

Welcome to the land of Libraria!
Congratulations! You are an

Elf

Elves are an ancient, self-important people. They live in the deep forests in ornate treehouses, wear flowers in their hair, and are always talking about how good times were before the gnomes, barbarians, and dragons showed up. Their favorite possessions are their books, wherein lies the knowledge of the ages (or at least the important elvish bits).

Their language is lyrical, flowing, and apt to put one to sleep.

A. Creating a naming language

First you need a name than means something in your language.

Step 1. Come up with some elvish-sounding “words.”

Syllables 1

hali	yava	fili
lisa	heva	fasi
kweth	ama	vini
yata	esa	yiva

Step 2. Match six of those “words” to English words.

Words 1

Column A		Column B	
English	Elvish	English	Elvish
<i>superior</i>	_____	<i>archer</i>	_____
<i>excellent</i>	_____	<i>calligrapher</i>	_____
<i>elegant</i>	_____	<i>hairstylist</i>	_____

Step 3. Combine your language’s words to form meaningful names.

Take a word from column A and add a word from column B to the end of it.

For example, if *fili* means *elegant* and *yava* means *hairstylist*, the elvish name *filiyava* means *Elegant-hairstylist*.

Names

English	Elvish
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

B. Building words

Even before generating an expansive vocabulary, you can make a fictional language have a unique sound just by picking certain speech sounds (phonology) and specifying the ways they can be combined into syllables (phonotactics).

Step 1: Choose your sounds.

Phonetic stereotypes are often employed when choosing which sounds to work with in a conlang.

For the elves, you'll use soothing sounds like *l* and *m* and unvoiced fricatives like *s* and *th* (like Tolkien's Quenya and Elgin's Laádan).

Speech Sounds

C:	p	t	kw		
	f	v	th	s	h
	m	n	l	r	y
V:	i	e	a		

Step 2: Combine your sounds (phonemes/letters) into syllables.

Here's where you decide the structure of your language's syllables.

- Does every syllable need a consonant (C) and a vowel (V)?
- Can two consonants (CC) occur next to each other (like *b* and *r*)?
- Does every syllable need to end with a vowel (CV)? Or a consonant (VC, CVC)?

Software exists that can generate random syllables based on the letters and rules you set.³

The letters in the Speech Sounds box have been combined into the words and syllables in the

Syllables 2 box. These will be your building blocks for all the remaining exercises.

Syllables 2

hali	yava	fili	lisa	heva	fasi
kweth	ama	vini	yata	esa	yiva
nili	pith	yin	nas	rith	neth
tim	sel	kwa	yeth	mil	fam
ta	ne	ya	kwi	reth	kwa
ri	path	pith	elen	silá	am

Rules

(C¹)V(C²)

where C¹ = {all except th}; C² = {s, th, m, n, l}

() means optional

Step 3: Give the syllables some meaning.

Place one or two syllables from the Syllables 2 box on each line in the Words 2 box to assign meanings to them (e.g., *yata* or *yatanili*).

Words 2

English

elf

book

language

(to) like

(to) read

(to) speak

Elvish

3. <http://www.fantasist.net/conlang.shtml>.

C. Verbs and word order

There are several ways to assemble words (morphology).

1. *Agglutination* refers to the adding of affixes (prefixes, suffixes, and infixes) to reflect syntactical meaning.
2. *Isolation* uses separate words and particles.
3. *Inflection* changes the words themselves to reflect changes in grammar.

We'll use an agglutinating system for this exercise.

Morphology

- ☒ Agglutination
- ☐ Isolation
- ☐ Inflection

Step 1: The verb

- ① Take the word meaning (*to*) *like* that you created in the Words 2 box (step B.3), and put it over the ① symbol in the Verb Tense box.

Verb Tense

English	Elvish
<i>likes</i>	(_____) (+) _____ (+) _____
or <i>am/are/is liking</i>	② ① ②

- ② Choose another syllable from the Syllables 2 box (step B.2), and tack it onto either the front or back end of your verb in the Verb Tense box, over one of the ② symbols. This will indicate that a verb is in the present tense in your language.

