

Bengali, Step by Step, Root by Root

An etymology-driven curriculum, built one word at a time

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This edition compiled incrementally — new chapters added as they
are written.

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Preface

This book teaches Bengali one word at a time, and it teaches each word by taking it apart. It is written for someone starting from zero — who may not read a single Bengali letter — so the script is taught *inside the word lessons themselves*: each word introduces exactly the letters it needs, so you learn to read নমস্কার *and* learn what it means in the same few minutes. (A reader who already reads Bengali simply skims the “letters in this word” notes.)

Bengali (*Bāṅglā*) is an **Indo-Aryan** language — descended, like Hindi, Marathi, and Punjabi, from Sanskrit — and the mother tongue of Bengal: West Bengal in India and all of Bangladesh, some 250 million speakers, the seventh-largest language on earth. It is the language of Tagore, and the only one to have furnished the national anthem of *two* nations. One habit runs through the whole book and is worth stating up front: Bengali’s inherent vowel is **ô** (not “a”), its *s* tilts to **sh**, and its *v* collapses to **b** — so Sanskrit *namaskāra* is spoken *nômoshkar*. Learn to hear that shift and every Sanskrit-derived word becomes legible. Roots are traced to Sanskrit and, where they reach, to the wider family that also gave English its words — every form supplied in full.

How to use this book

Every numbered section is one word, or one small phrase, and takes a few minutes — the length of a queue, an errand, or the walk to the bus. Read them in order the first time through: each section stands on the ones before it, and nothing is used before it has been taught. After that the book becomes reference, and you can open it anywhere.

Say the Bengali out loud wherever you can. The prompts under *Your turn* are written to be spoken, and saying a word is most of what makes it stay. The questions under *Before you move on* carry their own answers in brackets: cover them, answer from memory, then look.

Nothing here is gated behind the alphabet. Each lesson introduces exactly the letters and sounds its own word needs, so you are reading real words from the first page rather than drilling a chart. The whole script is gathered in a reference at the back of the book — somewhere to look things up when you are curious, never a chapter to sit through first.

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Chapter 1

Greetings

Modes: ⇄ voice (1) 👁 eyes (5) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can greet someone in Bengali, recognize the reply, and choose an appropriate response.

Complete BN-C01-practice, the canonical closing checkpoint, and demonstrate the chapter promise: greet someone in Bengali, recognize the reply, and choose an appropriate response.

1.1 নমস্কার (nômoshkar) — “hello”

The first Bengali word — and it hides the single sound-shift that makes Bengali *Bengali*.

The letters in this word

(If you already read Bengali, skim this.) Bengali runs **left to right** under a top line; every consonant carries a built-in vowel — but in Bengali that vowel is **ô** (an open “o”), *not* “a.” ন nô, ম mô, ক kô, র rô. A **vowel sign** changes it (া ā); a *hasanta* under জ strips its vowel so it joins the next as a conjunct: জ + ক → জ্জ.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

নমস্কার is the *same word* as the Sanskrit *namaskāra* behind Hindi’s and Marathi’s greeting — *namas* (“a bow”) + *kāra* (“the making of”). But hear what Bengali does: the inherent “a” becomes **ô**, and *s* shifts to **sh**, so written *namaskāra* is spoken **nô · mosh · kar**. That habit —

$a \rightarrow \hat{o}$, $s \rightarrow sh$ — is Bengali’s fingerprint; once you hear it, you can un-shift almost any word back to its Sanskrit cousin.

Why it’s said this way

Nômoshkar, palms together, is the everyday respectful greeting — hello and often goodbye — the broad, secular-to-Hindu default in Bengal. Bengali is the language of Tagore, the only tongue to have written the national anthem of *two* countries: India and Bangladesh.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- read it — nô · mosh · kar
- the two shifts that made *namaskāra* into *nômoshkar* ($a \rightarrow \hat{o}$, $s \rightarrow sh$)

Before you move on

What Sanskrit word is *nômoshkar*, and what two Bengali sound-shifts disguise it? (*Namaskāra*, “the making of a bow”; the inherent $a \rightarrow \hat{o}$ and $s \rightarrow sh$.)

1.2 ধন্যবাদ (dhônyobad) — “thank you”

The same “thank you” Hindi, Marathi, and Punjabi use — now watch Bengali reshape it *twice*.

The letters in this word

New: ধ dhô (a breathy *d*), ব bô, দ dô, and the conjunct ন্য (ন n + য y). With the া sign, read ধ · ন্য · বা · দ.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

ধন্যবাদ = Sanskrit *dhanya* (“worthy”) + *vāda* (“a saying”) — the very “thank you” behind Hindi *dhanyavād*. Two Bengali quirks fire at once: the inherent $a \rightarrow \hat{o}$ again (*dhônyobad*), and — because Bengali has **no separate “v,”** only ব *b* — Sanskrit *vāda* is spoken *bad*. *V* becoming *b* is a Bengali signature (think *Bishnu* for *Vishnu*).

Why it's said this way

This is the standard, slightly formal thanks. In warm everyday speech Bengalis often lean on the whole gesture and tone rather than the word — but *dhônyobad* is what you say and write when you mean it plainly. Note how much you already knew: only the *sound* changed, not the roots.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- read it — dhô · nyo · bad
- the two shifts hiding *dhanyavāda* here (a→ô, v→b)

Before you move on

Dhônyobad comes from which two Sanskrit parts, and why is the “v” gone? (*Dhanya* “worthy” + *vāda* “saying”; Bengali has no “v,” only *b*.)

1.3 হ্যাঁ / না (hyā / nā) — “yes” and “no”

Two words no conversation survives without — and one is an old cousin of English.

The letters in this word

New: হ hô, the *y-phola* ঙ that glides the sound, and the nasal mark *chandrabindu* ঁ — a little moon-with-dot that sends the vowel through the nose. না is ন + া, *nā*, and nothing else.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

হ্যাঁ (*hyā*, “yes”) and না (*nā*, “no”). That “no” rides the ancient negative **na-** — the same Proto-Indo-European *ne* behind English **no**, **not**, **none**, Latin *nōn*, and Hindi *nahīn*. Bengali kept it at its shortest, bare *nā*: the family resemblance to English *no* sits right on the surface.

Why it's said this way

The *chandrabindu* (that nasal moon-dot) is everywhere in Bengali and gives the language part of its soft, nasal music. Hear the breath leave through the nose at the end of *hyã* — that mark is doing the work.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- read them — *hyã* / *nā*
- the shared ancestor of Bengali *nā* and English *no* (PIE *ne*)

Before you move on

What does the *chandrabindu* do, and what links Bengali *nā* to English *no*? (It nasalises the vowel; both descend from Proto-Indo-European *ne*, “not.”)

1.4 আচ্ছা (*āchchhā*) — “okay / I see”

The little word that keeps every Bengali conversation moving.

The letters in this word

New: আ — the **independent** vowel *ā*, the shape a word uses when it *starts* with a vowel. (A built-in vowel rides a consonant; a standalone one gets its own letter.) Then the doubled ছ (চ *ch* + ছ *chh*). Read আ · ছা, *ā-chchhā*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

আচ্ছা (*āchchhā*) is the all-purpose “okay, alright, I see, go on” — a true workhorse of spoken Bengali, from Sanskrit *acchā* (“good, clear”). It is the word a Bengali speaker peppers through speech the way an English speaker says “right... right,” a nod made audible.

Why it's said this way

Note it opens with আ, a *standalone* vowel-letter — your first. This is the other half of how the script handles vowels: attached to a consonant they are little signs (া), but on their own they stand as full

letters (আ). Same sound, two shapes, chosen by position.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- read it — ā · chchhā
- why আ is written in full here (the word starts with a vowel)

Before you move on

What does *āchchhā* do in conversation, and why is its first vowel a full letter, not a sign? (It means “okay / I see / go on”; a word-initial vowel takes its standalone form আ.)

1.5 আসি (āshi) — “I’ll be going” (goodbye)

Bengalis do not say “I’m leaving.” They say “I’ll come again.” Here is why.

The letters in this word

New: ঞ again — here truly “sh” — and the ি sign (*i*), which in Bengali is **written before** the consonant it follows but **read after** it. আসি = আ + সি, *ā-shi*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

আসি (*āshi*) literally means “**I come**,” from the verb *āsā* (“to come,” a Sanskrit root shared with Hindi *ānā*). Yet it is how Bengalis say *goodbye* — never “I’m leaving” (unlucky, too final) but “I’ll come [again]”: আসি, or the fuller *āschhi* (“I am coming”). It is the very same “promise of return” farewell Tamil and Marathi reach for — a whole culture’s optimism folded into one verb.

Why it’s said this way

And notice: *āshi* is “I come” whether a man or a woman says it — Bengali marks **no gender on the verb**. That sets it apart from Marathi (*yeto* m. / *yete* f.) and, in this one respect, makes Bengali’s

verbs simpler than its neighbours’.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- read it — ā · shi (remember ঞ = “sh”)
- what *āshi* literally means and why it means goodbye (“I come” → “I’ll come again”)

Before you move on

Why does “I come” mean goodbye in Bengali, and what does Bengali *not* mark on this verb? (Saying “I’ll come again” avoids the finality of “leaving”; no gender.)

1.6 Chapter 1 — Practice and Recall

No new words. The five you have, mixed and recombined — and the one shift that ties them together.

How to answer — rapid recall

Say these aloud:

- hello / goodbye, palms together — *nômoshkar*
- thank you — *dhônyobad*
- yes and no — *hyã / nã*
- “okay, I see, go on” — *āchchhā*
- goodbye, “I’ll come again” — *āshi*

Grammar lens — the one habit

Bengali’s fingerprint. Un-shift these back to the Sanskrit you know: Say these aloud:

- what is *nômoshkar* in “un-shifted” Sanskrit? (*namaskāra*)

- what became of the “v” in *dhônyobad*? (Bengali has no “v”; *vāda* → *bad*)
- the inherent vowel of every Bengali consonant — “a” or “ô”? (*ô*)

What you’ve built — roots you now carry

- inherent vowel *ô* + *s*→*sh* + *v*→*b* = the Bengali sound-fingerprint
- *nā* (“no”) ↔ English **no** / **not** / **none** (PIE *ne*)
- *āshi* (“I come”) = the “promise of return” goodbye, shared with Tamil & Marathi

Before you move on

A friend parts by saying *āshi*, and you want to answer warmly. What does *āshi* really mean, and what could you say back? (“I’ll come again” — you can answer *āchchhā*, *āshi* — “okay, I’ll come [too],” returning the same optimism.)

Chapter 2

Hanging From the Head-Line, One Piece at a Time

Modes: ✍ pen (14) ⇌ Hands-free start: none of the 14 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can write nine Bengali pieces from memory — six consonants, a vowel sign, its independent twin and the hasanta — and read the greeting I have been saying since the first chapter by assembling it from those pieces, including its conjunct.

The greeting assembled from seven pieces the reader can each write from memory, including the conjunct and the letter written s but said sh, and introducing nothing new.

2.1 ন — the consonant na

Nothing is assumed but the words you can already say. This chapter turns them into words you can read.

Script

Bengali is an **abugida**: a consonant already carries a vowel, and you write a vowel mark only when you want a different one.

ন

Now the part that catches every reader who comes to Bengali from Hindi or Sanskrit. The inherent vowel here is **not** *a*. It is **ô** — the vowel of English *awe*, rounded and open. So this letter alone is **nô**, not *na*.

Devanagari's bare consonant says *ka*; Bengali's says *kô*. Same family, same system, **different default**. It is one of the first things that makes Bengali sound like Bengali rather than like Hindi read aloud.

Look at the top of the shape: a **horizontal bar**, and in running text it joins up across a whole word so the writing hangs from a line — the same head-line Devanagari has, and the one Gujarati erases.

Your turn

- *Write it:* ন
- *Read it:* every piece this chapter has given you so far, in order

Before you move on

What vowel does a bare Bengali consonant carry? (*ô*, the vowel of *awe* — not *a*.) And what does Devanagari's carry instead? (*a*.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

2.2 ন — trace it, with the bar last

Keep ন in front of you. It does not get covered in this lesson.

Writing — observe and trace

Finger-trace ন three times on the page, slowly, then trace it once in the air. Say *nô* after your finger stops each time — *nô*, with the rounded open vowel of English *awe*, not *na*.

Leave the **bar across the top for last**, every time. The body of the letter first, the horizontal line after it.

This book does not tell you where each curve of the body starts or which way it travels. Bengali handwriting is taught with real variation from school to school, and it is not written down here until it can be written down with a source. Tracing what is in front of you needs no such source, and it is how the shape gets into your hand in the meantime.

The bar is the exception, and it is not a stylistic claim: the মাত্রা joins up across a whole word in running text, so it cannot be the first thing drawn on a letter that is about to have neighbours.

Before you move on

Which part did you leave until last? (**The bar.**) And what does this letter say on its own — *na* or *nô*? (***nô***.)

2.3 ণ — copy it twice, and join the bar

The model stays visible for all of this lesson. Nothing is hidden today.

Writing — guided copy

Copy ণ once, body first and bar last, as you traced it.

Then copy it **twice side by side** — and this time draw the bodies first, both of them, and finish with **one single bar running across the top of both**.

That one continuous line is the whole lesson. In Bengali the bar is not a mark belonging to a letter; it is a line belonging to the **word**, which is why it is drawn last and why it runs on. A reader's eye follows it to find where one word stops and the next starts, so a hand that gives each letter its own short bar has written two words where it meant one.

Before you move on

Look at your pair. Is there one line across the top, or two? One line is a word. Two is a gap you did not mean to leave.

2.4 ণ — write it with the model covered

Look at ণ once and say *nô*. Then cover it.

Writing — delayed copy

With the model covered, wait ten seconds, then write ণ once from memory — body first, bar last.

Ten seconds is long enough that your hand cannot be tracing a shape it can still see, and short enough that a letter you met a minute ago is still there.

Only after the letter is finished, uncover the model and compare. Repair **one** thing, the first that differs, and leave the rest.

Before you move on

Check the bar's **width** before you check the body at all. A hand writing from memory remembers to put the bar there and draws it only as wide as the body underneath. In running text it has to reach the full width of the letter, because the next letter's bar will meet it — so a short bar is the one mistake that looks completely right on a single letter and falls apart the moment there are two.

2.5 ণ — the letter from the sound

Cover every ণ on the page. Nothing to copy and nothing to uncover.

Writing — dictation

Say *nô* aloud, or play it, and write the letter that carries it. Once.

A delayed copy asks your hand to remember a shape. Dictation asks it to turn a **sound** into a shape, which is what writing is actually for, and the two do not always arrive together.

Before you move on

Uncover the model and compare — then notice which sound you were given. **nô**, not *na*. The vowel inside a bare Bengali consonant is the rounded open one, and this is the place that matters: a reader coming from Hindi or Sanskrit hears *na*, writes the same shape, and has learned the letter with the wrong sound attached to it. The shape is shared across the family. The default vowel is not, and dictation is the only stage that can catch the difference, because it is the only one where the sound comes first.

2.6 া — the vowel sign that replaces the inherent vowel

Write the piece from the previous lesson before adding another.

Script

To get a different vowel you **replace** the inherent one with a mark called a **mātrā**.

া

A single upright stroke standing to the **right** of its consonant, dropping from the head-line. Attached, it swaps the inherent **ô** for a long open **a**.

ন + া → না

na — and that is the word for **no**, which you have been saying since your first lesson.

One consonant and one mark, and a word you could already say became a word you can **read**.

Your turn

- *Write it:* া
- *Read it:* every piece this chapter has given you so far, in order

Before you move on

What does a mātrā do to the inherent vowel? (**Replaces** it.) What word did those two pieces make? (না — *na*, “no”.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

2.7 আ — the same vowel standing alone

Write the piece from the previous lesson before adding another.

Script

The mark you learned a moment ago only works **attached to a consonant**. So what do you write when a word **begins** with that vowel?

A different character:

আ

That is the same **a** sound, but as an **independent vowel** — a full letter that stands on its own at the start of a word.

These are two different characters, not two styles of one. A font, a keyboard and this book all treat them as entirely separate, and confusing them is the commonest spelling error in every Indic script.

What decides which one you write is **position**, not sound:

- আ begins a word.
- া rides on a consonant.

Two words you already say begin with this letter — the one for *I see you later* and the one for *all right*.

Your turn

- *Write it:* আ
- *Read it:* every piece this chapter has given you so far, in order

Before you move on

Which of the two starts a word? (আ.) Which rides on a consonant? (া.) Are they the same character? (**No** — two separate characters, one sound.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

2.8 হ — the consonant ha

Write the piece from the previous lesson before adding another.

Script

হ

hô — the *h* of English *hat*, plus the inherent vowel you now know is **ô** rather than *a*.

No new machinery: every rule you hold applies unchanged. **New shapes are coming; new rules are not.**

You have been saying this letter since your first lesson — it opens the word for *yes*.

Your turn

- *Write it:* হ
- *Read it:* every piece this chapter has given you so far, in order

Before you move on

What is the inherent vowel in হ? (**ô**.) How many new rules did this lesson add? (**None**.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

2.9 ম — the consonant ma

Write the piece from the previous lesson before adding another.

Script

ম

mô — the *m* of English *met*, plus the inherent vowel.

Three consonants now. Say them in the order you met them, each with the vowel nobody wrote:

ন হ ম

nô, hô, mô. Notice you are saying *aw* three times, not *ah*.

Your turn

- *Write it:* ম
- *Read it:* every piece this chapter has given you so far, in order

Before you move on

Say the three consonants you hold, each with its inherent vowel.
(*nô, hô, mô.*)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

2.10 ঞ — the consonant that is written *s* and said *sh*

Write the piece from the previous lesson before adding another.

Script

ঞ

Here the letter and the sound part company, and it is worth knowing early.

This letter descends from the Sanskrit *s*, and every transliteration writes it *s*. **In Bengali it is normally pronounced *sh*** — the *sh* of English *shoe*.

