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# Vietnamese QuickChat

Vietnamese is the official language of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. It's spoken by about 85 million people worldwide, both in Vietnam and among migrant communities in Australia, Europe, North America and Japan. The Vietnamese people's knowledge of foreign languages reflects their country's relationship with foreign powers – cordial or otherwise – in recent history, but knowing a little of the language is a good way to endear yourself to the locals. To help you make sense of what is a very tricky writing system, the words and phrases in this guide include pronunciations that use a written form more familiar to English speakers.

## QUESTION WORDS

<b>How?</b>	Làm sao?	laàm sow?
<b>What?</b>	Cái gì?	gái zèè?
<b>When?</b>	Khi nào?	kee nòw?
<b>Where?</b>	Ở đâu?	êr đòh?
<b>Who?</b>	Ái?	ai?

## CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

<b>Hello</b>	Xin chào	sin jòw
<b>Goodbye</b>	Tạm biệt	daəm bee-ùht
<b>Yes</b>	Vâng(N)/Dạ (S)	vuhng/yá
<b>No</b>	Không	kawm
<b>Please</b>	Làm ơn	laàm ern
<b>Thank you</b>	Cảm ơn	gáam ern
<b>You're welcome</b>	Không có chi	kawm gố jee
<b>Excuse me</b>	Xin lỗi	sin løy
<b>Sorry</b>	Xin lỗi	sin løy
<b>How are you?</b>	Có khỏe không?	gáw kwá kawm?
<b>What's your name?</b>	Tên là gì?	den là zèè?
<b>My name is ...</b>	Tên tôi là ...	den doy là ...
<b>Where are you from?</b>	Bạn từ đâu đến?	baən dùr đòh đến?
<b>I'm from ...</b>	Tôi đến từ ...	doy đến tùhr ...
<b>I (don't) like ...</b>	Tôi (không) thích ...	doy (kawm) tít

## DIRECTIONS

<b>Where is ...?</b>	ở đâu ...?	êr đòh ...?
<b>Go straight ahead</b>	Thẳng tới trước	túhng der-ee chuhr-érk
<b>Turn left</b>	Sang trái	saang chái
<b>Turn right</b>	Sang phải	saang fai
<b>at the next corner</b>	ở góc đường	êr gốp đuhr-èrng
<b>at the traffic lights</b>	tại đèn giao thông	dại đèn zow tawm

## LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIESv

<b>Do you speak English?</b>	Bạn có nói được tiếng Anh không?	Baən gố nóy đuhr-érk đíng aang kawm?
<b>Can you show me (on the map)?</b>	Xin chỉ giúp (trên bản đồ này)	sin jeè zùm (chen baən dàu này)
<b>What does ... mean?</b>	Nghĩa là gì?	ngee-ùh là zèè?
<b>I (don't) understand</b>	Tôi (không) hiểu	doy (kawm) heé-oo

## TIME & DATES

<b>What time is it?</b>	Mấy giờ rồi?	máy zèr zòy?
<b>in the morning</b>	sáng	saáng
<b>in the afternoon</b>	chiều	jee-oo
<b>in the evening</b>	tối	dóy
<b>today</b>	hôm nay	hawm nay
<b>tomorrow</b>	ngày mai	ngày mai
<b>Monday</b>	thứ hai	túhr hai
<b>Tuesday</b>	thứ ba	túhr ba
<b>Wednesday</b>	thứ tư	túhr duhr
<b>Thursday</b>	thứ năm	túhr nuhm
<b>Friday</b>	thứ sáu	túhr sóh
<b>Saturday</b>	thứ bảy	túhr bảy
<b>Sunday</b>	chủ nhật	jòo nhựt

## SHOPPING & SERVICES

<b>I'd like to buy ...</b>	Tôi muốn mua ...	doy moo-úhn moo-uh ...
<b>How much is it?</b>	Cái này giá bao nhiêu?	gái này zaa bow nyee-oo?
<b>I don't like it</b>	Tôi không thích nó	doy kawm tít nó
<b>May I look at it?</b>	Tôi có thể xem được không?	doy gố tè sam duhr-érk kawm?
<b>I'm just looking</b>	Tôi chỉ ngắm xem	doy jeè nguým sam
<b>It's cheap</b>	Cái này rẻ	gái này zà
<b>It's too expensive</b>	Cái này quá mắc	gái này gwaá múhk
<b>I'll take it</b>	Tôi lấy cái này	doy láy gái này
<b>Do you accept credit cards?</b>	Bạn có nhận thẻ tín dụng không?	baən có nyuým tá dúng không?