Step 2: The subject (whodunnit?)

Now choose a first person nominative pronoun (also known as "I"). Pick a syllable from the Syllables 2 box (step B.2) to mean *I*.

Subject

English	Elvish
<i>I</i>	_____

Step 3: Word order

There are six possible orders for subject, verb, and object in a sentence, and they are listed in the Word Order box in the order of approximate prevalence in world languages, starting with the most common. (Notice that for about 95% of all the world's languages, the subject comes before the object.) Select a word order for your language.

Word Order ⁴	Example	Prevalence	Example languages
<input type="checkbox"/> SOV	<i>Buford salsa drinks.</i>	>40%	Turkish, Tamil, Japanese, Tibetan, Quechua
<input type="checkbox"/> SVO	<i>Buford drinks salsa.</i>	<40%	English, Swahili, Chinese, Indonesian
<input type="checkbox"/> VSO	<i>Drinks Buford salsa.</i>	15%	Welsh, Hawaiian, Berber, Classical Arabic
<input type="checkbox"/> OSV	<i>Salsa Buford drinks.</i>		Jamamadi (Brazil), Yoda-ese (Dagobah)
<input type="checkbox"/> OVS	<i>Salsa drinks Buford.</i>		Hixkaryana (Brazil), Klingon
<input type="checkbox"/> VOS	<i>Drinks salsa Buford.</i>		Fijian, Terena (Brazil), Malagasy (Madagascar)

Step 4: Subject + Object

In the Phrases box, put "I" (from the Subject box) and your conjugated verb (from the Verb Tense box) in the order you chose (VS or SV). We'll add the object (O) later.

Phrases

English	Elvish
<i>I like</i>	_____
<i>I read</i>	_____
<i>I speak</i>	_____

4. Rick Morneau, "Designing an artificial language: Syntax," *Essays on Language Design*, <http://www.eskimo.com/~ram/syntax.html>.

D. Nouns and building sentences

Step 1: Marking plurals ("Two nouns are better than one!")

English uses an -s suffix to mark plurals (with exception such as geese, mice, etc.). You have the power to change this in your language. Do you want to mark your plurals with a suffix or a prefix? Usually you'll use the same position you did for the verb affix you created in the Verb Tense box (step C.1). (Infix isn't really an option yet until you've specified your syllable rules further.)

☐ Prefix
 ☐ Suffix

- ❶ Take the word for *book* from the Words 2 box (step B.3), and put it over the ❶ symbol in the Plural Noun box.
- ❷ Choose another syllable from the Syllables 2 box (step B.2), and tack it onto either the front or the back of *book*, over one of the ❷ symbols.

Plural Noun		
English	Elvish	
<i>books</i>	(_____ +)	_____ (+ _____)
	②	① ②

You can now say *like*, *I*, and *books* in your new language. Now we're going to form a sentence using these three.

Step 2: Indicating the object of the sentence

You could choose to mark *books* with something to show it's the sentence object (step 1a) or just rely on the word order to show which word in your sentence is the subject and which one is the object.

Object

The sentence object is indicated by

- ☐ Word order (go to step 2a)
- ☐ Affix (skip to step 3)

Step 2a: Marking the object with an affix

If you decide to mark your object, choose another syllable from the Syllables 2 box (step B.2) and add it to the front or back of *books*. You'll usually use the same position you chose for the verb affix in the Verb Tense box (step C.1) and for the plural marker in the Plural Noun box (step D.1).

Object Marker

(_____) $(+\text{_____})$
 ② *books* (D.1) ②

Step 3: Assembling the sentence

Now, put your words for *like*, *I*, and *books* in the proper order in the Sentences box. Use the order you selected in the Word Order box (step C.3).

Sentences	
English	Elvish
<i>I like books!</i>	_____
<i>I speak (the) language.</i>	_____
<i>I like Superior-archer!</i>	_____

Congratulations! You've created a sentence in the language of the elves. You could now say *I speak (the) language*, *I read books*, or even *I like Elegant-hairdresser*!

And this is just the beginning! Welcome to the wonderful world of conlanging!