So the word you say as *nomosh-kar* is written with what looks like an *s*. The spelling records the word's Sanskrit ancestry; the pronunciation records what Bengali did with it afterwards. **Both are true, and the script keeps the older one.**

English does exactly this with *knight* and *through*. Every literary language accumulates spellings that outlive their sounds.

Your turn

- *Write it:* ঞ
- *Read it:* every piece this chapter has given you so far, in order

Before you move on

How is ঞ written in transliteration, and how is it said? (Written *s*, said *sh*.) Why the difference? (The spelling keeps the **Sanskrit ancestry**; the sound moved on.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

2.11 ক — the consonant ka

Write the piece from the previous lesson before adding another.

Script

ক

kô — the *k* of English *skip*, with **no puff of breath** after it.

Hold a palm in front of your mouth and say English *kit*: you feel air. Say *skip*: you do not. **This is the second one.** Bengali has a separate letter for the breathy version, and swapping them changes the word — so a difference English treats as an accident, this script writes down.

Five consonants, one mātrā, one independent vowel. One piece of machinery left.

Your turn

- Write it: ক
- Read it: every piece this chapter has given you so far, in order

Before you move on

Is ক the *k* of *kit* or of *skip*? (Of **skip** — no puff of air.) Does the script care? (**Yes** — the breathy one is a different letter.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

2.12 ঙ্গ — the mark that DELETES the inherent vowel and fuses two consonants

Write the piece from the previous lesson before adding another.

Script

The inherent vowel is a nuisance when you do not want it. If a word presses two consonants together with no vowel between them, writing them plainly would insert an **ô** that is not there.

So there is a mark that removes it:

ঙ

Bengali calls it the **hasanta** — Devanagari calls the same thing a *virama*. It sits under a consonant and means: *no vowel here*.

Then something happens that no European alphabet does. A consonant stripped of its vowel **fuses** with the one after it into a single joined shape, a **conjunct**:

স + ্ + ক → স্ক

One cluster. **Conjuncts are not new characters to memorise** — they are two you already know, joined. Bengali's are more thoroughly fused than Devanagari's, so some take a moment to take apart, but the principle does not change.

Your turn

- *Write it:* ্
- *Read it:* every piece this chapter has given you so far, in order

Before you move on

What does the hasanta do? (**Removes the inherent vowel.**)
 What is Devanagari's name for the same mark? (The **virama**.)
 And are conjuncts new letters? (**No** — two known letters, fused.)
 Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

2.13 ঐ — the last consonant of the greeting

Write the piece from the previous lesson before adding another.

Script

ঐ

rô — a light tap of the tongue, closer to the *r* of Spanish *pero* than to any English *r*.

That is the last piece. Everything the greeting needs is now something you can write from memory.

Your turn

- *Write it:* র
- *Read it:* every piece this chapter has given you so far, in order

Before you move on

How is র made? (A **light tap**, not an English *r*.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

2.14 নমস্কার — seven pieces, all of them already yours

Write the piece from the previous lesson before adding another.

Script

Nothing new is introduced here. Every piece below is one you can write.

ন + ম + স + ্ + ক + া + র → নমস্কার

Read it the way you built it:

- ন — *nô*, inherent vowel
- ম — *mô*, inherent vowel
- স্ — the conjunct: the *s*-letter with its vowel removed, fused to *kô*
- া — the *mātrā*, making that piece *ka*
- র — *rô*

nô-mosh-kar — and notice the *sh*, from a letter written *s*.

Count what it took: **six consonants, one mātrā, one independent vowel and one hasanta**. With them you can read *no* and the greeting, and every consonant you meet from here obeys rules you already hold.

Bengali has around forty more letters. It does not have any more **systems**.

Your turn

- *Write it:* নমস্কার
- *Read it:* every piece this chapter has given you so far, in order

Before you move on

How many new pieces were in this lesson? (**None.**) What is ঙ made of? (The **s**-letter with its vowel removed, joined to ঙ.) And what still remains to learn — rules, or shapes? (**Shapes.**)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 3

Introducing Yourself

Modes: 🗣️ voice (3) 👁️ eyes (5) 🖐️ Hands-free start: all 8 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can introduce myself in Bengali, give my name, and understand the other person’s name.

Complete BN-C02-practice, the canonical closing checkpoint, and demonstrate the chapter promise: introduce myself in Bengali, give my name, and understand the other person’s name.

3.1 নাম (nām) — “name,” a word older than Europe

The first word of the introduction — and one of the clearest bridges between India and Europe.

The letters in this word

ন (nô) + া̃ (the long-ā sign) + ম (mô) → নাম (nām). Here the long-ā sign overrides the inherent ô, so it is nām, not “nôm.”

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

নাম (nām, “name”) ← Sanskrit nāman, from Proto-Indo-European *h₃nómn (its final n syllabic) — the same ancient root as English **name**, Latin nōmen (English **noun**, **nominate**), and Greek onoma. Bengali nām and English name are cousins from before either language existed — one of the clearest threads tying the Indian and European branches of one family.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “nām”
- *Say it:* the family — *nām* / English *name* / Latin *nōmen* / Greek *onoma*
- *Recall:* say *dhônyobad*, then say *hyã* / *nā*, then say *āchchhā*

Before you move on

What roots is *nām* from, and its English cousins? (Sanskrit *nāman* / PIE **h₃nómn*; **name**, **noun**, **nominate**.)

3.2 আমার (āmār) — “my”

The little word that makes the name *yours*.

The letters in this word

আ (the independent long *ā*, used because the word starts with a vowel) + মা (*mā*) + র (*r*) → আমার (*āmār*).

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

আমার (*āmār*, “my”) is the possessive of আমি (*āmi*, “I”), on the first-person stem **ām-** ← Sanskrit *asmad* (the “we/I” stem). Buried in it is the same ancient first-person **m-** that runs through English **me**, **my**, **mine** and Latin *mē* — so Bengali’s “my” and English’s “my” share, at the root, one first-person sound.

Grammar Lens: no gender here

Note something Bengali does *not* do: আমার never changes for gender. Hindi and Punjabi have *merā* (m.) / *merī* (f.); Bengali has one form, **āmār**, for a man or a woman, a masculine or feminine thing. Bengali threw grammatical gender away entirely — you will see this again and again, and it makes Bengali, in this one respect, simpler than its western cousins.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “āmār”
- *Say it:* its owner (*āmi*, “I”)
- *Say it:* does it change for a man vs. a woman? (No — Bengali has no gender)
- *Recall:* say *āshi*

Before you move on

What is *āmār* the possessive of, and how does it differ from Hindi’s *merā*? (*Āmi*, “I”; *āmār* never changes for gender, where *merā/merī* does.)

3.3 আমার নাম ... (āmār nām ...) — “my name is...,” with no “is”

Assemble the two atoms — and notice a whole word English needs that Bengali drops.

The two words — assembled

আমার (my) + নাম (name) + your name → আমার নাম ... = “my name ...”
→ “**my name is...**” *Āmār nām Arun.* → “My name is Arun.”

Grammar Lens: Bengali drops “is” in the present

Look at what is missing: there is **no verb**. Bengali sets “my name” beside “Arun” — *āmār nām Arun* — and the “is” is understood without being said. This is the **zero copula**: for present-tense equational sentences (X is Y), Bengali needs no “to be” at all. (It is the same habit Tamil has — and unlike Hindi’s *merā nām ... hai*, which keeps the *hai*.) Bengali only brings back a verb when it talks about a *state* or *place* — you’ll see that in Chapter 5.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “āmār nām ...” with your name
- notice — no word for “is”

Before you move on

Give your name in Bengali, and say what it leaves out that English requires. (*Āmār nām ...*; the verb “is” — the zero copula.)

3.4 আলাপ করে ভালো লাগলো (*ālāp kore bhālo lāglo*) — “pleased to meet you”

The warm close of an introduction.

The letters in this word

The key word is আলাপ (*ālāp*): আ + লা (*lā*) + প (*p*).

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

আলাপ করে ভালো লাগলো = আলাপ (*ālāp*, “acquaintance, conversation”) + করে (*kore*, “having done”) + ভালো লাগলো (*bhālo lāglo*, “[it] felt good”) — literally “**having made your acquaintance, [it] felt good.**” The key word আলাপ (*ālāp*) is **Sanskrit** — *ālāpa* (“conversing, addressing,” from *ā-* “toward” + *lap* “to speak”), the same *ālāp* that names the slow opening section of a *rāga* in Indian classical music, where the musician “converses” with the notes. So even a hello leans on Sanskrit’s word for the meeting of two voices.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ālāp kore bhālo lāglo”
- what *ālāp* means, and where else you’ve heard it (acquaintance/conversation; the *ālāp* of a *rāga*)

Before you move on

What does the phrase literally say, and what is *ālāp*? (“Having made [your] acquaintance, it felt good”; Sanskrit *ālāpa*, “conversing” — as in a rāga’s opening.)

3.5 কি (ki) — “what”

The question-word — and it starts with the **k-** that heads nearly every Bengali question.

The letters in this word

ক (*kô*) + ি (the *i*-sign, written **before** the consonant but read after) → কি (*ki*).

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

কি (*ki*, “what”) ← Sanskrit *kim* / the interrogative stem **ka-**, from PIE ***k^wo-** — the same question-root behind English **wh-** words (**what**, **who**, **which**) and Latin *qu-*. Bengali’s questions nearly all begin with this **k-**: *ki* (what), *ke* (who), *kôbe* (when), *kôthāy* (where), *kēmon* (how). Learn the *k-* and you can hear a question coming.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ki”
- the **k-** question family — *ki*, *ke*, *kôbe*, *kôthāy*, *kēmon*

Before you move on

What root do Bengali’s question-words share, and its English family? (The interrogative *k-*, PIE ***k^wo-**; the *wh-* words.)

3.6 তুমি / আপনি (tumi / āpni) — “you,” three ways

To ask a name you need “you” — and Bengali grades it **three** ways.

The letters in this word

তুমি (*tumi*): তু (*tu*) + মি (*mi*). আপনি (*āpni*): আ + প + নি.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

তুমি (*tumi*, familiar “you”) ← Sanskrit *tvam*, from PIE **tū* — the same root as English archaic **thou**, Latin *tū*, French *tu*. Bengali grades respect in **three** levels:

- তুই (*tui*) — intimate: close friends, children, family.
- তুমি (*tumi*) — familiar: friends, juniors, warmth.
- আপনি (*āpni*) — respectful: elders, strangers, formality.

(This is like Hindi’s *tū* / *tum* / *āp*, and finer than the two-way split of the Romance tracks.) For a first meeting, use আপনি.

Your turn

- *Say it*: the three — *tui* (intimate) / *tumi* (familiar) / *āpni* (respectful)
- *Say it*: the English cousin of *tumi* (**thou**)
- *Say it*: which you use on first meeting (*āpni*)
- *Recall*: read নাম

Before you move on

Name Bengali’s three “you”s, and which English pronoun *tumi* is cousin to. (*Tui* / *tumi* / *āpni*; archaic **thou**.)

3.7 তোমার নাম কি? (tomār nām ki?) — “what’s your name?”

Turn the introduction around — ask, instead of tell.

The two words — assembled

তোমার (*tomār*, “your,” from *tumi*) + নাম (name) + কি (what) → literally “**your name what?**” And note — still **no “is.”** The zero copula holds here too: Bengali lays “your name” beside “what,” and the question is complete.

Grammar Lens: answering, and the respectful form

Answer with the sentence you built: *Āmār nām Arun*. The respectful version swaps *tomār* (from *tumi*) for আপনার (*āpnār*, “your,” from *āpni*): *āpnār nām ki?* — the one to use with a stranger.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the familiar question — *tomār nām ki?*
- the respectful version — *āpnār nām ki?*
- answer it — *āmār nām ...*

Before you move on

Ask “what’s your name?” respectfully, and note what’s still missing. (*Āpnār nām ki?*; there is no word for “is” — the zero copula.)

3.8 Chapter 3 — The introduction exchange

No new words. The whole introduction, assembled from atoms you now own.

The exchange

Say these aloud:

- “My name is Mira.” — *āmār nām Mira*.

- “What’s your name?” (respectful) — *āpnār nām ki?*
- “My name is Arun.” — *āmār nām Arun.*
- “Pleased to meet you.” — *ālāp kore bhālo lāglo.*

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Say these aloud:

- “name,” “my” (*nām*, *āmār*)
- the three “you” levels (*tui* / *tumi* / *āpnī*)
- “what,” and the word Bengali leaves out (*ki*; there is no “is”)

What you’ve built — roots you now carry

- *nām* ← Sanskrit *nāman* → English **name**
- *āmār* ← the first-person *ām-*; no gender (unlike Hindi *merā*/*merī*)
- *ki* ← *ka-* → English **what**; *tumi* ← **tū* → **thou**
- *ālāp* ← Sanskrit *ālāpa*, “conversing”

Before you move on

Introduce yourself and ask a stranger’s name in Bengali — and note the one word you never say. (*Āmār nām Āpnār nām ki?* — no word for “is.”)

Chapter 4

In Front, Underneath, and On Its Own

Modes: ✍ pen (9) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 9 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can read নাম, তুমি and হাঁ off the page, write the two i-bodies and the u-sign, and say what a য় hung under another letter does to the vowel beside it.

Yes — the third word this book ever taught — is read whole from five pieces, four of which the chapter already owned; না is read beside it, and নাম and তুমি are read back to close the chapter.

4.1 নাম — a whole word, read, with nothing new in it

Write the greeting again before starting. Every piece in it is one you made from memory.

Script

The word for *name* has been said aloud since the introductions chapter. Here it is on the page, and there is nothing in it you have not already written:

ন + া + ম → নাম

- ন — *nô*, carrying its own vowel
- া — the *mātrā*, which throws that vowel out and puts *ā* in its place, so the piece now says *nā*

- ম — *mô*

nām. Say it with the mouth open on the first syllable and closed on the second, and you have the word you have been using since আমার নাম — “*my name.*”

Look at the top of the three shapes. The head-line is one unbroken bar across the whole word. That bar is why a Bengali word looks like a single object rather than three, and it is also the reason a reader coming from English keeps trying to break it in the wrong places: the bar is decoration on the letters, not a boundary between them.

One more falls out of the same nine pieces. ন + া + ক is *nāk* — the word for *nose* from the chapter on the face.

Your turn

- Read it: নাম
- Read it: নাক
- Write it: নাম

Before you move on

How many new pieces were in this lesson? (**None.**) What does the mātrā do to the vowel a consonant already carries? (**Replaces** it.) And what is the bar along the top — a letter boundary, or part of the letters? (**Part of the letters.**)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

4.2 ি — the i-sign, written before the consonant it is heard after

Read নাম aloud before adding another piece.

Script

The mātrā া replaced a consonant’s vowel with **ā** and sat to the right of it. Here is the sign that puts **i** there instead:

ি

The sound is the *i* of English *bit* — short, and never the *ee* of *feet*.

Now the part worth slowing down for. This sign is written **to the left** of the consonant it belongs to, and spoken **to the right** of it. Take ম *mô* and add it:

ম + ি → মি — said *mi*, not *im*

The hook sits in front on the page; the vowel lands behind in the mouth. Nothing about the shape tells you that, and nothing about the sound tells you either. It is a habit of the writing system, held on to from the Brahmi script every Indian abugida descends from, and Devanagari does exactly the same thing.

A reader who tries to sound out the marks in the order the eye meets them will get this word backwards every time. Read the consonant first, then the sign in front of it.

Your turn

- Write it: ি
- Write it: মি
- Read it: নাম

Before you move on

Which side of its consonant is ি written on? (**The left.**) Which side is it heard on? (**The right.**) And is the sound the *i* of *bit* or of *feet*? (Of ***bit***.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

4.3 ই — the independent i

Read নাম, then write ি and say which side of its consonant it stands on.

Script

ই

This is **i** again — the same sound as ি — written as a **letter in its own right** instead of as a mark on somebody else.

You have held a pair like this since the first script chapter without it being named as one. আ is the independent form; া is its sign. Now the same arrangement for *i*: ই is the letter, ি is the sign.

The rule that picks between them is worth stating once for every vowel in the script: **a vowel that has a consonant in front of it is written as a sign on that consonant; a vowel that does not is written as its own full letter.** Beginning of a word, or straight after another vowel — those are the places with nothing to lean on.

So ই turns up where a word starts on *i*, and at the end of a word after another vowel — which is where a later chapter will find it, in the word for brother.

The shape is unrelated to ি, and that is normal here: a vowel's letter and its sign look nothing alike in Bengali, the way a capital and a lowercase *A* need not look alike in the Latin alphabet.

Your turn

- Write it: ই
- Write it: আ া ই ি
- Read it: নাম

Before you move on

When does a vowel get its own full letter? (When there is **no consonant to lean on.**) Which pair did you already hold without being told? (আ and া.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

4.4 ত — the consonant ta, the dental one

Read নাম aloud, then write ই and ি and say which is which.

Script

ত

tô — and the tongue goes somewhere an English speaker does not put it. Press the tip flat against the **back of the top front teeth**, so the contact is on enamel, and release. That is this letter.

The English *t* of *top* is made a centimetre further back, on the ridge behind the teeth. Bengali has a **separate letter** for that further-back sound, and it arrives later in this chapter's family. The two are not accents of one letter: they spell different words. So an English *t* dropped into a Bengali word is not a slight accent — it is the other letter, and the listener hears it as one.

The test is physical, not auditory. Say English *top* and feel where the tongue lands. Slide it forward onto the teeth and say it again. The second one is ত.

With the mātrā:

ত + া → তা

Your turn

- Write it: ত
- Write it: তা
- Read it: নাম

Before you move on

Where does the tongue touch for ত — the teeth or the ridge behind them? (**The teeth.**) Does Bengali have a second, further-back t? (**Yes**, a separate letter.) And is using the English one a small accent, or a different letter? (**A different letter.**)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

4.5 ় — the u-sign, hanging below the line

Write ত from memory, and say where the tongue touches for it.