## PLACES

<b>the church</b>	nhà thờ	nyaà tèr
<b>the city centre</b>	trung tâm thành phố	chum duhm taàng fáw
<b>the embassy</b>	sự quan ...	sự gwaan ...
<b>the market</b>	chợ	jẹr
<b>the museum</b>	viện bảo tàng	vee-ùhn bów daàng
<b>the post office</b>	bưu điện	buhr-oo dee-ùhn
<b>a public toilet</b>	phòng vệ sinh	fòm vệ sing
<b>the tourist office</b>	văn phòng hướng dẫn du lịch	vuhm fòm huhr-érng zúhn zoo lík

## TRANSPORT

<b>What time does the ... leave/arrive?</b>	Chuyến ... chạy lúc mấy giờ?	jwee-úhn ... jáy lúp máy zèr?
<b>boat</b>	tàu/thuyền	dòw/twee-ùhn
<b>bus</b>	xe buýt	sa beét
<b>plane</b>	máy bay	máy bay
<b>train</b>	xe lửa	sa lúhr-uh
<b>I'd like a ticket</b>	Tôi muốn vé ...	doy moo-úhn vá ...
<b>I want to go to ...</b>	Tôi muốn đi ...	doy moo-úhn dee ...
<b>The train has been cancelled</b>	Chuyến xe lửa bị hủy bỏ	jwee-úhn sa lúhr-uh beẹ hweé bó
<b>bus station</b>	bến xe	bén sa
<b>ticket office</b>	phòng bán vé	fòm bán vá
<b>timetable</b>	thời biểu	ter-èè beé-oo
<b>railway station</b>	ga xe lửa	gaa sa lúhr-uh

## EMERGENCIES

<b>Help!</b>	Cứu tôi!	gúhr-oo doy!
<b>I'm lost</b>	Tôi bị lạc đường	doy beẹ lạk đuhr-èrng
<b>Leave me alone!</b>	Thôi!	toy!
<b>Please call ...</b>	Làm ơn gọi ...	laàm ern goy ...
<b>a doctor</b>	bác sĩ	baák seé
<b>the police</b>	công an	gáwm aan

## SIGNS

<b>Entrance</b>	Lối Vào
<b>Exit</b>	Hướng Dẫn
<b>Open</b>	Mở
<b>Closed</b>	Đóng
<b>Prohibited</b>	Cấm
<b>Police</b>	Cảnh Sát/Công An



## WRITTEN VIETNAMESE

The Vietnamese treat every syllable as an independent word, so 'Saigon' is spelt 'Sai Gon' and 'Vietnam' is written as 'Viet Nam'. Foreigners aren't too comfortable with this system – we prefer to read 'London' rather than 'Lon Don'. This leads to the notion that Vietnamese is a 'monosyllabic language', where every syllable represents an independent word.

This idea appears to hark back to the Chinese writing system, where every syllable is represented by an independent character and each character is treated as a meaningful word in its own right. In reality, Vietnamese appears to be polysyllabic, like English.

However, writing systems do influence people's perceptions of their own language, so the Vietnamese themselves will insist that their language is monosyllabic – it's a debate probably not worth pursuing.

## PRONUNCIATION

Most of the names of the letters of the *quốc ngữ* alphabet are pronounced like the letters of the French alphabet. Dictionaries are alphabetised as in English except that each vowel/tone combination is treated as a different letter.

