

॥ संस्कृत वर्ण माला ॥

|| saṁskṛta varṇa mālā ||

The Garland of Saṁskṛta Letters

A key to Saṁskṛta pronunciation with reference to English.

52 Saṁskṛta Akṣaras (Sounds)

ॐ - om is the primordial sound, the vibration of the Lord's creation. It is a conjunction of the three letters: अ - a, उ - u, and अँ - aṁ. The universe and all sounds are said to have their source in this mystical sound.

A. 16 Saṁskṛta Svaras (Vowels)

Saṁskṛta has short and long vowels. Long vowels are slightly elongated, meaning they require more time to pronounce. Short vowels get one beat and long vowels get two beats.

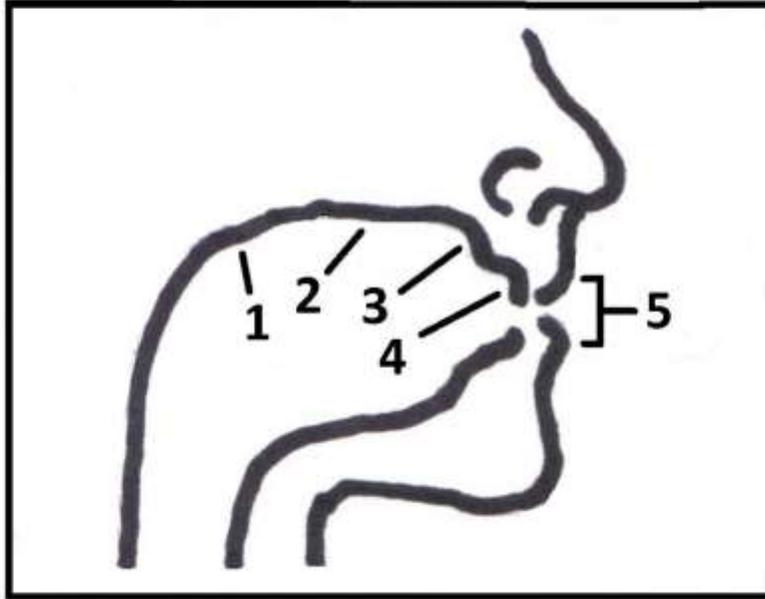
1. अ - a	short "a" as in about Example: शिव - śiva	2. आ - ā	long "a" as in father Example: निर्वाण - nirvāna
(People must be careful not to confuse the "a" letters, which sound different than English speakers in particular may assume)			
3. इ - i	short "i" as in tin Example: ऋषि - ṛṣi	4. ई - ī	long "i" as in piece Example: ईश्वर - īśvara
5. उ - u	short "u" as in put (though it often sounds more like the "u" in déjà vu) Example: गुरु - guru	6. ऊ - ū	long "u" as in assume Example: रूप - rūpa
7. ऋ - ṛ	Short "ri" like in rig, but rolled Example Example: कृष्ण - kṛṣṇa	8. ॠ - ṝ	long "ri" sound (held / rolled for 2 beats) Example: पितृणाम् - pitṛṇām
9. ॡ - ṝ̄	"Iri" sound as in full rib with a rolled r as in ऋ - ṛ Example: क्लृप् - kḷp	10. ॢ - ṝ̄̄	elongated "Iri" sound (held / rolled for 2 beats) No Examples: This vowel is listed in the varṇa mālā for symmetry, but does not occur in a single Saṁskṛta word
The four preceding sounds are pronounced in some parts of India with a rolled "r" combined with a "u" sound rather than an "i" sound.			

11. ए - e	Long "e" as in prey Example: देव - deva	12. ऐ - ai	long "ai" as in isle; (sometimes it is pronounced the same way as e – especially when it occurs at the end of a verse) Example: वैद्य - vaidya
13. ओ - o	Long "o" as in yoke Example: योग - yoga	14. औ - au	long "au" as in about or cow; (sometimes it is said the same way as the short o – it should be pronounced as au) Example: गौरी - gaurī
15. अं - am̐	This is usually pronounced as an "m" sound as in hum, but may also be said as an "n" sound as in run, depending on the following letter. This letter is called the anusvāra and is always used in conjunction with another vowel. Also written as अँ - am̐. This is pronounced as "ng" as in "rung" in Rigveda chanting. Yajur Veda Priests pronounce this sound as "gum" or "ggs" depending on the following consonant. In this case, the sound gets an additional syllable. The variation of the anusvāra is called the candra bindu because it resembles a crescent Moon and a dot. Example: संहिता - saṁhitā	16. अः - aḥ	This letter creates a slight aspiration of the preceding vowel as listed: aha āha ihi īhi uhu ūhu ehe aihe oho auho. This letter is called visarga. Example नमः - namaḥ

B. 36 Sarūpa (Consonants).

Tongue placement for Sanskrit Sounds

Sound	Mouth Position	Part of Tongue Used
1) Guttural	back of throat	Back
2) Palatal	back of hard palate	top
3) Cerebral (Retroflex)	front of hard palate	tip
4) Dental	behind the teeth	tip
5) Labial	lips	not used



B1. Guttural Consonants

These are voiced from the throat or back of the mouth.