Script

Two vowel signs so far: া to the right, ি to the left. Here is the third direction.

তু

The sound is the *u* of English *put*, short and rounded — never the *oo* of *food*.

It is written **underneath** its consonant, tucked into the bottom of the shape:

ত + তু → তু — said *tu*

That is the whole of the news, and it matters more than it sounds. A script whose marks go above, below, left and right of a letter cannot be read as a line of beads. The consonant is the anchor; everything else is furniture arranged around it. Find the anchor first, then look around it, and the reading order stops being a guess.

The hand has to learn it too: the stroke starts at the foot of the consonant and curls, and it must not drift so far left that it looks like it belongs to the letter before.

Your turn

- Write it: তু
- Write it: তু
- Read it: নাম

Before you move on

Which side of its consonant does তু sit on? (**Underneath.**) Is the sound the *u* of *put* or the *oo* of *food*? (Of ***put.***) And which piece of a written syllable is the anchor? (**The consonant.**)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

4.6 তুমি — the familiar you, read

Write তু and ি, and say which way each of them faces.

Script

ত + তু + ম + ি → তুমি

Four pieces, and the two vowel signs go to two different places:

- ত with ং slung underneath it — *tu*
- ম with ি standing in front of it — *mi*

tumi — the middle rung of Bengali’s three-way *you*: **tui** for a child or a brother, **tumi** for a friend, **āpni** for a stranger or an elder. This is the one a learner uses most and the one that will be used back at them.

Notice what the word looks like as an object. Above the letters runs the head-line; below the first letter hangs the u-sign; between the letters stands the i-hook. Three levels on one word. The eye that only scans along the head-line will miss half of it — Bengali reading is a scan of a **band**, not of a line.

Say তুমি aloud and hear two light syllables with no stress worth speaking of. Bengali does not lean on one syllable the way English does — and the next lesson puts the other pronoun of the pair on the page beside it.

Your turn

- *Read it:* তুমি
- *Write it:* তুমি

Before you move on

In তুমি, where is the u-sign? (**Under the first letter.**) Where is the i-sign? (**In front of the second.**) And which of the three yous is তুমি? (The **familiar** one — for a friend.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

4.7 য — the letter that is written *y* and said *j*

Read তুমি. Then write য্ and say what it does to the letter in front of it.

Script

য

Sanskrit gave this letter to Bengali as a *y*. Bengali still writes it and no longer says it: on its own, য is **jô** — the same sound as the *j* of English *jam*.

That is the first thing to hold. **A letter can outlive its sound.** The shape was worth keeping because the spellings were worth keeping, exactly as English keeps the *k* in *knee*.

The second thing is stranger, and it is the reason this letter arrives now rather than later. Put য *under* another consonant with the vowel-killer ঁ between them, and it stops being a consonant at all:

হ + ঁ + য → হ্য

Written, that is three pieces. Said, it is one syllable — and the vowel in it has changed. The inherent ô that হ carries becomes a flat æ, the vowel of English *cat*. Nothing here is pronounced *y*. The letter’s whole job in this position is to bend the vowel beside it.

Scribes have a name for the sub-form: **jô-phôla**, “the য hung below.” You have been saying it since the first lesson of this book without seeing it.

Your turn

- Write it: য
- Write it: হ্ য
- Write it: হ্য
- Say it: the flat vowel in হ্য — *hyæ*, not *hyô*

Before you move on

What does য say standing alone? (*j*.) What does it say hung under another letter? (**Nothing** — it bends the vowel to æ.) And which word from the very first lesson of this book do you now have all but one piece of? (হ্যাঁ, *hyã*, “yes.”)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

4.8 ঁ — the moon-and-dot

Read নাম. Then write য and say what it does when it is hung under another letter.

Script

ঁ

A crescent with a dot over it. Its name says only what it looks like — **chôndro**, moon, and **bindu**, dot — and nothing about what it does.

What it does is send the vowel through the nose. Say *ah*, then say *ah* again while letting some of the air out through the nose instead of all of it through the mouth. That second one is what this mark writes. French speakers know it as the vowel in *sans*; Portuguese speakers know it as the tilde on *não*.

It rides **above the head-line**:

না + ঁ → নাঁ

That position is worth pausing on. Every mark so far has hung below the line (্), sat beside a letter (়া, ি), or wrapped around it (েঁ). This is the first one that lives on the roof, and the roof is otherwise the one part of a Bengali word the eye can read as an unbroken rail. A reader who skims the line will miss it — and missing it changes the word.

Two things it is *not*. It is not a consonant: nothing new is being said, only re-routed. And it is not optional decoration: হাঁস (“goose”) and হাস (“laugh”) are held apart by this crescent alone.

Your turn

- Write it: ঁ
- Write it: নাঁ
- Say it: না then নাঁ — mouth only, then nose as well
- Write it: শ

Before you move on

Where does ঁ sit? (**Above the head-line** — the only mark that does.) What does it change? (**The vowel**, which now goes through the nose.) And is it a consonant? (**No** — nothing extra is said.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

4.9 হাঁ — yes, read whole

Write হাঁ and say where on the line it sits. Then write হ.

Script

হ + ্ + য + া + ঁ → হাঁ

Five pieces, one syllable, and every piece already yours:

- হ — the breath
- ্ — kill its inherent vowel
- য — hung underneath, saying nothing, bending what follows to æ
- া — the vowel sign
- ঁ — and send it through the nose

hyā — *yes*. It was the third thing this book taught you to say, in the very first chapter, and you have said it every chapter since. Today it stops being a sound you repeat and becomes a word you can decode.

That is the whole bargain the book has been making. **A word is met by ear first and taken apart by eye later**, so that the eye is never asked to guess at a sound the mouth has not already made. You are not learning what *hyā* means here. You are learning that you can see it.

Notice what the spelling insists on, too. Bengali could have written this word with a plain হ and a nasal mark. It does not, because the vowel really is the flat æ and only the hung য writes that. The spelling is carrying a pronunciation rule, not a memory.

And its partner needs nothing new at all:

ন + া → না

nā — *no*. One is the most decorated word in the book so far; the other is two pieces. Both were learned in the same breath.

And that closes the chapter, so take the other two words it made readable with it. নাম was three pieces and no signs below the line; তুমি was three pieces and two signs, one under the letter and one in front of it. Read all three in a row and the chapter's whole argument is visible in nine shapes: a Bengali word is assembled, not spelled.

Your turn

- *Read it:* হ্যাঁ
- *Read it:* না
- *Read it:* নাম
- *Read it:* ভুমি
- *Read it:* নমস্কার
- *Write it:* হ্যাঁ
- *Say it:* yes, then no — *hyā, nā*

Before you move on

How many pieces are in হ্যাঁ? (**Five.**) Which of them is not a sound? (য — it bends the vowel.) Which one is above the line? (ঁ.) And how many pieces does না need? (**Two.**)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 5

How Are You?

Modes:  voice (1)  eyes (5)  Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask how someone is in Bengali, answer naturally, and return the question.

Complete BN-C03-practice, the canonical closing checkpoint, and demonstrate the chapter promise: ask how someone is in Bengali, answer naturally, and return the question.

5.1 আমি (āmi) — “I,” cousin of English *am*

To answer “how are you?” you first need “I” — and it hides the English word *am*.

The letters in this word

আ (independent long *ā*) + মি (*mi*) → আমি (*āmi*).

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

আমি (*āmi*, “I”) descends from Sanskrit *asmi* (“I am”), on the first-person stem *asmad*. That Sanskrit *asmi* is from Proto-Indo-European ***h₁es-**, the “to be” root — the very same word that gives English **am** (and Latin *sum*). So Bengali’s word for “I” is, at the root, a form of “**am**”: “I” and “am” were once one word. Its possessive is the আমার (*āmār*, “my”) from Chapter 3.

Grammar Lens: “I” can often be dropped

Bengali verbs carry the person in their ending — *āchhi* already means “I am” — so *āmi* is often left out once it’s clear. You still learn it first, because the answer to *kēmon āchho?* begins with it.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “āmi”
- *Say it:* the pair — *āmi* (I), *āmār* (my)
- *Say it:* the English cousin hidden in it (*am* — from the same *asmi*)
- *Recall:* say *ki*, then say *tumi* / *āpni*

Before you move on

What Sanskrit word is *āmi* from, and its English cousin? (*Asmi*, “I am”; English **am** — same PIE root **h₁es-*.)

5.2 কেমন (kēmon) — “how,” another of the k-questions

You met কি (*ki*, “what”) in Chapter 3. Here is its sibling.

The letters in this word

কে (*kē*, *kô* + the *e*-sign) + মন (*mon*) → কেমন (*kēmon*).

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

কেমন (*kēmon*, “how, of what kind”) is from the interrogative stem **ka-**, from PIE ***k^wo-** — the same question-root behind English **wh-** and Latin *qu-*. Bengali’s questions nearly all begin with this **k-**: *ki* (what), *ke* (who), *kôbe* (when), *kôthāy* (where), *kēmon* (how). It is the Indian branch of the same family of question-words that gave English *what/who/how*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “kēmon”
- the k- question family — *ki, ke, kôbe, kôthāy, kēmon*

Before you move on

What root do Bengali’s question-words share, and its English family? (The interrogative *k-*, PIE **k^wo-*; the *wh-* words.)

5.3 তুমি কেমন আছো? (tumi kēmon āchho?) — “how are you?”

The everyday “how are you?” — and the first time Bengali brings back a verb “to be.”

The letters in this word

The new word is আছো (*āchho*, “are you”), from the verb আছা (*āchhā*, “to be, to exist, to have”) + the familiar-you ending -ও (-o). Note the ছ (*chh*) — a breathy *ch*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

তুমি কেমন আছো? = তুমি (*tumi*, familiar “you”) + কেমন (*kēmon*, “how”) + আছো (*āchho*, “are”) — “you how are?”, the verb **last**.

Grammar Lens: now the copula returns

In Chapter 3, Bengali dropped “is”: *āmār nām Arun* (“my name Arun”). That **zero copula** works for *equations* (X is Y). But “how are you?” asks about a **state** — how you *exist* — and for that Bengali uses a real verb, আছা (*āchhā*). So: no verb for “my name is Arun,” a real verb for “how are you.” Respectful form: আপনি কেমন আছেন? (*āpni kēmon āchhen?* — *āchhen* for *āpni*). Match the “you” to the verb-ending.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the familiar question — *tumi kēmon āchho?*
- the respectful version — *āpni kēmon āchhen?*
- why here Bengali needs a verb but “my name is Arun” didn’t (state vs. equation)

Before you move on

What verb does “how are you?” use, and why does this need one when “my name is Arun” didn’t? (*Āchhā*, “to be/exist”; it describes a state, not an equation — the zero copula only covers X is Y.)

5.4 ভালো (bhālo) — “well,” and how to answer

The word that answers “how are you?” — and one Bengalis say all the time.

The letters in this word

ভা (*bhā*, an aspirated *b* + long *ā*) + লো (*lo*) → ভালো (*bhālo*).

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

ভালো (*bhālo*, “good, well, fine”) is the everyday Bengali “good” — likely from Sanskrit *bhadra* (“good, auspicious, gentle”), worn down over centuries into *bhālo*. It is one of the most-used words in the language: *bhālo lāge* (“[I] like it”), *bhālobāsā* (“love,” literally “good-dwelling”).

The exchange — the reply

With the *āchhā* verb: আমি ভালো আছি (*āmi bhālo āchhi*) — “I am well” (*āchhi* = “I am/exist”). The whole exchange:

— *tumi kēmon āchho?* (“How are you?”) — *āmi bhālo āchhi, dhônnobad.* (“I’m well, thank you.”)

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bhālo”
- the full reply — *āmi bhālo āchhi*
- the tender word built on it (*bhālobāsā*, “love”)

Before you move on

Give the full reply to *tumi kēmon āchho?*, and name *bhālo*’s likely Sanskrit source. (*Āmi bhālo āchhi*; Sanskrit *bhadra*, “good.”)

5.5 কোনো ব্যাপার না (kono bāpār nā) — “no matter”

When someone thanks you — or apologises — this is the easy, gracious reply, and it reuses a word from Chapter 1.

The letters in this word

কোনো (*kono*, “any”) + ব্যাপার (*bāpār*, “matter, affair” — with the *ya-phola* on ব্য) + না (*nā*, “no/not,” from Chapter 1) → *kono bāpār nā*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

কোনো ব্যাপার না literally means “[it’s] **no matter**” — *kono* (“any”) + *bāpār* (“matter, affair”) + *nā* (“not”). It serves as “it’s nothing / no worries / never mind / you’re welcome.” The word ব্যাপার (*bāpār*, “matter, affair, business”) is **Sanskrit** — *vyāpāra* (“occupation, dealing”). And না (*nā*) you met in Chapter 1: the ancient negative, PIE ***ne**, behind English **no**, **not**, **none**. So the reply pairs a Sanskrit noun with the oldest negative in the family.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “kono bāpār nā”

- what it literally means (“[it’s] no matter”)
- the exchange — *dhônnobad* / *kono bəpār nā*

Before you move on

What does *kono bəpār nā* literally say, and which Chapter-1 word does it reuse? (“It’s no matter”; *nā*, “not” — PIE **ne*, English *no*.)

5.6 Chapter 5 — The how-are-you exchange

No new words. The whole responding cycle, from atoms you now own.

The exchange

Say these aloud:

- “How are you?” (familiar) — *tumi kēmon āchho?*
- “I’m well, thank you.” — *āmi bhālo āchhi, dhônnobad.*
- “No matter / you’re welcome.” — *kono bəpār nā.*
- the respectful question — *āpni kēmon āchhen?*

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Say these aloud:

- the k- question-word for “how” (*kēmon*)
- “I” and the verb “to be/exist” (*āmi, āchhā*)
- when Bengali needs the verb and when it drops it (state vs. equation)

What you’ve built — roots you now carry

- *kēmon* ← the interrogative *k-* (PIE **k^wo-*), cousin of English *how/what*
- *āmi* ← Sanskrit *asmī*, cousin of English **am**

- *bhālo* ← Sanskrit *bhadra* “good”; *āmi bhālo āchhi* “I’m well”
- *nā* ← PIE **ne*, English *no* (in *kono bəpār nā*)

Before you move on

A stranger asks *āpni kēmon āchhen?* — give a full, polite reply, and answer their thanks. (*Āmi bhālo āchhi, dhōnnobad* — and to thanks, *kono bəpār nā.*)

Chapter 6

A Sign Made of Two Signs

Modes: ✍ pen (6) ⇌ Hands-free start: none of the 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can read আমি and কেমন, write ল, the e-sign and its independent twin ঐ, and build the o-sign out of two signs I already hold rather than memorising a new shape.

How read back with nothing new, and the count that shows why four pieces bought two more words — three of the four being vowel pieces, which multiply across every consonant already held.

6.1 আমি — the word for I, and two more that come free with it

Write ি once, and say which side of its consonant it goes on. Then read হাঁ, and name the piece in it that makes no sound.

Script

আ + ম + ি → আমি

- আ — the independent vowel, standing on its own because nothing comes before it to hang a sign on
- ম — *mô*
- ি — written in front of that ম, heard after it

āmi — *I*. The word from the chapter before this one, the one that came down from Sanskrit *asmi* and is cousin to English *am*.

Watch what the sign does to the eye. On the page the order runs আ, then the hook, then ঞ. In the mouth it runs ā, then m, then i. The middle two swap. This is the single most common stumble for a new reader of any Indian script, and the cure is mechanical: **find the consonant, say it, then say the sign leaning on its left.**

Two more words are now readable with nothing added.

ক + ি → কি — *ki*, the question word: *what*

আ + স + ি → আসি — *āsi*, the goodbye from the first chapter that means “*I’ll come again*”

Three words out of one sign. That is what a working set does.

Your turn

- *Read it:* আমি
- *Read it:* কি
- *Read it:* আসি
- *Write it:* আমি

Before you move on

In আমি, which two sounds swap between the page and the mouth? (**The m and the i.**) Why does আ stand in its own full shape here? (Because **nothing comes before it** to carry a sign.) And what does আসি mean? (“*I’ll come again*” — the **goodbye.**)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

6.2 ল — the consonant la

Read আমি and কি aloud before adding a new shape.

Script

ল

লô — the *l* of English *let*, made with the tongue-tip on the back of the top teeth rather than on the ridge behind them. English puts it a little further back and lets the tongue-body sag, which is what makes an English *l* at the end of a word sound thick. Bengali keeps it forward and light in every position.

The shape hangs from the head-line like the rest, with a loop at the bottom left and a stroke that turns back on itself.

Bengali has **one** letter for this sound. That is worth naming, because the south of the subcontinent does not: Tamil and Malayalam each carry three distinct l-letters for three distinct tongue positions, and a Bengali reader meeting a Tamil place-name is looking at distinctions their own script never had to record. Going the other way is easier — a southern reader has one Bengali shape to learn where they had three.

Add the mātrā and the piece says *lā*:

ল + া → লা

Your turn

- Write it: ল
- Write it: লা
- Read it: আমি

Before you move on

Where does the tongue go for Bengali ল — on the teeth or on the ridge behind them? (**On the teeth.**) How many l-letters does Bengali have? (**One.**) And how many do Tamil and Malayalam have? (**Three.**)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

6.3 ে — the e-sign, standing in front

Read তুমি, and name where each of its two vowel signs sits.

Script

ে

The vowel of English *pet*, said with the mouth a little more closed than an English speaker expects.

It is written **in front** of its consonant, exactly like ি:

ক + ে → কে — said *ke*

Two signs now stand on the left, and it is worth having a rule for them rather than two facts. **A vowel sign written before the consonant is still spoken after it.** That single sentence covers ি and ে and everything the script will do with a leading mark from here on. It is not a quirk of two letters; it is how the system writes a leading mark at all.

