used above and throughout this book is called IAST (International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration). It is the standard within scholastic communities worldwide. The markings are called “diacritics” or “diacritical marks,” and they create a one-to-one correlation with all Sanskrit sounds.