PRONUNCIATION IN THE INDONESIAN LANGUAGE

There are 5 vowels and 21 consonants in the Indonesian alphabet. As well as representing individual sounds, they also combine to form other phonemes, namely *ng* [ŋ], ny [ɲ], sy [ʃ] and kh [x].

In addition, some of the vowels have more than one variation of sound, or allophones as they are known. For instance, the vowel e can be pronounced as [æ, e and ə]. Indonesian also has three diphthongs: *ai* [aj], *oi* [oj] and *au* [aj].

The remainder of this section comprises a detailed explanation of how to pronounce the various sounds in the Indonesian language. Some examples are also listed alongside the explanations in order to aid your understanding of the different phonemes.

Vowels

1. a is pronounced [a], like a in car.

| anda | [an.da] | 'you' |
| bawa | [ba.wa] | 'bring' |

2. e has three pronunciations. They are [æ], [e] and [ə].
   e is pronounced as [æ], like e in rest.

| kakek | [ka.kæk] | 'grandfather' |
| nenek | [næ.næk] | 'grandmother' |

   e is pronounced [e], like a in say.

| enak | [e.naʔ] | 'nice' |
| merah | [me.rah] | 'red' |

   e is also pronounced [ə], like a in ago.

| empat | [əm.pat] | 'four' |
| kelapa | [kə.la.pa] | 'coconut' |

Pronunciation

3. ***i*** has two pronunciations. The first is short and is pronounced [I], like *i* in *sit*. This occurs when an ***i*** appears between two consonants.
   In other positions, ***i*** is pronounced [i], like *y* in *very*.

in***i***	[**i**.n**i**]	'this'
as***i***n	[a.s**I**n]	'salty'

4. ***o*** is usually pronounced [o], like *o* in *go*.

orang	[**o**.rang]	'people'
kad***o***	[ka.d**o**]	'gift'

   o is sometimes pronounced [ɒ], like *a* in *call*.

obr***o***l	[**ɒ**.br**ɒ**l]	'chat'
k***o***per	[k**ɒ**.pər]	'suitcase'

5. ***u*** is pronounced [u], like *oo* in *food*.

uang	[**u**.waŋ]	'money'
bar***u***	[ba.r**u**]	'new

Consonants

1. ***b*** is pronounced [b], like *b* in *book*.

bola	[**b**o.la]	'ball'
te***b***al	[tə.**b**al]	'thick'

   When *b* appears in the final position, it is not aspirated.

seba***b***	[sə.ba**p**]	'cause'
ba***b***	[ba**p**]	'chapter'

2. ***c*** is pronounced [ʧ], like *ch* in *church* with a slight aspiration.

cari	[ʧa.ri]	'to look for'
ku***c***ing	[ku.ʧiŋ]	'cat'

3. **d** is pronounced [d], like *d* in *daddy*.

dorong	[**d**ɒ.rɒŋ]	'push'
mu**d**a	[mu.**d**a]	'young'

4. **f** is pronounced [f], like *f* in *fat*.

foto	[**f**o.to]	'photograph'
maa**f**	[maʔ.a**f**]	'sorry'

5. **g** is pronounced [g], like *g* in *game*.

gadis	[ga.dis]	'girl'
bagus	[ba.gus]	'good'

When g is in the final position, it is pronounced [k], like k in back, although this an irregular spelling which rarely occurs.

gudeg	[gu.də**k**]	'gudeg (a kind of Javanese food)'

6. **h** is pronounced [h], like *h* in *hill*.

hujan	[**h**u.jan]	'rain'
ta**h**u	[ta.**h**u]	'tofu'

In some words h which appears between two vowels is not pronounced.

ta**h**u	[ta.u]	'know'
ta**h**un	[ta.un]	'year'

7. **j** is pronounced [dʒ], like *j* in *judge* with a slight aspiration.

jelas	[dʒə.las]	'clear'
ker**j**a	[kər.dʒa]	'work'

Pronunciation

8. **k** is pronounced [k], like *k* in *key*.

kamar	[**k**a.mar]	'room'
sa**k**u	[sa.**k**u]	'pocket'

When k appears in the final position, it is usually pronounced as a glottal stop.

ena**k**	[e.na**ʔ**]	'nice'
tida**k**	[ti.da**ʔ**]	'no'

9. **l** is pronounced [l], like *l* in *long*.

lima	[**l**i.ma]	'five'
gu**l**a	[gu.**l**a]	'sugar'

10. **m** is pronounced [m], like *m* in *mother*.

mandi	[**m**an.di]	'to take a bath'
bu**m**i	[bu.**m**i]	'earth'

11. **n** is pronounced [n], like *n* in *notice*.

nomor	[**n**ɒ.mɒr]	'number'
bada**n**	[ba.da**n**]	'body'

12. **p** is pronounced [p], like *p* in *park*.

panas	[**p**a.nas]	'hot'
ra**p**at	[ra.**p**at]	'meeting'

When *p* appears in the final position, it is not aspirated.

ata**p**	[a.ta**p**]	'roof'
lemba**p**	[lem.ba**p**]	'humid'

13. **q** is pronounced [k], like *k* in *kitchen*.