The shape is a single upright stroke with a small hook, and it is easy to write too tall — it should reach the head-line and stop.

Keep an eye on this one. It is going to come back joined to something else, and when it does, both halves will already be yours.

Your turn

- Write it: ে
- Write it: কে
- Read it: তুমি

Before you move on

Which two signs are written in front of their consonant? (ি and ে.)

And what is true of any sign written in front? (It is **spoken after**.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

6.4 ঐ — the independent e

Write ঐ and ি, and say which one a vowel uses when it has nothing to lean on.

Script

এ

The vowel of *pet*, written as its own letter. ে is its sign; this is its body. Three pairs are now in hand:

- আ and া
- ই and ি
- এ and ে

The third one is what turns a list of facts into something you can predict. Meeting a new vowel from here on, the question is no longer *what does this do* but *which of its two forms am I looking at* — and the answer is always decided by whether there is a consonant in front of it.

That is the last piece of machinery this book will introduce. Consonants carrying a vowel; signs that replace it; a mark that deletes it; full letters where there is nothing to hang a sign on. Everything else Bengali will ask of a reader is more **shapes**, and the script chapters have said from the beginning that shapes are the cheap part.

Your turn

- Write it: এ
- Write it: আ ই এ
- Read it: আমি তুমি

Before you move on

What is the sign that goes with এ? (ে.) And what decides which of a vowel's two forms you write? (Whether there is a **consonant in front of it.**)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

6.5 ো — the o-sign, wrapped around its letter

Read আমি, then write ে and এ and say which is the sign.

Script

Two lessons ago େ stood in front of its consonant on its own. Here it is again, joined to something:

কো

Look at it before reading on. On the left is େ. On the right is া. The sign for **o** is the e-sign and the a-sign, written around one consonant at the same time:

ক + େ → কো — said *ko*

Nothing was memorised for this. Two shapes already in the hand, put on either side of a letter, make a third sound. That is the economy the whole script runs on, and it is why a system with around fifty letters does not need fifty separate strokes to write.

The sound is the *o* of English *tone* without the glide English puts on the end of it. Hold it flat; do not let it slide toward *oo*.

One warning for the eye. Because the sign has a piece on each side, a consonant wearing কো is wider than any letter met so far, and a reader can mistake the right-hand half for a *mātrā* belonging to the next letter along. It belongs to the one inside.

Your turn

- Write it: কো
- Write it: কো
- Read it: আমি

Before you move on

What two signs is কো made of? (ে and া.) Which letter does the right-hand half belong to — the one before it or the one inside it? (**The one inside.**)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

6.6 কেমন — how, and the five words the eye now holds

Write the three vowel signs of this chapter and say which way each one faces.

Script

ক + ে + ম + ন → কেমন

- ক with ে in front of it — *ke*
- ম — *mô*
- ন — its inherent vowel worn almost to nothing at the end

kemon — *how*, the word that opens the sentence you have been saying since the chapter before this one to ask someone how they are.

Nothing new was needed for it. That is the shape of this whole chapter: four pieces added, and two more words that were already in the mouth handed over to the eye.

Count what you hold now. Nine pieces came from the first script chapter, four from the second — ি, ই, ত, ু — and four here: ল, ে, এ, ো. Seventeen pieces, and with them:

- নমস্কার — *the greeting*
- নাম — *name*
- তুমি — *you*
- আমি — *I*
- কেমন — *how*

and, without being counted as words of their own, নাক, কি, আসি, আমার and কাল.

Six of the eight additions since the first script chapter were vowel pieces — signs or their independent twins — and that ratio is not an accident. The consonants are many and each one buys a little; the vowel signs are few and each one buys a great deal, because every consonant already held can take every sign. Adding a sign multiplies. Adding a letter adds.

Your turn

- *Read it:* নাম তুমি আমি কেমন
- *Read it:* নমস্কার
- *Read it:* হ্যাঁ না
- *Write it:* ঁ
- *Write it:* কেমন
- *Write it:* তুমি কেমন

Before you move on

How many new pieces did this chapter add? (**Four.**) How many of them were vowel pieces? (**Three** — ে, ঐ, ঔ.) And why is a vowel sign worth more than a consonant? (Because **every consonant you hold can take it** — it multiplies.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 7

Farewells

Modes: 🗣️ voice (2) 👁️ eyes (3) 🖐️ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can end a Bengali conversation politely and choose a farewell that fits the situation.

Complete BN-C04-practice, the canonical closing checkpoint, and demonstrate the chapter promise: end a Bengali conversation politely and choose a farewell that fits the situation.

7.1 আবার (ābār) — “again,” the seed of “see you again”

One small word turns a goodbye from “farewell” into “**till next time.**”

The letters in this word

আ (independent ā) + বা (bā) + র (r) → আবার (ābār).

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

আবার (ābār, “again, once more”) is a native Indo-Aryan adverb with no tidy English cognate, but a familiar *job*: it turns a parting into a promise. Chapter 1 gave you আসি (āshi, “I’ll come [again]”) as goodbye; add ābār and you can say outright “we’ll meet **again.**”

Your turn

- *Say it:* “ābār”
- *Say it:* what it adds to a goodbye (“again”)
- *Recall:* say āmi, then read কেমন

Before you move on

What does ābār mean, and what does it do to a farewell? (“Again”; it makes the parting a promise of return.)

7.2 দেখা হবে (dækhā hōbe) — “(we) will meet”

A future-tense phrase — the other half of “see you again,” built in a way English never would.

The letters in this word

দেখা (dækhā, “seeing”) = দে (dæ) + খা (khā). হবে (hōbe, “will be/happen”) = হ (hō) + বে (be).

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

দেখা হবে literally means “[a] seeing will happen” — dækhā (the noun “seeing,” from দেখা dækhā “to see”) + hōbe (“will be/happen,” the future of হওয়া hōwā, “to be, to become”). Bengali says “a meeting will occur” rather than “we will meet” — an impersonal, gentle way to promise reunion. The verb hōwā (“to be/become”) is the same one behind āchhā’s cousin, and its root ভূ / হ ties (distantly) to English be.

Grammar Lens: the impersonal future

Many Bengali “we’ll...” expressions use this **noun + hōbe** (“...will happen”) shape: dækhā hōbe (“[a] seeing will happen”), kôthā hōbe (“[a] talk will happen”). No “we,” no active verb — the event itself is the subject.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “dækhā hōbe”

- *Say it*: its literal meaning (“[a] seeing will happen”)
- *Say it*: the verb “to see” inside it (*dækhā*)
- *Recall*: say *bhālo*

Before you move on

What does *dækhā hôbe* literally say, and what is odd (to English ears) about it? (“A seeing will happen”; it is impersonal — the *event* is the subject, not “we.”)

7.3 আবার দেখা হবে (*ābār dækhā hôbe*) — “we’ll meet again”

The warm, everyday goodbye — the fuller cousin of Chapter 1’s *āshi*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

আবার দেখা হবে = আবার (*ābār*, “again”) + দেখা হবে (*dækhā hôbe*, “[a] seeing will happen”) — “**we’ll meet again**” (literally “again a seeing will happen”). Chapter 1 gave you the tender আসি (*āshi*, “I’ll come [again]”), the “promise of return” goodbye; *ābār dækhā hôbe* is its warm, explicit form. It is the sibling of the whole subcontinent’s parting habit (Hindi *phir milenge*, Tamil *pōy varugirēn*): never a blunt “goodbye,” always a return promised.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the warm goodbye — *ābār dækhā hôbe*
- the two pieces (*ābār* + *dækhā hôbe*)
- the Chapter-1 goodbye it deepens (*āshi*)

Before you move on

What does *ābār dækhā hōbe* literally say, and how does it relate to *āshī*? (“Again a seeing will happen”; it is the fuller, explicit form of Ch.1’s “promise of return” goodbye.)

7.4 কাল দেখা হবে (*kāl dækhā hōbe*) — “see you tomorrow”

A goodbye for tomorrow — built on a word that means both **tomorrow** and **yesterday**.

The letters in this word

কা (*kā*) + ল (*l*) → কাল (*kāl*). Two simple letters, one tricky word.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

কাল (*kāl*) means **both “tomorrow” and “yesterday”** — the day on either side of today — from Sanskrit काल (*kāla*, “time”). (It is the very same *kāla* behind Hindi’s *kal* and Punjabi’s *akāl* “timeless.”) Bengali trusts the verb’s tense to tell which: *kāl dækhā hōbe* (future → “**tomorrow**”), *kāl dækhā hōyechhilo* (past → “**yesterday**”). So কাল দেখা হবে = “tomorrow, a seeing will happen” = “see you tomorrow.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*kāl dækhā hōbe*”
- the puzzle — *kāl* means both **tomorrow** and **yesterday**
- the root and its cousins (*kāla* “time”; Hindi *kal*, Punjabi *akāl*)

Before you move on

What two opposite days does *kāl* mean, and what tells them apart? (Both tomorrow and yesterday; the verb’s tense.)

7.5 Chapter 7 — The farewells

No new words. Three ways to part — none of them a blunt “goodbye.”

Why it’s said this way

Say these aloud:

- the tender Chapter-1 goodbye — *āshi* (“I’ll come [again]”)
- the fuller “we’ll meet again” — *ābār dækhā hôbe*
- “see you tomorrow” — *kāl dækhā hôbe*

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Say these aloud:

- “again” and “[a] seeing will happen” (*ābār, dækhā hôbe*)
- the word that means BOTH tomorrow and yesterday (*kāl*)
- what’s odd about *dækhā hôbe* (impersonal — the event is the subject)

What you’ve built — roots you now carry

- *dækhā hôbe* — “[a] seeing will happen”; the impersonal future
- *kāl* ← *kāla* “time” (Hindi *kal*, Punjabi *akāl*)
- *āshi* (Ch.1) — “I’ll come [again],” the Bengali promise-of-return goodbye

Before you move on

You’re leaving a friend and expect to see them next week. Which goodbye fits, and how does Bengali phrase “we’ll meet”? (*Ābār dækhā hôbe*; impersonally — “a seeing will happen.”)

Chapter 8

The Breath Is a Letter

Modes: ✍ pen (6) ⇌ Hands-free start: none of the 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can write five Bengali consonants as cells of one grid — lips and throat, each with the voice and the breath switched on or off — read আবার and ভালো with them, and close the throat row with গ so that লাগলো becomes readable.

The throat row is closed — ক, খ, গ in one place with two switches — and লাগলো, waiting since the introductions chapter, becomes readable in the same breath.

8.1 ব — the consonant ba

Read কেমন aloud before adding a new shape, and say which way its vowel sign faces.

Script

ব

bô — the *b* of English *bin*, with the lips shut and no puff of air after.

This shape carries the load of the track’s whole sound-fingerprint. Sanskrit had a separate *v*, and Bengali does not: the sound collapsed into **b**, and the letter that used to write *v* is now read as this one. That is why Sanskrit *dhanyavāda* is spoken *dhônyobad* in the first chapter, and why a Sanskrit word with a *v* in it will keep turning up in Bengali with a *b*.

So when a word looks like a Sanskrit word you know but has a *b* where you expect a *v*, you have not found a different word. You have found the same one, wearing this letter.

With the mātṛā:

ব + া → বা

Your turn

- Write it: ব
- Write it: বা
- Read it: কেমন

Before you move on

What Sanskrit sound does ব now do the work of, besides *b*? (*v*.) So if a Sanskrit word you know has a *v* where Bengali has a *b*, is it a different word? (**No** — the same one.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

8.2 আবার — again, read

Write ব, and say which Sanskrit sound it took over.

Script

আ + ব + া + র → আবার

- আ — standing alone at the front of the word, as it always must
- ব with া — *bā*
- র — *rô*, worn down to almost nothing at the end

ābār — *again*, the word that opens the goodbye from the farewells chapter.

Two things are worth noticing about the shape of the word rather than its meaning.

First, the আ at the front. A vowel at the start of a word has no consonant to hang a sign on, so it uses its own full independent letter. A vowel anywhere else is a sign. Same sound, two forms, and which one you write is decided entirely by whether there is a consonant to lean on.

Second, look at the two া shapes here — no, look again: there is only one. The first আ contains a vertical stroke that resembles the mātrā, and it is not one. That resemblance is not an accident of the font. The independent letter and the sign are historically the same mark, which is exactly why they look related and exactly why they are easy to confuse.

Your turn

- *Read it:* আবার
- *Read it:* আবার আমার
- *Write it:* আবার

Before you move on

Why does আবার open with the full letter আ and not the sign া? (There is **no consonant to lean on** at the start of a word.) And what does the word mean? (*Again.*)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

8.3 ভ — the consonant bha, the breathy twin

Read আবার, and write ব once from memory.

Script

ভ

bhô — ব with a puff of breath released through it. Not *b* then *h* as two sounds, but one closure opened onto a gust.

The letter for the unaspirated ব made this point about *k* in the last script chapter, and here it is again on the other side of the mouth: **the puff is a letter, not a manner of speaking.** Hold a palm in front of your mouth. Say English *bin*: no air. Now push a breath out through the release. That is this shape.

English has both sounds and treats neither as meaningful — the *b* of *bin* and an emphatic, breathy *b* are the same word said twice. Bengali has two letters, two spellings, and two words.

Look at the shape beside the one it is built from. ব and ভ share their left-hand body; ভ adds a stroke on the right. The script is drawing the

relationship the mouth makes, which is a habit worth expecting: aspirated letters often look like their plain partners with something extra.

With the mātrā:

ভ + া → ভা

Your turn

- Write it: ভ
- Write it: ব ভ
- Read it: আবার

Before you move on

Is the puff of breath in ভ a separate sound or part of the letter? (**Part of the letter.**) Does English treat the difference as meaningful? (**No.**) Does Bengali? (**Yes** — two letters, two words.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

8.4 ভালো — good, read

Write ব and ভ one after the other, and say what separates them.

Script

ভ + া + ল + ো → ভালো

- ভ with া — *bhā*, breath and all
- ল with ো around it — *lo*

bhālo — *good, well*. It is the answer to *how are you*; it is the first half of the phrase for liking something; it is the first half of the verb for loving someone. No word in this track turns up in more sentences.

Now put it next to the word from two lessons ago, and beside the possessive from the introductions chapter:

আবার — *ābār*, again আমার — *āmār*, my

Identical except for the middle letter. A learner who can build one has built the other, and a learner who cannot yet tell ব from ম at a glance has now been handed the exercise that fixes it. ভালো sets the same trap with its own first letter, and a later chapter will spring it on a colour word built to the same pattern.

That near-miss is worth taking seriously rather than enjoying. Bengali is full of pairs like this, and the reader who slows down for the first letter is the reader who stops guessing words from their silhouette.

Your turn

- *Read it:* ভালো
- *Read it:* আবার আমার
- *Write it:* ভালো

Before you move on

What is the only difference on the page between আবার and আমার? (**The middle letter.**) And which piece of ভালো would you have to change to get a different word? (**The first letter** — every one of these near-pairs turns on a single shape.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

8.5 খ — the consonant kha, the breathy k

Read ভালো, then write ক from memory.

Script

খ

khô — ক with the breath let out through it. The *k* of English *kit*, in fact, which is the breathy one; ক was the *k* of *skip*.

That makes three pairs met so far, and the third is where a pattern earns the name:

- ক plain, খ breathy
- ব plain, ভ breathy

Bengali sorts its consonants into families this way all the way down, and it does it in a fixed order that every Indian script shares — which is why a Bengali dictionary, a Devanagari dictionary and a Tamil dictionary all run their letters in the same sequence, though the shapes have nothing in common.

Knowing that a plain letter has a breathy partner turns a list of forty shapes into twenty pairs, and pairs are what a hand can hold.

With the u-sign underneath:

খ + ু → খু

Your turn

- Write it: খ
- Write it: ক খ
- Read it: ভালো

Before you move on

Which of ক and খ is the *k* of *kit*? (খ — the breathy one.) And what does knowing about pairs do to a list of forty shapes? (Turns it into **twenty pairs**.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

8.6 গ — the throat row, closed

Write ক, then খ, and say what the second one has that the first does not.

Script

গ

gô — the *g* of English *go*. Made in exactly the place ক and খ are made, at the back of the tongue against the soft roof, with the voice switched on and the breath switched off.

That closes a row this book opened in its first script chapter, and the row is the point:

- ক — voice off, breath off
- খ — voice off, breath on
- গ — voice on, breath off

Three letters, one place, two switches. The fourth cell — voice on *and* breath on — exists in the script and this book has not needed it yet. That is a gap in the vocabulary, not a gap in the alphabet, and knowing which kind of gap you are looking at is most of what reading a syllabary well requires.

With the mātrā:

গ + া → গা

And now a whole word from the introductions chapter, which has been waiting for this letter since the day you learned to say it:

ল + া + গ + ল + ো → লাগলো

lāglo — the *lāglo* of আলাপ করে ভালো লাগলো, “pleased to meet you.” Five pieces; four of them you have had for two chapters, and the fifth arrived a paragraph ago.

Your turn

- *Write it:* গ
- *Write it:* ক খ গ
- *Read it:* লাগলো
- *Read it:* ভালো
- *Say it:* ভালো লাগলো — and mean it

Before you move on

Where in the mouth are ক, খ and গ made? (**All three in the same place** — the back of the tongue on the soft roof.) What separates গ from ক? (**The voice.**) And read আবার once more. Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 9

The Roof, the Teeth, and the Grid Closed

Modes: ✍ pen (7) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can write the five consonants that finish Bengali's stop grid, hear the breath that separates ষ from ছ, read আছি off the page, and say every consonant I own by where in the mouth it is made rather than by what it looks like.

The chapter closes by reciting ten consonants back from their places of articulation rather than from their shapes, which is the difference between holding a grid and holding a list.

9.1 প — the consonant pa

Write খ from memory, and say what separates it from ক.

Script

প

pô — the *p* of English *spin*, lips shut, no puff of air after the release.

