

Introduction to Sinhala script

This document serves as a guide for anyone who wishes to use the Sinhala alphabet cards as a tool for learning the Sinhala script. Separate documents introduce the Tamil script, and the phonetic system used to transcribe the words.

The Sinhala alphabet pack contains 40 letter cards:

initial vowels (12):

අ ආ අඳ අඳ ශ්‍ර ඊ උ උ ශ ච ච ශ්‍ර ඹ ඹ

initial consonants (21):

බ ච ද ආ ග හ ජ ක ල ළ ම න ප ර ස ත ට ච ය ෂ ශ

non-initial consonants (7):

ඩ ණ ඹ ද ශ ඩ ඵ

1. The 40 letters

1.1 Initial vowels (12)

These letters are only used when a word begins with a vowel:

අ	අරලිය	araliya	frangipani (temple flower)
ආ	ආතා	āta	custard apple
අඳ	අඳස්	æś	eyes
අඳ	අඳයා	æya	pangolin
ච	චඵවා	eluwa	goat
ච්	ච්	ē	A (letter)
ශ්‍ර	ශ්‍රත්තඵවා	ittæva	porcupine
ඊ	ඊතලය	ītalaya	arrow
ඹ	ඹරඵව	oruwa	dugout canoe
ඹ්	ඹ්ලු	ōlu	water lily
උ	උණ	una	bamboo
උ ශ්‍ර	උ ශ්‍රා	ūra	pig

1.2 Initial consonants (21)

These words begin with an unmodified letter (consonant + vowel **a**):

ග	ගස්ලබු	gaslabu	papaw (papaya)
ජ	ජම්බු	jambu	rose apple
ළ	ළමයි	lamay	children
න	නයා	naya	cobra
ර	රඹුටන්	rambutan	rambutan
ස	සරම	sarama	sarong
ට	ටයරය	tayaraya	tyre
ච	චට්ටක්කා	vattakka	pumpkin
ය	යතුර	yatura	key
ෂ	ෂර්ට් චික	shart-eka	shirt

The words below begin with a modified letter:

(For an explanation of how the letters are modified, see part 2 below)

බ	බෝ කොළය	bō kolaya	bo leaf
ච	චොකලට්	chokalat	chocolate
ඳ	ඳාගැබ	dāgæba	dagoba (stupa)
ෆ	ෆෂන් චික	fæn-eka	fan
හ	හූනා	hūna	gecko
ක	කාක්කා	kākka	crow
ල	ලේනා	lēna	squirrel
ම	මාළු	māluwa	fish
ප	පොල් ගහ	pol gaha	coconut tree
ශ්‍රී	ශ්‍රී ලංකාව	shrī lankāva	Sri Lanka
ත	තැඹිලි	tæmbili	king coconut

1.3 Non-initial consonants (7)

These words feature the target letter in non-initial position:

ඩ	වෙසක් කූඩු	vesak kū <u>u</u>	Vesak lanterns
ඹ	අඹ	a <u>m</u> bā	mango
ඳ	හඳ	ha <u>n</u> dā	moon
ඟ	ගඟ	ga <u>n</u> gā	river
ධ	හොධ	ho <u>n</u> dā	trunk
ණ	මුහුණ	muhun <u>a</u>	face
ඵ	උඵ	ulu	tiles

2. The modifiers

The examples below illustrate the most common ways in which the letters may be modified. In each pair of examples, the first shows the vowel in initial position, and the second shows the same vowel sound represented by a modification to another letter.

2.1 The vowel *a* and variations

අ	අරලිය	a <u>r</u> aliyā	frangipani (temple flower)
	සරම	sar <u>a</u> mā	sarong

The letter without any modification, pronounced *a* in the first syllable of a word, and *ə* in subsequent syllables.

ආ	ආතා	<u>ā</u> ta	custard apple
ඃ	කාක්කා	k <u>ā</u> kka	crow

The symbol *ᳵ* is used to make the vowel long (*ā*).

ඇ	ඇස්	<u>æ</u> s	eyes
ඊ	තැඹිලි	t <u>æ</u> mbili	king coconut

(open vowel similar to standard English pronunciation of *cat*)

අඳ	අඳයා	ǣya	pangolin
ඳ	ඟඳන් එක	fǣn-ekə	fan

(long version of previous vowel, similar to standard English pronunciation of *jam*)

2.2 The vowels e/ē, i/ī, o/ō

එ	එළුවා	eluwa	goat
ඔ	වෙසක් කූඩු	vesak kūḍu	Vesak lanterns

The *kombuwa* ඔ precedes the letter, but affects the vowel following the consonant.

ඒ	ඒ	ē	A (letter)
ඔ ^ඵ	වෙලනා	lēna	squirrel

(long ē - combination of *kombuwa* + ඵ)

ඉ	ඉත්තෑවා	ittǣva	porcupine
ඞ	තැඹිලි	tǣmbili	king coconut

ඊ	ඊතලය	ītaləya	arrow
ඞ	ශ්‍රී ලංකාව	shrī lankāva	Sri Lanka

(Note: The tail under the letter represents the r in shrī.)

ඔ	ඔරුවා	oruwa	dugout canoe
ඔ-ඃ	චොකලට්	chokəlat	chocolate

(o - combination of *kombuwa* + ඃ)

ඔ	ඔලු	ōlu	water lily
ඔ-ඵ	බෝ කොළය	bō koləya	bo leaf

(long ō - combination of *kombuwa* + ඃ + ඵ)

2.3 The vowels u and ū

උ	උණ	una	bamboo
උ	මුහුණ	muhuna	face
උ	යතුර	yatura	key
උ	ඔරුව	oruwa	dugout canoe

Note 3 different ways of forming the u vowel:

- (1) The “foot” උ is the most common.
- (2) The “tail” ු is only used with 4 letters: ත ක ග ඔ.
- (3) The symbol ේ is only used with the irregular letter ට. (With any other letter, this symbol represents the vowel æ as above.)

උ	උරා	ūra	pig
උ	හුනා	hūna	gecko
උ	වෙසක් කූඩු	vesak kūdu	Vesak lanterns

Note 3 different ways of forming the long ū vowel, corresponding with 1-3 above:

- (1) a variation on the “foot”
- (2) a variation on the “tail”
- (3) The irregular letter ට changes to ටෑ (rū) (no example word included). (With any other letter, this symbol represents the vowel æ.)

2.4 Others

ඔ	ශ්‍රී ලංකාව	shrī lankāva	Sri Lanka
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(invariable letter, pronounced ng)

ඔ	වට්ටක්කා	vaṭṭakka	pumpkin
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Any letter + cap/flag = consonant without vowel, for example in double consonants as above, or in words ending with a consonant.

Most letters take the “flag”; the “cap” is only used with 6 letters: ට ට ට ට ට ට. These two symbols have identical functions; they are also used in combination with the *kombuwa* ට to make the long ē vowel (see above).