17. क - kha	"k" as in paprika	18. ख - kha	aspirated "k + h" sound as in thick honey
The "h" after a consonant indicates an aspirated consonant, which sounds like the conjunction of the unaspirated consonant and the "h" sound. This sound creates one syllable.			
19. ग - ga	"g" as in gum	20. घ - gha	"g + h" as in big hut
21. ङ - ṅa	"ng" as in angle or sing (this sound is always combined with another consonant as in the saṁskṛta: "śaṅkara")		

B2. Palatal Consonants			
These are voiced with the tongue harb palate near the top front of the mouth.			
22. च - ca	"ch" as in church	23. छ - cha	aspirated "ch + h" as in beach hut
24. ज - ja	"j" as in just	25. झ - jha	"j + h" as in garage hum
26. ञ - ña	"n" as in the spanish piñata: this sound has a nasal quality (it is used in combination with other consonants as in the saṃskṛta: "pañca")		

B3. Cerebral Consonants			
These are voiced by touching the tongue to the front of the soft palate at the top rear of the mouth. This is different than in English (which touches the hard palate for these sounds).			
27. ट - ṭa	cerebral "t" similar to ton	28. ठ - ṭha	cerebral "t + h" similar to night hum
29. ड - ḍa	cerebral "d" similar to dug	30. ढ - ḍha	cerebral "d + h" similar to red honey
31. ण - ṇa	cerebral "n" similar to nun (as in the saṃskṛta: "gaṇeśa")		

B4. Dental Consonants			
These are voiced by touching the tip of the tongue to the top of the teeth. This is different than in English (which touches the hard palate for these sounds).			
32. त - ta	dental "t" similar to similar to ton	33. थ - tha	dental "t + h" similar to night hum
34. द - da	dental "d" similar to dug	35. ध - dha	dental "d + h" similar to red honey
36. न - na	na dental "n" as in nine (as in the saṃskṛta: "nava")		

B5. Labial Consonants			
These are voiced using the lips.			
37. प - pa	"p" as in pun	38. फ - pha	"p + h" as in top hum (this is not pronounced as "fa" as in Hindi)
39. ब - ba	"b" as in bug	40. भ - bha	"b + h" as in job hum
41. म - ma	ma "m" as in money		

B6. Semivowels

A vowel is syllable made by a pure expansion of the vocal tract. A consonant is a sound made by a pure contraction of a portion (or portions) of the vocal tract. While a normal sound creates its own syllable, a semivowel does not. Therefore it must be voiced in conjunction with a vowel.

42. य - ya	"y" as in young	43. र - ra	"r" as in run (in संस्कृत the "r" sound is rolled more than in English)
44. ल - la	"l" as in luck	45. व - va	soft "v" somewhere like the English "v" and sometimes more like "w" but always softer than English (as in the saṃskṛta: "svāmi" or "śiva")

B7. Sibilants

These sounds are created by pushing air out sharply between the teeth.

46. श - śa	"sh" as in shut
47. ष - ṣa	Cerebral "sh" sound made by placing the tongue to the soft palate and forcing air around it
48. स - sa	"s" as in Sun

B8. Aspirate

This sound is produced by exhaling.

49. ह - ha	"h" as in honey
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B9. Conjunctions and Other Sounds

These are combinations of other sounds already listed. There is also a cerebral "l" in this group.

50. क्ष - kṣa	ka + cerebral sha as in the saṃskṛta: "lakṣmī."	51. ञ - ṅa	cerebral "l" similar to luck (touching the soft palate as with the cerebral sounds above). Some sources give this letter as tra.
52. ज्ञ - jña	This is a conjunction of ja and ñ. This is said somewhat like a cerebral ñ with the j silent and pronounced as a brief pause as in the saṃskṛta: "jñāna" or yajña. This is pronounced differently by Hindi speakers who often say a "g" sound like "gya." The proper Saṃskṛta pronunciation is with a silent pause more like in Hindi or Saṃskṛta when there is a double consonant like in buddha. It should be noted by English speakers that Saṃskṛta is a phonetic language and every written sound is voiced in some way. A double consonant is different than a single consonant and is voiced as a brief pause before the consonant sound.		