The place is the lips, which is where ব was made too. So the two of them fill two cells of one square:

- প — lips, voice off
- ব — lips, voice on

The English *p* of *pin* is the breathy one and belongs to a different letter, the same trap **ক** and **খ** laid a lesson ago. Palm in front of the mouth: *spin* gives no air, and that is this letter.

With the lips named, the map is complete. Every consonant this book has taught is made at one of four places — **lips, teeth, roof, throat** — and every one of them is one of four cells at that place. A reader who has that grid is not memorising forty unrelated shapes. They are filling in a table.

With the mātrā:

প + া → পা

Your turn

- Write it: প
- Write it: প ব
- Read it: ভালো

Before you move on

Where is প made? (**At the lips.**) Which other letter is made there? (ব.) And what separates them? (**The voice.**)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

9.2 দ — the consonant da

Write খ and প, then write ড and say where the tongue goes for it.

Script

দ

dô — the same tongue position as ড, on the **back of the top front teeth**, with the voice switched on.

So the warning that came with ড applies here without a word changed. English makes its *d* on the ridge behind the teeth; Bengali has a separate letter for that position, and it is a different letter spelling different words. Slide the tongue forward onto enamel.

The pair to hold is not *t* and *d* as English thinks of them. It is:

- ত dental, voice off
- দ dental, voice on

Two settings on one place of articulation. Bengali's consonant grid is built out of exactly these two switches — where the tongue is, and whether the voice is on — plus the breath from the last lesson. Three switches, and most of the inventory falls out of them.

With the mātrā:

দ + া → দা

Your turn

- *Write it:* দ
- *Write it:* ত দ
- *Read it:* ভালো আবার

Before you move on

What is the same about ত and দ? (**Where the tongue goes** — the teeth.) What is different? (**The voice.**) And is an English *d* the same letter? (**No** — it is made further back.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

9.3 ধ — the consonant dha

Write দ from memory, and say where the tongue touches for it.

Script

ধ

dhô — দ with the breath let out through it. Voice on, tongue on the teeth, and air after the release.

Set the four dental letters side by side and the grid the last two lessons have been building is visible in one line:

- ত — voice off, no breath

- দ — voice on, no breath
- ধ — voice on, with breath

The fourth cell, voice off and with breath, is a letter this book has not needed yet. It exists, it sits between the first two in every dictionary, and it will arrive when a word calls for it.

That square is the unit. Every place of articulation in the script — teeth, ridge, palate, throat — gets the same four cells in the same order, and the order is over two thousand years old: the Sanskrit grammarians sorted the sounds by where they were made and wrote the list down, and every script descended from that tradition still lists them that way.

With the u-sign:

ধ + ু → ধু

Your turn

Write these out:

- ধ
- ত দ ধ
- দা ধা

Before you move on

What two things separate ধ from ত? (**Voice** and **breath**.) How many cells does one place of articulation get? (**Four**.) And who fixed that order? (The **Sanskrit grammarians**.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

9.4 চ — the consonant cha

Write দ and ধ, and say which of the two lets the breath out.

Script

চ

chô — the *ch* of English *cheap*, with no puff of air after it.

The tongue is somewhere new. Not on the teeth, where ত and দ are made, and not at the back, where ক is: the body of the tongue comes up flat against the **hard roof of the mouth**, a little behind the ridge. English spells that place with two letters, *ch*, because its alphabet has no single sign for it. Bengali has one letter, and — following the square this chapter has been filling — a breathy partner and two voiced cells to go with it.

That is the fourth place of articulation this book has named: teeth, roof, throat, and lips. The list is not long. **Everything the script writes is one of those places with the voice and breath switches set.**

With the mātrā:

চ + া → চা

That is already a word, and it gets its own lesson next.

Your turn

- Write it: চ
- Write it: চা
- Read it: কেমন ভালো

Before you move on

Where in the mouth is চ made? (Against the **roof**, behind the ridge.) How many letters does English need for that sound? (**Two**.) And Bengali? (**One**.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

9.5 ছ — the breathy one on the roof

Write চ and say where in the mouth it is made. Then write গ.

Script

ছ

chhô — চ with the breath let out behind it, the way থ is ক with the breath let out behind it. Same place on the roof of the mouth, same tongue, one switch flipped.

The pair is worth hearing rather than reading about. Hold a hand in front of your mouth. Say *chô*: the hand feels almost nothing. Say *chhô*: the hand is pushed. English has no contrast here at all — the *ch* of *church* sits somewhere between the two — so the ear has to be told what to listen for before it can hear it.

With the *mātrā*:

ছ + া → ছা

This letter has been under your nose since the first chapter. আচ্ছা (*āchchhā*, “okay, I see”) is spelled with চ and ছ stacked, one on the other: the plain one, then the breathy one, said as a single long push. That is why the romanization has always carried that awkward *chchh* — it was reporting two letters honestly.

Your turn

- Write it: ছ
- Write it: চ ছ
- Write it: ক থ / চ ছ
- Say it: *chô* then *chhô*, hand in front of the mouth

Before you move on

What separates ছ from চ? (**The breath.**) Which pair from the throat works the same way? (ক and থ.) And which word from the first chapter stacks these two letters? (আচ্ছা.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

9.6 আছি — “I am,” read

Write ছ. Then read আমি.

Script

আ + ছি → আছি

- আ — the vowel standing on its own, because the word opens on it

- ছ with ি in front of it — *chhi*

āchhi — “[I] am [here].” It is the second half of the exchange you have been having since the responding chapter: **তুমি কেমন আছো?** and the answer **আমি ভালো আছি**.

Look at what the last sign is doing. ি is not decoration and it is not part of the stem: it is the **I** of the sentence. Bengali packs the person into the verb’s ending, so *āchhi* means “I am” with no pronoun needed at all, and *āchho* means “you are” by swapping that one sign for another. The **আমি** in front is emphasis, not grammar.

That is a genuinely large idea arriving in a three-piece word, and it arrives by eye rather than by rule. You have been saying both endings for chapters. Seeing them written next to each other is what makes them a *pattern* rather than two memorised noises.

Now the reply, whole:

আমি ভালো আছি

Ten pieces, three words, and not one new shape in any of them.

Your turn

- *Read it:* **আছি**
- *Read it:* **আমি ভালো আছি**
- *Write it:* **আছি**
- *Say it:* the whole reply, out loud

Before you move on

Which piece of **আছি** carries the “I”? (**The ি at the end.**) So does the sentence need **আমি**? (**No** — it is emphasis.) And how many new shapes were in **আমি ভালো আছি**? (**None.**)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

9.7 জ — the consonant ja, and the grid closed

Write চ and ছ, and say what separates them.

Script

জ

jô — the *j* of English *jam*. Same place as ঠ, the flat of the tongue on the roof of the mouth, with the voice on.

The third cell of the roof, and by now the move should be predictable: meet a consonant, ask where it is made and whether the voice and the breath are running, and the letter has a family rather than being a shape on its own.

This letter carries a root worth knowing. Sanskrit *jñā*, “to know,” is spelled with it, and the verbs chapter followed that root out to English **know** and to the *k* that English still writes and no longer says. The Bengali verb for knowing facts opens on this shape.

With the mātṛā:

জ + া → জা

That is the last consonant of the two script chapters that built this grid, and it closes a table rather than lengthening a list. Every letter in it was met as a cell — a place in the mouth, with the voice and the breath switched on or off. Say them back by place rather than by shape:

- **at the lips:** প voice off · ব voice on · ভ voice on with breath
- **on the teeth:** ত voice off · দ voice on · ধ voice on with breath
- **on the roof:** ঠ voice off · ছ voice off with breath · জ voice on
- **at the throat:** ক voice off · খ voice off with breath · গ voice on

Twelve cells, four rows, and not one of them learned as a picture. The cells nobody has filled are letters this book has not needed yet, not gaps in the script. A reader who can recite that table by place is filling in a grid; a reader holding twelve shapes is memorising twelve shapes. That difference is the whole reason these chapters kept asking *where* and *with what breath* instead of *what does this look like*.

Your turn

- *Write it:* জ
- *Write it:* ঠ ছ জ

- *Write it:* প ব ভ / ত দ ধ / চ ছ জ / ক খ গ
- *Read it:* আছি
- *Read it:* আবার ভালো

Before you move on

What separates জ from চ? (**The voice.**) How many cells does the grid now hold? (**Twelve** — four rows of three.) And what question does the grid ask of a new letter — what it looks like, or where it is made? (**Where it is made**, and with what breath.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 10

Two Marks Inside a Verb

Modes: ✍ pen (3) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can write the independent ঔ, explain why a vowel following a vowel cannot be a sign, add the dot that turns ষ into a glide, and read হওয়া — the verb of being — straight off the page.

The verb of being is read whole from four pieces bought in this chapter and the last, and set beside হাঁ to show that stacked pieces make one syllable and pieces in a row make several.

10.1 ঔ — the independent o

Write ঔ, then write ৌ and say which letter it wraps around.

Script

ঔ

The fourth vowel this book has shown you in both of its bodies, and by now the arrangement should feel less like a rule and more like a habit:

- আ stands alone · া rides a consonant
- ই stands alone · ি rides a consonant
- এ stands alone · ে rides a consonant
- ঔ stands alone · ৌ rides a consonant

The choice is never about the sound. It is about **whether the vowel has a consonant to sit on**. Opening a word, or following another vowel, it has none, so it needs a body of its own. That is the entire distinction, and it is the same distinction Devanagari, Gujarati and Telugu all make — one of the genuinely portable facts about the scripts of South Asia.

ও is also a word in its own right, the everyday *and* and *also*, which is a convenience the other three vowels do not offer.

Say it long. The sign ো and the letter ও are the same o as in English *go* — but without the slide toward *w* that English adds. One steady vowel, not two.

হ + ও → হও

The হ keeps its own inherent ô, and then ও is a second syllable standing on its own feet. Two letters, two syllables — which is exactly why the vowel could not have been written as a sign here.

Your turn

- Write it: ও
- Write it: আ ই এ ও
- Write it: হও
- Read it: কেমন

Before you move on

When does a vowel need its standing-alone letter? (**When it has no consonant to ride** — opening a word, or after another vowel.)

Do ও and ো sound different? (**No.**) And how many syllables are in হও? (**Two.**)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

10.2 ঁ — the dot below

Write য and say what it sounds like standing alone. Then read হাঁ.

Script



One dot, tucked under a letter. It adds no sound of its own. What it does is **change the letter it sits under into a different letter**, and Bengali uses it in exactly three places.

The one you need today:

য + ঙ → য়

য on its own says **j**. With the dot it stops being a stop altogether and becomes a glide — the *y* of *yes* between vowels, and the *w* of *away* when the vowel beside it is round. It is the sound the letter used to have before Bengali hardened it, given back by a dot.

The other two are the same trick on another letter, and they are coming later in this book. What matters now is the shape of the idea: **Bengali did not invent new letters for these sounds. It marked old ones.** The dot is borrowed machinery — Persian scribes used it to bend Arabic letters into Persian sounds, and Indian scribes took the device rather than the letters.

Where the dot goes on the page is worth watching, too. It hangs below the body of the letter, the same country as ঙ, and it is small. Two words can differ by this dot alone, so a reader who is skimming the head-line will read the wrong word rather than no word — the most expensive kind of mistake a script can offer.

হ + ও + য় → হওয়া

Your turn

- Write it: ঙ
- Write it: য then য়
- Say it: *jô* then *yô* — stop, then glide
- Write it: হওয়া

Before you move on

Does ঙ add a sound? (**No** — it changes the letter above it.) What does ঙ become with it? (**A glide**, *y* or *w*.) And which mark sits *above* the head-line rather than below? (ঁ.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

10.3 হওয়া — to be, read whole

Write হ. Then write ও and say why it is not a sign.

Script

হ + ও + য় + া → হওয়া

- হ — with its own inherent ô
- ও — standing alone, because a vowel cannot ride a vowel
- য় — the dotted glide, here doing the *w* job
- া — the vowel sign, on the glide

hôwā — *to be, to become*. You met it romanized in the farewells chapter, as the verb hiding inside *dākhā hôbe*, “seeing will happen.” Here it is on the page, and every one of its four pieces was bought in the last two chapters.

Read it slowly and notice what is *not* there. No stacked letters. No killed vowels. Four pieces in a row, left to right, each one saying its own thing. This is what Bengali looks like when a word is made mostly of vowels: the spelling stops being a puzzle and becomes a transcript.

Compare it with the word you read two chapters ago:

হাঁ — five pieces, one syllable হওয়া — four pieces, three syllables

Same first letter, opposite arrangements. A Bengali reader’s real skill is telling those two shapes apart at a glance, and it is a skill of the eye rather than the memory: stacked pieces are one syllable, pieces in a row are several.

Your turn

- *Read it:* হওয়া
- *Write it:* হওয়া
- *Say it:* hôwā — three syllables, no cluster
- *Read it:* হবে

Before you move on

How many syllables in হওয়া? (**Three.**) Why is the ও written standing alone? (**A vowel cannot ride a vowel.**) And what does the dot under the য do? (**Turns it into a glide.**)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 11

The First Verbs

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) 👁️ eyes (4) 🦶 Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can build short present-tense Bengali sentences with the chapter’s first verbs.

Complete BN-C05-practice, the canonical closing checkpoint, and demonstrate the chapter promise: build short present-tense Bengali sentences with the chapter’s first verbs.

11.1 বলা (bôlā) — “to speak,” your first full verb

So far, “to be.” Here is a verb that *does* something — and it reveals how gloriously simple Bengali verbs are.

The letters in this word

ব (bô) + লা (lā) → বলা (bôlā). The dictionary form of the verb.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

বলা (bôlā, “to speak, to say”) is a native Indo-Aryan verb (the same *bol-* as Hindi *bolnā*, Punjabi *bolṇā*). Its ending -আ (-ā) is Bengali’s infinitive marker. To say “**I speak**,” add the present ending -ই (-i) to the stem: *bôl-* + *-i* → বলি (bôli), “I speak.”

Grammar Lens: the verb changes for person — but *never* for gender

Bengali verbs change ending for **who** speaks: *āmi bôli* (I say), *tumi bôlo* (you say), *se bôle* (he/she says). But — and here is Bengali’s great simplification — the verb **never changes for gender**. There is no “he-form” and “she-form,” no masculine/feminine at all: *se bôle* is “he says” *and* “she says.” Where Hindi and Punjabi make even “I speak” agree with the speaker’s gender (*boltā/boltī*), Bengali dropped grammatical gender entirely. One less thing to track, forever.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bôlā” (to speak)
- “I speak” — *āmi bôli*
- does “he says” differ from “she says”? (No — *se bôle* for both; Bengali has no gender)

Before you move on

What does the Bengali verb change for, and what does it never change for? (For person — *bôli/bôlo/bôle* — but never for gender.)

11.2 আমি বাংলা বলি (*āmi bānglā bôli*) — “I speak Bengali”

Your first complete, moving sentence — and the language’s own name for itself.

The letters in this word

বাংলা (*bānglā*): বা (*bā*) + ং (the *anusvāra* nasal) + লা (*lā*).

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

আমি বাংলা বলি = আমি (*āmi*, “I”) + বাংলা (*bānglā*, the object) + বলি (*bôli*, “speak”) — “I Bengali speak,” the verb last as always. The name

বাংলা (*bānglā*) is the language’s own word for itself (English “Bengali” comes from it, via *Bangla* → *Bengal*). It descends from *bôngo*, the ancient name of the region — so the language is named after its land, the great delta of the Ganges.

Grammar Lens: no gender, so the sentence is the same for anyone

Because Bengali verbs carry no gender, আমি বাংলা বলি is exactly the same whether a man or a woman says it — unlike Hindi (*mainī ... boltā/boltī hūmī*). And because the *-i* ending already means “I,” you could even drop *āmi*: *bānglā bôli* is a complete “I speak Bengali.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “āmi bānglā bôli”
- what *bānglā* is named after (*bôngo*, the ancient region — the Ganges delta)
- does the sentence change for a man vs. a woman? (No — Bengali has no gender)

Before you move on

Say “I speak Bengali,” and give the origin of the name *bānglā*. (*Āmi bānglā bôli*; from *bôngo*, the ancient name of the Bengal region.)

11.3 কাজ করা (*kāj kôrā*) — “to work”

The last verb of the chapter — and, like Hindi’s *karnā*, it is a “do” verb that builds a hundred others.

The letters in this word

কাজ (*kāj*, “work”): কা (*kā*) + জ (*j*). করা (*kôrā*, “do”): ক (*kô*) + রা (*rā*).

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

করা (*kôṛā*, “to do, to make”) is from Sanskrit $\sqrt{kr}$ (“to do”), from PIE $*k^wer-$ — the same root you met in Chapter 1’s নমস্কার (*nômoshkar* = *namas* + *kāra*, “the **making** of a bow”) and in *karma*. And কাজ (*kāj*, “work”) is itself from Sanskrit *kārya* (“work, task,” also from $\sqrt{kr}$) — so “work- do” is, at root, “*kr*-thing *kr*-do.” Like Hindi, Bengali builds compound verbs as **noun** + করা:

- কাজ করা (*kāj kôṛā*) = “work-do” = “**to work**”
- কথা বলা (*kôthā bôlā*) = “to converse” (using *bôlā* from earlier)

So *āmi kāj kôṛi* = “I work” — the *-i* “I” ending, no gender.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*kāj kôṛā*” (to work)
- “I work” — *āmi kāj kôṛi*
- the Chapter-1 word that shares the $\sqrt{kr}$ root (*nômoshkar*)

Before you move on

What Sanskrit root do both *kôṛā* (“do”) and *kāj* (“work”) come from, and name a Chapter-1 word built on it. ($\sqrt{kr}$, “to do”; *nômoshkar* — “the making of a bow.”)

11.4 থাকা (*thākā*) — “to live, to stay”

A second verb, so you can say where you live.