Al**q**uran	[al.**k**ur.an]	'the Quran'
qanun	[**k**a.nun]	'law'

14. **r** is pronounced [r], like *r* in *road*.

rumah	[**r**u.mah]	'home'
pi**r**ing	[pi.**r**iŋ]	'plate'

15. **s** is pronounced [s], like *s* in *sand*.

surat	[**s**u.rat]	'letter'
pi**s**au	[pi.**s**aw]	'knife'

16. **t** is pronounced [t], like *t* in *time*.

tinta	[**t**in.**t**a]	'ink'
ke**t**at	[kə.**t**at]	'tight'

When *t* appears in the final position, it is not aspirated.

keta**t**	[kə.ta**t**]	'tight'
saki**t**	[sa.ki**t**]	'sick'

17. **v** is pronounced [f], like *f* in *fog*.

variasi	[**f**a.ri.a.si]	'variation'
la**v**a	[la.**f**a]	'lava'

18. **w** is pronounced [w], like *w* in *wet*.

warna	[war.na]	'colour'
tawar	[ta.war]	'bargain'

19. **x** is pronounced [s], like *s* in *class*.

xilofon	[si.lo.**f**on]	'xylophone'
xilograf	[**s**i.lo.graf]	'xylograph'

20. **y** is pronounced [j], like *y* in *young*.

yakin	[**j**a.kin]	'sure'
a**y**am	[a.**j**am]	'chicken'

21. **z** is pronounced [z], like *z* in *zero*.

zat	[**z**at]	'substance'
i**z**in	[i.**z**in]	'permission'

Pronunciation

Consonant Combinations

There are phonemes that are represented by two consonants in the alphabets. However, they are pronounced as a single sound, as follows:

1. **ng** is pronounced [ŋ], like *ng* in *sing*.

i**ng**at	[i.**ŋ**at]	'remember'
bawa**ng**	[ba.wa**ŋ**]	'onion'

2. **ny** is pronounced [ɲ], like *n* in *new*.

nyaman	[**ɲ**a.man]	'comfortable'
ta**ny**a	[ta.**ɲ**a]	'ask'

3. **kh** may pronounced as [x] or [k].

khusus	[**x**u.sus]/[**k**u.sus]	'special'
a**kh**ir	[a.**x**ir]/[a.**k**ir]	'end'

4. **sy** is pronounced [ʃ], like *sh* in *shell*.

syarat	[**ʃ**a.rat]	'requirement'
ma**sy**arakat	[ma.**ʃ**a.ra.kat]	'society/community'

Vowel Combinations

There are three vowel combinations in Indonesian which may pronounced as two separate vowels or diphthongs. They are *ai*, *oi* and *au*. They are pronounced as two separate sounds if they occur word initially and medially, i.e. between two consonants. However, in word-final position, these three vowel combinations are mostly pronounced as diphthongs, *ai* [ay], *oi* [oy], and *au* [aw].

1. ai is pronounced as two separate sounds in word-initial and word-medial position.

air	[a.ir]	'water'
k**ai**n	[ka.in]	'cloth'
m**ai**n	[ma.in]	'play'

ai is pronounced as diphthong [aj] word finally, like *y* in *cry*.

panta**i**	[pan.ta**j**]	'beach'
rama**i**	[ra.ma**j**]	'noisy'

2. **oi** is pronounced as two separate sounds in word-medial position.

k**oi**n	[kɒ. in]	'coin'

oi is pronounced as diphthong [ɒj], like *oy* in *boy* in word-final position.

amb**oi**	[am.bɒj]	'wow'
sep**oi**	[se.pɒj]	'breezy'

3. **au** is pronounced as two separate sounds in separate syllable in word-medial position.

l**au**t	[la.ut]	'sea'
b**au**t	[ba.ut]	'bolt'

au is pronounced as diphthong [aw], like *ow* in *cow* in word-final position.

kemar**au**	[ke.ma.r**aw**]	'dry'
kal**au**	[ka.l**aw**]	'if'

However, in some words *au* is pronounced as two separate sounds in word-final position.

b**au**	[ba.u]	'smell'
m**au**	[ma.u]	'want'

Other Vowel Combinations

Indonesian has other vowel combinations to those previously mentioned that are not considered to be diphthongs. They are always pronounced as separate sounds and glides ([w] or [j]) can be inserted in between the two vowels. The examples are as follows:

b**ua**h	[bu.ʷah]	'fruit'
d**ui**t	[du.ʷit]	'money'
c**iu**t	[ci.ʸut]	'narrow'
l**ia**t	[li.ʸat]	'tough'
ˌ · ˂ʲu	[ˌ ˈˌnir]	' ˌ ɔneer'

Pronunciation

Identical-vowel Combinations

Indonesian has words with identical-vowels that are pronounced as two separate sounds. Most of them are pronounced with glottal in between.

s*aa*t	[saʔ.at]	'moment'
m*aa*f	[maʔ.af]	'sorry'
k*oo*rdinator	[kɒʔ.ɒr.di.na.tɒr]	'coordinator'
bel*oo*n	[blɒʔ.ɒn]	'stupid'

Spelling Reform

In 1947 and 1972, the Indonesian government advocated a number of spelling reforms to be introduced to Bahasa Indonesia. The changes involved a move away from old spellings that were closely derived from the Dutch language and the adoption of new spellings.

Although the old spellings are no longer in use in the written form of language, they still survive in proper names.

The following is a list of the changes;

oe	*u*	e.g. kr*oe*p*oe*k becomes kr*u*p*u*k	'crackers'
tj	*c*	e.g. *tj*ut*j*i becomes *c*u*c*i	'to wash'
dj	*j*	e.g. *dj*arum becomes *j*arum	'needle'
j	*y*	e.g. dja*j*a becomes ja*y*a	'victorious'
nj	*ny*	e.g. *nj*amuk becomes *ny*amuk	'mosquito'
sj	*sy*	e.g. *sj*arat becomes *sy*arat	'requisite'
ch	*kh*	e.g. a*ch*ir becomes a*kh*ir	'end'

A good example of the old spelling in modern usage is in the name of Jakarta's International Airport. It is formally known as Soekarno-Hatta International Airport, named after Indonesia's first President, Soekarno, and first Vice-President Mohammad Hatta.