Most of the consonants of the Romanised Vietnamese alphabet are pronounced more or less as they are in English with a few exceptions. Vietnamese doesn't use the English letters 'f', 'j', 'w' and 'z'.

## TONES

<b>c, k</b>	<b>ğ</b>	an unaspirated 'k'
<b>đ</b>	<b>đ</b>	(with crossbar) as in 'do'
<b>d</b>	<b>z/y</b>	without crossbar) as the 'z' in 'zoo' (N); as the 'y' in 'yes' (S)
<b>gi-</b>	<b>z/y</b>	as a 'z' (N); as a 'y' (S)
<b>kh-</b>	<b>ch</b>	as the 'ch' in German buch
<b>ng-</b>	<b>ng</b>	as the '-nga-' sound in 'long ago'
<b>nh-</b>	<b>ny</b>	as the 'ny' in 'canyon'
<b>ph-</b>	<b>f</b>	as in 'farm'
<b>r</b>	<b>z/r</b>	as 'z' (N); as 'r' (S)
<b>s</b>	<b>s/sh</b>	as 's' (N); as 'sh' (S)
<b>tr-</b>	<b>ch/tr</b>	as 'ch' (N); as 'tr' (S)
<b>th-</b>	<b>t</b>	a strongly aspirated 't'
<b>x</b>	<b>s</b>	like an 's'
<b>-ch</b>	<b>k</b>	like a 'k'
<b>-ng</b>	<b>ng</b>	as the 'ng' in 'long' but with the lips closed; sounds like English 'm'
<b>-nh</b>	<b>ng</b>	as in 'singing'

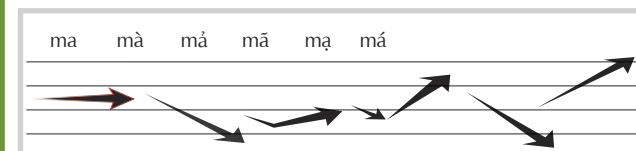
The hardest part of studying Vietnamese for Westerners is learning to differentiate between the tones. There are six tones in spoken Vietnamese. Thus, every syllable in Vietnamese can be pronounced six different ways. For example, depending on the

tones, the word *ma* can be read to mean 'phantom', 'but', 'mother', 'rice seedling', 'tomb' or 'horse'.

The six tones of spoken Vietnamese are represented by five diacritical marks in the written language (the first tone is left unmarked). These should not be confused with the four other diacritical marks that are used to indicate special consonants and vowels.

The following examples show the six different tone representations:

<b>ma</b> (ghost):	middle of the vocal range
<b>mà</b> (which):	begins low & falls lower
<b>m</b> (tomb):	begins low, dips and then rises to higher pitch
<b>mã</b> (horse):	begins high, dips slightly, then rises sharply
<b>m</b> (rice seedling):	begins low, falls to a lower level, then stops
<b>má</b> (mother):	begins high and rises sharply



Vietnamese grammar is fairly straightforward, with a wide variety of possible sentence structures. Nouns have no masculine, feminine or plural forms and verbs have only one form regardless of gender, person or tense. Instead, tool words and classifiers are used to show a word's relationship to its neighbours. For example, in the expression *con mèo (ca) tôi* (my cat), *con* is the classifier, *mèo* is the noun, *ca* means 'of/belong to' (and can be omitted), and *tôi* is the personal pronoun 'I'.

## PRONOUNS

<b>I</b>	<i>tôi</i>	<i>doy</i>
<b>you</b>	<i>ông</i>	<i>awm</i> (to an older man)
	<i>bà</i>	<i>baà</i> (to an older woman)
	<i>anh</i>	<i>aang</i> (to a man your own age)
	<i>cô</i>	<i>gaw</i> (to a woman your own age)
<b>he</b>	<i>anh y</i>	<i>ang áy</i>
<b>she</b>	<i>cô y</i>	<i>gô áy</i>
<b>we</b>	<i>chúng tôi</i>	<i>jum doy</i>
<b>they</b>	<i>họ</i>	<i>họ</i>