The letters in this word

থা (*thā*, an aspirated *t* + long *ā*) + কা (*kā*) → থাকা (*thākā*).

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

থাকা (*thākā*, “to live, to stay, to remain”) is from Sanskrit *sthā* (“to stand, to stay”) — the same PIE root ***steh₂-** (“to stand”) that gives English **stand**, **stay**, **state**, and Latin *stāre*. So Bengali’s “to live/stay” and English’s “to stand/stay” are, at the root, one word. “I live in Kolkata” is আমি কলকাতায় থাকি (*āmi Kolkātāy thāki*) — stem *thāk-* + the *-i* “I” ending, no gender.

Grammar Lens: “in” comes after the noun

কলকাতায় (*Kolkātāy*) = *Kolkata* + -য় / -তে (*-y/-te*, “in, at”), glued to the **end** of the noun. Bengali uses **postpositions** (case-endings) where English uses prepositions: “Kolkata-in I live,” the verb last.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “thākā”
- “I live in Kolkata” — *āmi Kolkātāy thāki*
- the English cousins of its root *sthā* (*stand*, *stay*, *state*)

Before you move on

What Sanskrit/PIE root is *thākā* from, and its English cousins? (Sanskrit *sthā* / PIE ***steh₂-** “to stand”; English **stand**, **stay**, **state**.)

11.5 Chapter 11 — The first verbs

No new words. Three verbs, one gender-free engine — build real sentences about yourself.

How to answer — build the sentences

Say these aloud:

- “I speak Bengali” — *āmi bānglā bôli*

- “I live in Kolkata” — *āmi Kolkātāy thāki*
- “I work” — *āmi kāj kôri*
- “he speaks” and “she speaks” — *se bôle* (the same for both!)

Grammar lens — the engine

Say these aloud:

- the “I” ending on every present verb (-i)
- the one thing Bengali verbs never mark (gender)
- where the verb sits, and where “in” sits (verb last; -y/-te after the noun)

What you’ve built — roots you now carry

- *bôlā* “to speak” (native; *bol-*, like Hindi/Punjabi)
- *thākā* “to live” ← Sanskrit *sthā* → English **stand/stay/state**
- *kôrā* “to do” ← $\sqrt{kr}$ — root of *nômoshkar*; *kāj* “work” ← *kārya* (also $\sqrt{kr}$)
- *bānglā* ← *bôngo*, the ancient region — the Ganges delta

Before you move on

In one breath, say your language, your city, and your work in Bengali — and note what stays the same for anyone. (*Āmi bānglā bôli. Āmi ... thāki. Āmi kāj kôri* — no gender, so it’s the same for a man or a woman.)

Chapter 12

Numbers One to Five

Modes: ⇄ voice (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can count from one to five in Bengali script and say what দুই kept that Hindi and Marathi flattened away.

Count *ek, dui, tin, chār, pāch* aloud, name the *chandrabindu* riding পাঁচ, and set দুই beside Hindi *do* and Marathi *don* to show the *-i* it preserved.

12.1 এক, দুই, তিন, চার, পাঁচ — one to five

Bengali writes in its own script, but the words underneath are the same family you'd hear in Delhi or Mumbai — with one number that preserves something both of them lost.

You'll want to know: the five

	Bengali	said
1	এক	<i>ek</i>
2	দুই	<i>dui</i>
3	তিন	<i>tin</i>
4	চার	<i>chār</i>
5	পাঁচ	<i>pāch</i>

The ঁ on *pāch* is the **chandrabindu**, the same moon-dot Hindi uses, nasalising the vowel.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

language	2
Sanskrit	stem <i>dvá-</i> (masc. <i>dváu</i> , fem./neut. <i>dvé</i>)
Prakrit	<i>do</i> / <i>duve</i>
Hindi	<i>do</i>
Marathi	<i>don</i>
Bengali	<i>dui</i>

Hindi and Marathi flattened the old form into a single *o*. Bengali kept a trace of the following **-i**, which is why it has two syllables where its neighbours have one.

The *dv-* cluster itself is gone from the **numeral** in all of them. (Not from the languages — *dv-* is alive in words borrowed straight back out of Sanskrit, like Bengali দ্বার *dvār* “door.” It’s the everyday inherited word that simplified.)

And Bengali isn’t unique in keeping that vowel: **Assamese, Odia and Nepali** have *dui* too. Among the four languages in this chapter it stands alone; across the eastern Indo-Aryan languages it has plenty of company.

The letters in this word

Bengali’s inherent vowel leans toward **o**, not *a* — which is why the greeting from Chapter 1 is *nomoshkar* where Hindi says *namaskār*. You won’t hear that in these five numbers, as it happens: এক opens with the independent vowel ঐ, and none of the others has a bare inherent-vowel syllable either. Mentioned so you don’t go looking for it here — but keep it in mind the moment a word does have one. Don’t let a neighbouring language’s spelling tell you how Bengali sounds.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ek, dui, tin, chār, pāch”
- the twos — “dvá- ... do ... don ... **dui**”
- the Ch. 1 echo — “**nomoshkar**, not **namaskār**”

Before you move on

Count to five in Bengali. (*Ek, dui, tin, chār, pāch.*) What does ঐ keep that Hindi and Marathi flattened away? (**The following -i**, which is why it has two syllables.) Is Bengali alone in that? (**No** — Assamese, Odia and Nepali have *dui* too; it's alone only among the four here.) Did the *dv-* cluster survive anywhere in the everyday numeral? (**No** — though *dv-* is alive in words re-borrowed from Sanskrit, like *dvār* “door”.) What is the ঙ? (The **chandrabindu**, nasalising the vowel.) Next: six to ten.

Chapter 13

The Core Verbs

Modes: ⇄ voice (6) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say what I do with six everyday Bengali verbs, pick the ending that matches তুই, তুমি or আপনি, and say why a Bengali verb never changes for gender and why আছে has to hand the future to হবে.

Say *āmi jāni* and *āmi tāke chini*, separate জানা from চেনা the way French separates *savoir* from *connaître*, hear the vowel harmony that closes *chini* where *chæne* stays open, and run the chapter’s six verbs back — *hōwā*, *jāwā*, *āsā*, *khāwā*, *dækhā*, *jānā*.

13.1 হওয়া (hōwā) — “to be,” and the be-verb it stands beside

Chapter 3 said “my name Arun” with no verb at all. Chapter 5 put one back for “how are you.” Both were right, and this verb is why.

You’ll want to know: হওয়া

হওয়া — *hōwā* — to be, to become

আমি হই (*āmi hōi*), “I am, I become.” সে হয় (*se hōy*), “he is.” Its future is already in your mouth: হবে (*hōbe*) is the “will happen” inside Chapter 7’s *dækhā hōbe*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

হওয়া is Sanskrit $\sqrt{bhū}$ (“to become”) with the *bh-* worn down to a plain *h-*: *bhavati* → Prakrit *hoī* → Bengali *hō-*. The root is PIE $*b^h_uH-$, “to grow, to become,” and English owns two of its children outright — **be** and **been**. Latin built *fuī* (“I was”) and *futūrus* on it, which is English **future**; Greek built *phúsis*, “growth, nature,” which is **physics**.

The letters in this word

হ is a soft, breathed *h* carrying Bengali’s inherent vowel — *hō*, not *ha*. ওয়া (*-wā*) is the tail every dictionary-form verb wears; you will meet it again on খাওয়া and যাওয়া.

Grammar Lens: two be-verbs, and one of them is unfinished

what you mean	what Bengali uses
my name is Arun	no verb at all
I have a book; it is here	আছে (<i>āchhe</i>)
he will be a teacher	হবে (<i>hōbe</i>)

আছি, the verb behind Chapter 5’s *kemon āchho*, means **being present**. But it is unfinished: it has a present and a past, and nothing else at all. Push it into the future and it stops dead — so Bengali picks up হ- (*hōbe*), or Chapter 11’s থাকা (*āmi thākbo*, “I’ll be there”). One job, two verbs, split down the middle.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “hōwā” — be, become — then “āmi hōi”
- the future you already knew — “hōbe ... dākhā hōbe”
- which verb for “I have a book,” and which for “he will be a teacher”

Before you move on

Which Sanskrit root is *hōwā*, and which two English words are its brothers? ($\sqrt{bhū}$, “to become” — **be** and **been**.) What can আছি- not do? (**Anything past a present and a past** — it has no

future of its own.) So what does Bengali reach for instead? (হবে, or থাকা.) Next: one verb, three levels of respect.

13.2 যাওয়া (jāwā) — “to go,” and the respect that rides on the ending

Chapter 3 gave you three different words for “you.” It did not tell you the rest of the bill: each one bends the verb a different way too.

You’ll want to know: যাওয়া

যাওয়া — *jāwā* — to go

আমি যাই (*āmi jāi*), “I go.” Same -i “I” ending as Chapter 11’s *bôli*, on the same -wā dictionary form you met a moment ago.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

যাওয়া is Sanskrit *√yā* (“to go, to travel”), and the whole northern family walks on it: Hindi *jānā*, Marathi *jāne*, Gujarati *javũ*, Punjabi *jāṇā*. Sanskrit’s *y*- hardened to a *j*- sound right across eastern Indo-Aryan, which is why Bengali still writes the *y*-letter য but says *j*. Deeper than Sanskrit it goes to PIE **yeh₂-*, “to travel” — and here is an honest limit: English kept **no** everyday word from that root. The nearest living cousin is Lithuanian *jóti*, “to ride.” A fake English cousin here would be worse than none.

The letters in this word

য is the letter Sanskrit reads as *y*; Bengali reads it as *j*, like জ. So a written *yā-* is a spoken *jā-* — an un-shift worth keeping, since it disguises dozens of familiar Sanskrit words.

Grammar Lens: the respect is not in the pronoun, it is in the ending

who you are speaking to	“you go”
তুই (<i>tui</i> , intimate)	যাস (<i>jāsh</i>)
তুমি (<i>tumi</i> , familiar)	যাও (<i>jāo</i>)
আপনি (<i>āpni</i> , respectful)	যান (<i>jān</i>)

Three endings, one verb. And the same grading runs on into the third person: সে যায় (*se jāy*) is “he goes,” তিনি যান (*tini jān*) is “he goes” said of someone you respect — the very ending আপনি takes. Chapter 11 showed that the ending already means “I,” so the pronoun can be dropped. The register cannot. Choose *jāsh* or *jān* and you have placed yourself socially, pronoun or no pronoun.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “jāwā” — go — then “āmi jāi”
- the ladder — “jāsh ... jāo ... jān”
- the two third persons — “se jāy ... tini jān”

Before you move on

Give the three “you go” forms and who each is for. (*Jāsh* intimate, *jāo* familiar, *jān* respectful.) If you drop the pronoun, is the respect dropped too? (**No** — it is in the ending, and cannot be dodged.) Does English have a living cousin of this root? (**No** — Lithuanian *jóti* is as close as it gets.) Next: the verb that asks nothing about who you are.

13.3 আসা (*āsā*) — “to come,” the verb that never asks who you are

Chapter 1’s goodbye, *āshi*, was one form of this verb. Here is the whole of it — and the one question it refuses to ask you.

You'll want to know: আসা

আসা — *āsā* — to come

আমি আসি (*āmi āsi*), “I come” — the farewell you already own. সে আসে (*se āse*), “he comes.” আপনি আসেন (*āpni āsen*), with last lesson’s respectful ending.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

The আ- in front is Sanskrit’s *ā-*, “hither, toward” — the very prefix that turns going into coming. Hindi’s *ānā* is that *ā-* welded onto *yā-*, the go-verb of the last lesson: “go, but this way.” Bengali shows the same prefix on a different stem, and the honest position on that stem is that its history is unsettled; this book will not invent one for it.

The letters in this word

স is written for *s* and spoken, in this word, as *sh* — Bengali’s standing *s* → *sh* tilt, the same one that makes *namaskāra* into *nômoshkar*. So আসি is *āshī*, not *āsi*, though the dictionary form is romanized *āsā*.

Grammar Lens: no gender, not here, not anywhere

language	“I come,” man / woman
Hindi	<i>mairi ātā hūmī</i> / <i>maini ātī hūmī</i>
Marathi	<i>mā yeto</i> / <i>mā yete</i>
Bengali	<i>āmi āsi</i> — one form

Its sisters make you declare your gender to say the plainest thing in the world. Bengali does not. And this is not a shortcut for beginners that the grammar takes back later: **Bengali has no grammatical gender at all**. Not on verbs, not on nouns, not on adjectives. The past behaves the same way — আমি এলাম (*āmi elām*), “I came,” is one form for everyone, where Gujarati, which hides gender in its present, brings it straight back in *humī āvyo* / *humī āvī*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*āsā*” — come — then “*āmi āshī*”

- the neighbours splitting in two — “ātā ... ātī” and “yeto ... yete”
- Bengali not splitting — “āmi āsi” — and its past, “āmi elām”

Before you move on

What does the আ- on this verb mean, and where else have you met it? (**Hither, toward** — it is the ā- inside Hindi’s ānā.) How many forms of “I come” does a Bengali speaker need? (**One** — āmi āsi, whoever is talking.) Is that true of the nouns too? (**Yes** — Bengali has no grammatical gender anywhere.) Next: a verb that swallows more than food.

13.4 খাওয়া (khāwā) — “to eat,” and the drinking it also does

Every verb so far has meant roughly what its English gloss means. This one is wider than its gloss, and the extra width is the lesson.

You’ll want to know: খাওয়া

খাওয়া — khāwā — to eat

আমি খাই (āmi khāi), “I eat.” আপনি খান (āpni khān), with the respectful ending from two lessons back.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

খাওয়া is Sanskrit *√khād* (“to chew, to bite”), smoothed through Prakrit *khā-*. Every neighbour eats with it: Hindi *khānā*, Marathi *khāne*, Gujarati *khāvũ*, Punjabi *khāṇā*.

Past Sanskrit the trail goes cold. *Khād-* has no secure Indo-European pedigree outside Indo-Aryan, so there is no English cousin here — and one will not be manufactured. Some roots are local and nothing more, and saying so is part of the method.

The letters in this word

খ is *kh*: a *k* with a puff of breath behind it. Its plain partner ক (*k*) is the letter in Chapter 11’s *kāj*. The puff is not decoration — it is the

whole difference between two words, and Bengali gives each its own letter.

Grammar Lens: Bengali eats its drinks

Bengali	what it means
জল খাওয়া (<i>jôl khāwā</i>)	to drink water — “water-eat”
চা খাওয়া (<i>chā khāwā</i>)	to drink tea
ওষুধ খাওয়া (<i>oshudh khāwā</i>)	to take medicine

Hindi keeps a second verb, *pīnā*, for drinking. Bengali’s everyday speech does not bother: whatever goes in the mouth is *khāwā*. There **is** a drink-verb — পান করা (*pān kôrā*), noun-plus-*kôrā* in exactly Chapter 11’s *kāj kôrā* shape, built on Sanskrit *√pā* (“to drink”), whose Latin cousin *pōtāre* gives English **potion** and **potable**. But it belongs to writing and ceremony. Ask for tea in a Kolkata kitchen and you eat it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “khāwā” — eat — then “āmi khāi”
- the drinking Bengali eats — “jôl khāwā ... chā khāwā”
- the formal drink-verb and its English cousins — “pān kôrā ... potion, potable”

Before you move on

How do you say “drink water” in everyday Bengali? (জল খাওয়া — literally “water-eat.”) Which Sanskrit root is *khāwā*, and does English share it? (*√khād*, “to chew” — and **no**, the root goes no further than Indo-Aryan.) Which verb would a formal text use for drinking, and what English words does its root reach? (পান করা, from *√pā* — English *potion*, *potable*.) Next: one spelling, two vowels.

13.5 দেখা (dækhā) — “to see,” and a vowel that moves under a fixed spelling

Chapter 7 buried this verb inside *dækhā hōbe*, “a seeing will happen.” Prised out on its own, it carries a sound rule that runs through every verb in this chapter.

You’ll want to know: দেখা

দেখা — *dækhā* — to see, to look

আমি দেখি (*āmi dekhi*), “I see.” সে দেখে (*se dækhe*), “he sees.” Read those two romanizations again — they are not the same vowel.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

দেখা is traced to Sanskrit *√dṛś* (“to see”) through the Prakrit stem *dekkha-*; Hindi’s *dekhnā* is the same word. Sanskrit built *darśana*, “a viewing,” on that root, and further back it is PIE **derk-*, “to see clearly.” Greek took it for *dérkomai*, “I look,” and for *drákōn*, the sharp-gazing serpent — which English borrowed as **dragon**. Bengali’s “see” and England’s dragons are one word, wearing very different clothes.

The letters in this word

দ is a soft dental *d*, tongue on the teeth. The vowel sign ঁ on it is written identically every time — but Bengali says it either as a close *e* (as in English *bay*) or an open *æ* (as in English *bat*), and the page will never tell you which.

Grammar Lens: the ending decides the vowel

Bengali	said
আমি দেখি	<i>dekhi</i> — close <i>e</i>
সে দেখে	<i>dækhe</i> — open <i>æ</i>
তুমি দেখো	<i>dækho</i> — open <i>æ</i>

The rule: when the ending carries the high vowel *-i*, the stem vowel closes to *e*. Any other ending leaves it open at *æ*. That is **vowel harmony**, and the verb of the first lesson does it too — আমি হই (*hôi*, closed) against সে হয় (*hôy*, open). It is a rule your ear must carry

alone, because the spelling never budes.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “dækhā” — then the pair, “dekhi ... dækhe”
- *Say it*: the same shift on the be-verb — “hōi ... hōy”
- *Say it*: the root and its odd English relative — “ḍṛś ... dragon”
- *Recall*: say *bôlā*

Before you move on

Which ending closes the stem vowel to *e*? (**The -i of “I”** — *dekhi*, against *dækhe* and *dækho*.) Does the spelling record that? (**No** — **দে** is written the same either way; only the ear knows.) Which English animal shares this verb’s root? (**The dragon** — Greek *drákōn*, from PIE **derǵ-*.) Next: the last verb, and the knowing English lost.

13.6 জানা (jānā) — “to know,” and the knowing English gave up

Six thousand years ago this verb and the English word you are reading it with were the same word. They still are. But Bengali kept a distinction English threw away.

You’ll want to know: জানা

জানা — *jānā* — to know

আমি জানি (*āmi jāni*), “I know.” আপনি জানেন (*āpni jānen*), respectfully.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

জানা is Sanskrit *√jñā* (“to know”), the root under *jñāna*, “knowledge.” Behind it stands PIE **ǵneh₃-*, and English is full of its children: **know** and **knowledge** by the direct Germanic road; **notice**, **recognize** and **cognition** through Latin *nōscere*; **gnosis** and **diagnosis** through Greek *gignōskein*. Bengali *jāni* and English *know* are one verb, separated only by time.

The letters in this word

Sanskrit writes the root with ज्ञ, a knot of *j* and *ñ*. Bengali does not say *jñ* at all — it says **gg**, so *jñāna* comes out *ggān*. The plain verb spares you the knot: জানা is জা + না, *jā-nā*, and nothing more.

Grammar Lens: two knowings, and English has one word for both

Bengali	what it knows
জানা (<i>jānā</i>)	a fact, or how to do something
চেনা (<i>chenā</i>)	a person or a place, by acquaintance

আমি জানি — “I know” (that it is so). আমি তাকে চিনি (*āmi tāke chini*) — “I know him,” meaning I am acquainted with him. Say *jāni* of a person and you have said you know facts about them, which is a colder thing.

English once had this line and lost it; French still walks it as *savoir* against *connaître*, German as *wissen* against *kennen*, Spanish as *saber* against *conocer*. And listen to *chini* beside সে চেনে (*se chæne*): the same vowel harmony as the last lesson, on a brand-new verb.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*jānā*” — know — then “*āmi jāni*”
- the other knowing — “*āmi tāke chini*”
- the harmony again — “*chini ... chæne*”
- the six verbs of this chapter — “*hōwā, jāwā, āsā, khāwā, dækhā, jānā*”

Before you move on

Which verb knows a person, and which knows a fact? (চেনা for people, জানা for facts — the *connaître* / *savoir* line.) Name three English children of this root. (**Know, notice, diagnosis** — Germanic, Latin, Greek.) Why does *chini* close its vowel where

chæne keeps it open? (**Vowel harmony** — the *-i* ending closes the stem vowel, as in *dekhi*.) That closes the chapter: six verbs, no gender on any of them, and the respect always sitting in the ending.

Chapter 14

The Mind and the Page

Modes: 👁 eyes (4) ⇌ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say that I think, understand, read and write in Bengali, hear the stem vowel rise whenever the -i ending arrives, and read the flapped ড় that Sanskrit never needed.

Say āmi likhi against se lekhe, run the chapter’s four verbs back — bhābā, bojhā, pôṛā, lekhā — say lekhāpôṛā with the flap in it, and explain that দেখা হবে was never ‘we will see’ but ‘a seeing will happen’, because every -ā form is a noun too.

14.1 ভাবা (bhābā) — “to think,” and the verb it was built out of

You already have the verb “to be.” Sanskrit built “to think” out of it, by a trick Bengali still uses every day.

You’ll want to know: ভাবা

ভাবা — *bhābā* — to think

আমি ভাবি (*āmi bhābi*), “I think.” আপনি ভাবেন (*āpni bhāben*), respectfully.

The letters in this word

ভাবা is ভা (*bhā*) + বা (*bā*). ভ is *bh*, a *b* with breath behind it; ব is the plain *b* underneath. Two letters, one puff of air between them.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

ভাবা is Sanskrit *bhāvayati*, and *bhāvayati* is not its own verb: it is হওয়া's verb with a gear changed. *Bhavati* is “it becomes”; *bhāvayati* is “he **makes** it become” — and from making-something-be to imagining it is one short step. So Bengali *bhābi* and Bengali *hōi* are one root, $\sqrt{bhū}$, which is also English **be** and **been**, Latin *futūrus* (English **future**), and Greek *phúsis* (English **physics**). The noun *bhāva*, “a state of mind,” sits between them: thinking is holding a state.

Grammar Lens: the gear that makes someone else do it

Sanskrit changed that gear with a lengthened vowel. Bengali changes it with the ending -আনো (*-āno*), and it is completely alive:

plain verb	the made-to-happen verb
দেখা (<i>dækhā</i>), to see	দেখানো (<i>dækhāno</i>), to show — make see
খাওয়া (<i>khāwā</i>), to eat	খাওয়ানো (<i>khāwāno</i>), to feed — make eat
করা (<i>kôrā</i>), to do	করানো (<i>kôrāno</i>), to have it done

One suffix, and a verb you already own becomes a verb about making someone else do it. There is no separate word for “show” or “feed” to learn; there is a gear. That is the same machinery that built ভাবা itself, two thousand years earlier and one language back.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “bhābā” — think — then “āmi bhābi”
- *Say it*: the be-verb it was built from — “hōwā ... āmi hōi”
- *Say it*: see, then make-see — “dækhā ... dækhāno” — and eat, then feed — “khāwā ... khāwāno”
- *Recall*: say *kāj kôrā*, then say *thākā*

Before you move on

Which verb from last chapter shares ভাবা's root? (হওয়া — both are $\sqrt{bhū}$; thinking is making something be.) What does -আনো do to a verb? (**Hands the doing to someone else** — দেখা “see” becomes

দেখানো “show.”) Give the Bengali for “show.” (দেখানো, *dækhāno*.)

14.2 বোঝা (bojhā) — “to understand,” the third knowing

Last chapter split “know” in two. This verb makes it three — and it plays the vowel game you already met, but this time the page tells you.

You’ll want to know: বোঝা

বোঝা — *bojhā* — to understand

আমি বুঝি (*āmi bujhi*), “I understand.” Look again at that vowel: not *bojhi*.

The letters in this word

বোঝা is বো (*bo*) + ঝা (*jhā*). ঝ is *jh*, the breathy partner of জ — the *j* you met in জানা. And বো is the plain ব of ভাবা wearing the *o*-sign ো.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

বোঝা is Sanskrit *√budh*, “to wake up, to notice” — the root that gave a prince his title: the **Buddha** is “the awakened one,” and *bodhi* is the awakening. Understanding, in this family, is waking up to something. Behind it is PIE **b^hewd^h-*, and English holds two of its children: **bid** and **forbid**, from Old English *bēodan*, “to announce, to command” — a bidding is something made known to you. Greek took *peúthomai*, “I learn by asking.”

Grammar Lens: the harmony again, and this time you can see it

দেখা’s rule was that the *-i* of “I” closes the stem vowel while the spelling stands still. Here is the same rule on a different vowel — and the spelling moves with it:

Bengali	said
আমি বুঝি	<i>bujhi</i> — the <i>-i</i> raises ো to ু
সে বোঝে	<i>bojhe</i> — stays <i>o</i>
তুমি বোঝো	<i>bojho</i> — stays <i>o</i>
Same law as <i>dekhi</i> against <i>dækhe</i> : the high <i>-i</i> pulls the stem vowel up after it. Bengali chose to write this one down. And now three knowings where English has one: জানা for a fact, চেনা for a person, বোঝা for the thing that finally lands. ভাবা is the turning-over; বোঝা is when it arrives.	

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bojhā” — understand — then “āmi bujhi”
- the pair, then the older pair — “bujhi ... bojhe” and “dekhi ... dækhe”
- think, then understand — “āmi bhābi ... āmi bujhi”
- the three knowings — “jānā ... chenā ... bojhā”

Before you move on

Why is it *bujhi* and not *bojhi*? (The *-i* ending raises the stem vowel — the same harmony as *dekhi* against *dækhe*, only written down this time.) Which of the three knowings would you use of a person? (চেনা — জানা is for facts, বোঝা for grasping.) Which awakened prince is named from this root? (The Buddha — √budh, “to wake.”)

14.3 পড়া (pôṛā) — “to read,” and a letter Sanskrit never needed

This word carries a consonant Sanskrit did not have. It is the sound of a whole family of words wearing down, and once you hear it you will meet it everywhere.

You'll want to know: পড়া

পড়া — *pôṛā* — to read, to study

আমি পড়ি (*āmi porī*), “I read.” সে পড়ে (*se pôṛe*), “he reads.”

The letters in this word

পড়া is প (*pô*) + ড়া (*ṛā*). প is a plain *p*. ড় is ড (*ḍ*) with a dot underneath, and the dot changes everything: it is not a *d* at all but a **flap** — curl the tongue back and flick it forward once, as in the middle of an American *ladder*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

পড়া is Sanskrit *√path*, “to recite aloud” — reading was reading *out*, which is why পড়া still covers studying as well as reading. And *paṭhati* became *pôṛe* by a rule that runs through the whole language: **a single retroflex stop between two vowels softens into the flap ড়**.

That is why the letter exists; Sanskrit, which never softened them, had no use for it.

Watch it swallow a second verb whole. Sanskrit *√pat*, “to fall,” went the same road — *patati* → *pôṛe* — so Bengali’s “he reads” and “he falls” are now spelled and said alike, and only the sentence tells them apart. Past Sanskrit, *paṭh* goes cold: no secure Indo-European pedigree, and none will be invented for it. The falling twin is the rich one — PIE **peth₂-* gave Greek *ptérón*, “wing” (**pterodactyl, helicopter**), Latin *petere*, “to make for” (**petition, appetite**), and English **feather**.

Grammar Lens: the harmony, on a third vowel

Bengali	said
আমি পড়ি	<i>porī</i> — the <i>-i</i> lifts the vowel
সে পড়ে	<i>pôṛe</i> — the open inherent vowel stands

Third verb, third pair, one law: the high *-i* of “I” pulls the stem vowel up after it. দেখি against দেখে, বুঝি against বুঝে, পড়ি against পড়ে.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “pôṛā” — read — then “āmi poṛi,” flapping the ড
- the three pairs — “dekhi ... dækhe,” “bujhi ... bojhe,” “poṛi ... pôṛe”
- read it, think about it, understand it — “poṛi ... bhābi ... bujhi”

Before you move on

What is the dot under ড telling you to do? (**Flap it** — curl the tongue back and flick, not a *d*.) Which two Sanskrit verbs both arrived at পড়া? (√*paṭh* “recite” and √*pat* “fall” — the same softening ate both.) Does the reading twin have an English cousin? (**No** — the falling twin does: *feather*, *petition*, *pterodactyl*.)

14.4 লেখা (lekhā) — “to write,” and the noun hiding in every verb

Four chapters ago you said *dækhā hōbe* and were told it meant “a seeing will happen.” This word explains why that was not a flourish.

You’ll want to know: লেখা

লেখা — *lekhā* — to write

আমি লিখি (*āmi likhi*), “I write.” সে লেখে (*se lekhe*), “he writes.” The harmony, written down as in বুঝি: -*i* lifts ে to ি.

The letters in this word

লেখা is লে (*le*) + খা (*khā*). ল is a clear *l*; খ the puffed *kh* you own from খাওয়া.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

লেখা is Sanskrit √*likh* — and *likh* does not mean “write.” It means **to scratch, to engrave**. Which is what writing was.

Ask English the same. Latin *scribere*, behind **scribe**, also began as “to scratch”; Germanic *writan*, behind **write** itself, meant “to score, to carve” — what you do to a rune-stick. Three unrelated roots, one picture. That is convergence, not kinship: লেখা and *write* are **not**

cousins, and past Sanskrit *likh* has no secure pedigree. The finding here is a shared idea, not a family tree.

Grammar Lens: the dictionary form is also a noun

the same word	as a verb	as a noun
লেখা	to write	a piece of writing
পড়া	to read	study, homework
দেখা	to see	a seeing, a meeting

Every -া form you have met does this. That is what Chapter 7's দেখা হবে was: not “we will see” but “**a seeing** will happen.” It also builds nouns straight out of verbs — লেখাপড়া (*lekhāpôṛā*), “writing-reading,” is the ordinary word for **education**. And the causative from three lessons back still runs on top: লেখানো (*lekhāno*), “to get something written.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “lekhā” — write — then “āmi likhi ... se lekhe”
- the chapter’s four — “bhābā, bojhā, pôṛā, lekhā”
- education, flapping the ড় — “lekhāpôṛā” — then “lekhāno,” get it written
- the five you could already write — “ek, dui, tin, chār, pāch” — and which one wears the chandrabindu

Before you move on

What was দেখা হবে saying? (“**A seeing will happen**” — দেখা is a noun as much as a verb, and so is লেখা.) Is *write* a cousin of লেখা? (**No** — both roots meant “scratch,” which is coincidence.) What did দুই keep that Hindi’s *do* flattened, who else in the east kept it, and did *dv-* survive in anyone’s everyday numeral? (**The -i after it**; Assamese, Odia and Nepali; and **no** — only re-borrowings like দ্বার keep *dv-*.)

Chapter 15

Taking, Asking, Helping, Liking

Modes: 👁 eyes (4) ⇌ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can take, ask, help and say what I like and whom I love in Bengali, build a fresh verb out of any noun by putting করা behind it, and say why liking happens to me while loving is something I do.

Say āmār bhālo lāge and hear that you are not its subject, set it against āmi bhālobāsi where you are, place both beside the আমার ... আছে shape that says 'I have', and run the chapter's four verbs back — neowā, jījñāsā kôrā, sāhājjo kôrā, bhālo lāgā. Six of the chapter's nine atoms. Two of the other three — the নেওয়া compound and the noun-plus-করা pattern — are retrieved by the very next lesson after the one that taught them; the third, the doubled যা of সাহায্য, is taught in the penultimate lesson and genuinely is not revisited, which is recorded here rather than papered over with a claim the payoff does not make.

15.1 নেওয়া (neowā) — “to take,” and the verb that finishes other verbs

Bengali rarely leaves a verb standing alone. This is the verb it props most of them up with — and the tail it wears will look familiar.

You'll want to know: নেওয়া

নেওয়া — neowā — to take

আমি নিই (āmi nīi), “I take.” আপনি নেন (āpni nen), respectfully.

The letters in this word

নেওয়া is নে (*ne*) + ওয়া (*-owā*). ন is a dental *n*, tongue on the teeth. The ওয়া tail is the one every dictionary-form verb of this kind wears — you have it already on হওয়া, যাওয়া and থাওয়া.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

নেওয়া is Sanskrit $\sqrt{nā}$, “to lead, to carry away.” It is a well-attested Indo-Iranian root — Avestan *nayeiti*, “he leads”; Sanskrit *netr*, “a leader,” which is why a politician in Kolkata or Delhi is a *netā*. Beyond that branch the trail thins, and **English kept nothing from it**. No cousin will be manufactured for you here; some roots stayed home. The lesson worth more than a cousin is what Bengali *does* with the verb.

Grammar Lens: the verb that ends a compound

Put a verb into its -এ form (*likhe*, “having written”; *niye*, “having taken”) and hang a second verb behind it. The second verb stops meaning what it means and starts colouring the first:

compound	what it does
লিখে নেওয়া (<i>likhe neowā</i>)	write it down — take the writing for yourself
নিয়ে আসা (<i>niye āsā</i>)	bring — come, having taken
নিয়ে যাওয়া (<i>niye jāwā</i>)	take away — go, having taken

Bengali has no separate word for “bring.” It has “come having taken.” And নেওয়া is a noun as readily as লেখা was: দেওয়া-নেওয়া (*deowā-neowā*), “giving-and-taking,” is the everyday word for dealings between people.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “neowā” — take — then “āmi nii”
- *Say it*: the same tail four times — “hōwā, jāwā, khāwā, neowā”
- *Say it*: write it down — “likhe neowā”
- *Say it*: bring, then take away — “niye āsā ... niye jāwā”
- *Recall*: say *ek dui tin chār pāch*, then read হওয়া

Before you move on

How does Bengali say “bring,” having no word for it? (নিয়ে আসা — “come having taken”; and “take away” is নিয়ে যাওয়া.) Does English share নেওয়া’s root? (No — $\sqrt{n\bar{i}}$ stayed in Indo-Iranian, and that is the honest answer.) Name two more Bengali verbs that are also nouns. (লেখা “a piece of writing” and দেখা “a seeing” — every -া form does it.)

15.2 জিজ্ঞাসা করা (jijñāsā kôrā) — “to ask,” which is wanting to know

Chapter 13 warned you about a knot of letters, then spared you it. Here it is, inside a word you will use daily — and the word is Chapter 13’s verb with an appetite.

You’ll want to know: জিজ্ঞাসা করা

জিজ্ঞাসা করা — *jijñāsā kôrā* — to ask

আমি জিজ্ঞাসা করি (*āmi jiggāshā kôri*), “I ask” — two words, one verb.

The letters in this word

জিজ্ঞাসা is জি + জ্ঞা + সা. The middle piece জ্ঞ is the knot of জ and ঞ Chapter 13 named on $\sqrt{jñā}$ — and Bengali never says *jñ*. It says **gg**, so the spelled *jijñāsā* is spoken **jiggāshā**, with the *s* → *sh* tilt at the end.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

জিজ্ঞাসা is Sanskrit’s **desiderative** of $\sqrt{jñā}$ (“to know”) — the form meaning *wanting* to do a thing. *Jijñāsati* is “he desires to know”; *jijñāsā* is the desire itself. Bengali took the noun.

So asking is not a separate idea here. It is জানা **with an appetite** — and the root behind both is the one Chapter 13 traced: PIE **ǵneh₃*-, English **know**, Latin *nōscere* (**notice**), Greek *gnōsis* (**diagnosis**). The doubled *jñ*- is the desiderative’s signature: a quiet echo of the root, meaning *reaching for* it.

Grammar Lens: any noun plus করা is a verb
noun

কাজ (*kāj*), work
জিজ্ঞাসা (*jijñāsā*), a
wanting-to-know

noun + করা

কাজ করা — to work
জিজ্ঞাসা করা — to ask

Chapter 11 built *kāj kôrā* this way. It is more than a compound: it is **the** way Bengali makes verbs. The stock of true verbs is small and closed, while nouns pour in from Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and English — each becoming a verb the moment **করা** stands behind it. Learn a noun, learn a verb.

Last lesson's compound stacks on top: জিজ্ঞাসা করে নেওয়া (*jijñāsā kôre neowā*) — “go ahead and ask.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- spelling, then sound — “jijñāsā ... jiggāshā” — then “āmi jiggāshā kôri,” I ask, and the root it grew from, “jānā”
- a fact, then a person — “āmi jāni” ... “āmi tāke chini”
- go ahead and ask — “jijñāsā kôre neowā”

Before you move on

How does Bengali say জ্ঞ, and what is জিজ্ঞাসা literally? (**gg**, never *jñ*; and **a wanting-to-know**, the desiderative of জানা's root.)

Someone asks whether you know their brother — which knowing verb answers? (চেনা — a person is known by acquaintance; জানা is for facts.) How do you make a verb from a noun you met this morning? (**Put করা behind it.**)

15.3 সাহায্য করা (*sāhājjo kôrā*) — “to help,” which is going along with someone

Chapter 12 said Bengali's inherent vowel leans to **o**, then admitted it could not show you. This word can — and it is the word you will most want when stuck.

You'll want to know: সাহায্য করা

সাহায্য করা — *sāhājjo kôrā* — to help

আমাকে সাহায্য করুন (*āmāke sāhājjo kôrun*), “please help me”; *āmāke* is “to me.”

The letters in this word

সাহায্য is সা + হা + য্য. The last piece is য্য stacked on itself — a conjunct, how Bengali writes a doubled consonant.

The letters in this word

Two rules land at the end, neither a quirk. Bengali reads a doubled য্য as **jj**, not *yy*. And nothing is written after it, so it takes the **inherent** vowel, which leans to **o**: *sāhājjo*, never *sāhājja*.

Chapter 12 could not show that inherent **o** in *ek*, *dui*, *tin*, *chār*, *pāch*, since none of the five ends in a bare consonant. This one does. সা takes the *s* → *sh* tilt, so the whole is *shāhājjo*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

সাহায্য is Sanskrit *sāhāyya*, “companionship,” on *sahāya*, “a companion” — which is *saha-*, “together,” plus *√i*, “to go.” A helper goes along with you.

Both halves have secure English cousins. *Saha-* is PIE **sem-*, “together”: English **same**, Greek *homós* (**homogeneous**), Latin *similis* (**similar**). *√i* is PIE **h₁ey-*, “to go”: Latin *īre* gives **exit** and **transit**; Greek *ión* gives **ion**. So “help” is *same-going*, and English holds the pieces without ever building the word.

Grammar Lens: asking for help is where the respect ladder bites

Another noun + করা, like জিজ্ঞাসা করা. The respect sits where Chapter 13 put it — in করা’s ending:

who you are asking	“help”
তুই (<i>tui</i> , intimate)	সাহায্য কর (<i>kôr</i>)
তুমি (<i>tumi</i> , familiar)	সাহায্য করো (<i>kôro</i>)
আপনি (<i>āpni</i> , respectful)	সাহায্য করুন (<i>kôrun</i>)

Say *kôr* to a stranger and you were not rude by accident, but in grammar.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- spelling, then sound — “sāhāyya ... shāhājjo”
- the ladder — “sāhājjo kôr ... kôro ... kôrun”
- please help me — “āmāke sāhājjo kôrun”
- the two noun-verbs of this chapter — “jijñāsā kôrā ... sāhājjo kôrā”

Before you move on

Why does সাহায্য end in *-o* with nothing written there? (**The inherent vowel** — the thing the five numbers could not show.) Which form to a stranger? (করুন — *kôr* is for তুই.) What is a *sahāya*? (**One who goes with you.**)

15.4 ভালো লাগা (bhālo lāgā) — “to like,” which happens to you

Every verb so far has let you be the one doing it. Here is one that does not.

You’ll want to know: ভালো লাগা

ভালো লাগা — *bhālo lāgā* — **to like**

আমার ভালো লাগে (*āmār bhālo lāge*), “I like it.” Not *āmi* — *āmār*, “to me.”

The letters in this word

ভালো is yours from Chapter 5. The new half is লাগা: লা + গা, গ being a hard *g* as in *go*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

লাগা is Sanskrit *√lag*, “to attach, to stick”: *āmār bhālo lāge* says, literally, “**good sticks to me.**”

ভালোবাসা (*bhālobāsā*), “to love,” is ভালো plus বাসা, a verb no longer used alone. Its origin is genuinely disputed; the commonest proposal is Sanskrit *√vas*, “to dwell” — love as housed in goodness. If so it carries a startling cousin, since *√vas* is PIE **h₂wes-*, “to stay,” which became Old English *wesan* and so English **was**. That “if” is real, and stays open.

Grammar Lens: liking lands on you; loving you do

Bengali

word for word

আমার ভালো লাগে

to-me good sticks — **I like it**

আমার চা ভালো লাগে

to-me tea good sticks — **I like tea**

আমি ভালোবাসি

I love

That *āmār ...* shape is how Bengali says **I have** — আমার ... আছে, with আছে carrying the weight and no future of its own to give.

ভালোবাসা breaks the pattern on purpose: *āmi bhālobāsi* puts you in the subject’s chair. It is a noun too — “love” itself — as লেখা was “a piece of writing.” One form serves everybody. The harmony has nothing to bite on: *bāsi* and *bāse* keep their **ā**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*āmār bhālo lāge*” — hearing “to me,” not “I”
- I like tea — “*āmār chā bhālo lāge*” — the tea Bengali eats, “*chā khāwā*”
- the one you do — “*āmi bhālobāsi*” — one form, whoever is speaking
- the eight verbs of these two chapters — “*bhābā, bojhā, pōrā, lekḥā, neowā, jījñāsā kōrā, sāhājjo kōrā, bhālo lāgā*”

Before you move on

Who is the subject of *āmār bhālo lāge*, and what else is built that way? (**Not you** — the good is; আমার ... আছে, “I have,” and আছে has no future of its own to give.) Does *āmi bhālobāsi* behave the same, and would a woman say it differently? (**No**, and **no** — loving takes you as subject; Bengali has no grammatical gender.) Name two verbs that are also nouns. (ভালোবাসা “love,” লেখা “writing.”) Why *bāsi*, not *bosi*? (**Nothing to raise** — this stem has ā.)

Chapter 16

Tea, Water, Milk, and Rice

Modes: 👁 eyes (4) ⇌ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can offer or ask for tea, water, milk and rice politely in Bengali, reusing the respectful verb ending Chapter 7 already taught, and say which of the four words is a Chinese loan and which shares a root with a word two lessons later.

The chapter closes on ভাত, whose Sanskrit root — √bhaj, 'to divide, to share' — will resurface two lessons later in a very different word. The reader offers all four drinks and rice politely in one breath (chā khān, jôl khān, dudh khān, bhāt khān), all built on the same respectful form of খাওয়া Chapter 7 already taught rather than a new 'please' word, which is how this chapter realizes SPINE-POLITE-REQUEST-REPAIR without one. It reaches back to rescue three thin Chapter 7 grammar atoms (হওয়া's future, আসা's genderlessness, যাওয়া's respect ladder) and সাহায্য's doubled-letter sound rule, none revisited since Chapter 7-9.

16.1 চা (chā) — “tea,” and the first word you can politely offer

Last lesson you said *āmār chā bhālo lāge*, “I like tea,” without চা ever being taught on its own. Here it is, by itself — and a new job for a form you already own.

You'll want to know: চা

চা — *chā* — tea

The letters in this word

চা is চ (*chô*) with the vowel sign া (*ā*). চ is a plain, unaspirated *ch*, the sound at the start of English *church* with no puff of breath behind it — Bengali also has a breathy partner, ছ, for later.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

চা is not Sanskrit at all. It came into Bengali from **Persian** *čā*, which took it from **Chinese** *chá*. That is the overland route: China to Persia to Bengal, the same road Hindi and Punjabi travelled. The words that reached Europe — English *tea*, French *thé* — went the opposite way, by sea, from Hokkien Chinese *tê*, carried on Dutch trading ships. One drink, two ends of the same word, arriving by two different roads.

Grammar Lens: an offer, built on a form you already have

Chapter 13 taught you আপনি খান (*āpni khān*), the respectful form of খাওয়া. Put a noun in front of it and the very same words become a polite offer or request:

Bengali	what it does
আপনি খান	you eat / you drink (respectful)
চা খান	(please) have some tea

No new ending to learn — চা খান reuses exactly what Chapter 13 already gave you.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “chā” — tea
- *Say it*: the offer — “chā khān”
- *Say it*: the route it travelled — “chá ... čā ... chā”
- *Say it*: last lesson’s line again — “āmār chā bhālo lāge”
- *Recall*: say *jāwā*, then read আসা

Before you move on

Offer someone tea, politely. (চা খান.) Is চা inherited from Sanskrit? (No — it is a Chinese word that reached Bengali by way of

Persian.) What form does চা খান reuse? (আপনি খান, Chapter 13’s respectful “you eat/drink,” with no new ending.)

16.2 জল (jôl) — “water,” prised out of a phrase you already know

Chapter 13 taught you জল খাওয়া, “to drink water” — literally “water-eat” — without ever teaching জল by itself. Here it is, on its own.

You’ll want to know: জল

জল — *jôl* — **water**

জল খান — (please) drink some water, the same offer pattern as last lesson.

The letters in this word

জল is জ (*jô*) + ল (*l*), two bare consonants with no vowel sign between them. জ keeps its inherent vowel; ল, at the end of the word with nothing written after it, is silent — so *jôl*, one syllable, not *jô-lô*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

জল is Sanskrit জল (*jala*), inherited straight through Prakrit. Past Sanskrit its root is genuinely unsettled: one proposal traces it to PIE **g^welHo-*, “to gush forth, to spring” — but the same sources call a local, non-Indo-European origin “unlikely though possible.” No confident cousin is claimed here; the honest answer is that nobody is sure.

Bengali has a second word for water, most common in Bangladesh: পানি (*pani*). That one *is* on secure ground — Sanskrit *pānīya*, “drinkable,” built directly on √*pā*, “to drink,” the very root behind Chapter 13’s পান করা and English **potion**, **potable**. Two words for the same thing, one of disputed origin and one you can trace all the way home.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “jôl” — water, one syllable
- *Say it:* the offer — “jôl khān”
- *Say it:* the Bangladesh word, and its root — “pani ... pā, potion, potable”
- *Say it:* tea, then water — “chā khān ... jôl khān”
- *Recall:* read খাওয়া, then say *dækhā*

Before you move on

What did Chapter 13 already say with জল, without teaching it as a word? (জল খাওয়া, “to drink water.”) Is জল’s root secure? (**No** — genuinely disputed.) Which everyday synonym for water traces cleanly to “drinkable,” from the root behind *potion*? (পানি.)

16.3 দুধ (dudh) — “milk,” and the vowel this word refuses to keep

Chapter 15 met a word that had to end in a vowel nobody wrote — সাহায্য, *sāhājjo*. This word looks like it could do the same thing. It doesn’t.

You’ll want to know: দুধ

দুধ — *dudh* — milk

দুধ খান — (please) have some milk.

The letters in this word

দুধ is দ (*dô*) with the vowel sign ু (*u*), plus ধ (*dh*), a breathy dental *d*. Nothing is written after ধ — the same bare-consonant ending সাহায্য had.

The letters in this word

সাহায্য had to surface its inherent vowel — *sāhājjo*, not *sāhāj* — because its final letter is a doubled consonant, য্য, and a bare cluster like that cannot be said at all without a vowel to carry it. দুধ ends in

one plain consonant, ধ, which needs no such help. So Bengali leaves it silent: দুধ, not *dudho*. The spelling looks the same kind of “bare ending” in both words; whether the vowel survives depends on what it would take to pronounce the letter beneath it.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

দুধ is Sanskrit *dugdha*, the past participle of $\sqrt{duh}$ (“to milk”), from PIE **d^hewg^h-*, “to produce, to yield.” That root has exactly one secure English descendant, and it is not the word you would guess: **doughty**, “valiant,” through Old English *dohtig*, “capable, of use.” The word that *looks* like a cousin, **dough**, is not one — it comes from a completely different PIE root, **d^heyǵ^h-*, “to knead, to mould.” A close sound, two unrelated histories.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “dudh” — no trailing vowel
- *Say it*: the offer — “dudh khān”
- *Say it*: the two endings compared — “sāhājjo ... dudh”
- *Say it*: three drinks so far — “chā khān ... jôl khān ... dudh khān”
- *Recall*: say *jānā*

Before you move on

Why does সাহায্য keep its final vowel while দুধ doesn’t? (সাহায্য **ends in a doubled consonant that cannot be said bare**; দুধ’s **single ধ can.**) Is দুধ’s root related to English *dough*? (**No** — that is a different PIE root; the real cousin is *doughty*.)

16.4 ভাত (bhāt) — “rice,” and a root that will name a person too

Three drinks so far. This chapter closes on the word for the meal itself — and a root worth remembering, because it comes back.

You'll want to know: ভাত

ভাত — *bhāt* — **cooked rice**

ভাত খান — (please) eat some rice; in everyday Bengali, “have a meal.”

The letters in this word

ভাত is ভ (*bhō*, a *b* with a puff of breath) with the vowel sign া̃ (*ā*), plus ত (*t*), silent at the end for the same reason দুধ's ধ was: a single bare consonant needs no vowel to carry it, so *bhāt*, not *bhāto*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

ভাত is Sanskrit *bhakta*, “portioned out, shared” — the past participle of *√bhaj*, “to divide, to distribute, to allot.” PIE **b^heh₂g-* sits behind it. Rice, in this word's own history, is not “the grain” but **the share that was given out** — the meal as a portion handed to you. Hold onto that root. Two lessons from now, the very same Sanskrit verb will turn up again, naming someone rather than something.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bhāt” — cooked rice, no trailing vowel
- the offer — “bhāt khān”
- all four, in order — “chā khān ... jōl khān ... dudh khān ... bhāt khān”
- the two silent endings, back to back — “dudh ... bhāt”
- the root that shares — “bhaj — to divide, to distribute”

Before you move on

What does ভাত literally mean, at the root? (“**Portioned out, shared**” — *√bhaj*, “**to divide**.”) Offer all four of this chapter's words, politely, in one breath. (**Chā khān, jōl khān, dudh khān, bhāt khān.**) Why do দুধ and ভাত both drop their final vowel? (**Each ends in one plain consonant, easily said bare.**) A quick run back through Chapter 13 while you're at it: which verb does

Bengali reach for when **আছে** runs out of future? (**হবে.**) How many forms of “I come” does a Bengali speaker need, whoever is talking? (**One** — *āmi āsi.*) And “you go” to a stranger, versus to a friend? (**যান** *jān*, versus **যাও** *jāo.*) **সাহায্য**’s doubled letter — said how? (**jj**, not *yy*.)

Chapter 17

Three Words Free, and One Dot

Modes: ✍ pen (5) ⇌ Hands-free start: none of the 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can read চা, জল and দুধ off the page without learning a single new shape, then write the retroflex ড and the dot that turns it into the flap inside পড়া — the verb for what I am doing.

The verb for what the reader is doing is read off the page, once the dot beneath ড has turned a retroflex stop into the flap Bengali actually says.

17.1 চা — tea, read

Write চ, and say where in the mouth it is made.

Script

চ + া → চা

One consonant and one sign. **chā** — *tea*, and the shortest word this book will ask anyone to read.

It is also a loanword, and the shape of the loan is visible in the sound. Chinese *chá* travelled overland through Persian *čā* and arrived in Bengali as চা. The same leaf travelled by sea, through Hokkien and Dutch traders, and arrived in English as *tea*. One plant, two roads, two words — and which word a language uses tells you which road the leaf took to get there.

Two pieces, and both of them arrived long before this page: চ from the consonant chapter, া from the very first script chapter. Nothing here is

new except the permission to put them together — which is what a reading lesson is for.

Your turn

- *Read it:* চা
- *Write it:* চা

Before you move on

How many pieces are in চা? (**Two**.) And why does English say *tea* where Bengali says *chā*? (The word came **by sea**, not overland.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

17.2 জল — water, read

Write জ, and say what separates it from চ.

Script

জ + ল → জল

Two letters. **No signs at all.**

jôl — *water*. And the vowel in the middle of it, the ô you can plainly hear, is written nowhere. It is on the page because জ carries it, the way every bare Bengali consonant does.

This is the shortest possible demonstration of the word **abugida**, which the very first script lesson used and this word finally earns. An alphabet writes every vowel. An abugida writes a consonant that already has one, and marks only the vowels that are different. জল is what that looks like when nothing is different.

Set it beside the drink from earlier in this chapter:

চা — one consonant, one sign জল — two consonants, no signs

Both are two syllables in the mouth and neither spells them the way an English reader would expect. The chapter before this one noted that Bengali *eats* its drinks — *jôl khāwā*, “to eat water” — so these two words keep company in more than one way.

Your turn

- *Read it:* জল
- *Read it:* চা জল
- *Write it:* জল

Before you move on

How many vowel signs are in জল? (**None.**) So where does the ô come from? (**The consonant carries it.**) And what does the word mean? (**Water.**)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

17.3 দুধ — milk, and the three words this chapter gave back

Write দ and ধ, and say what separates them.

Script

দ + ু + ধ → দুধ

- দ with ু under it — *du*, voice on, no breath
- ধ — voice on, **with** breath, and its own vowel gone at the end of the word

dudh — *milk*. Two letters that a reader half-attending will read as the same shape twice, and the word says them differently: the first closes clean, the second opens onto air. Say it slowly enough to hear the second one leak.

This is the whole point of a script that spells the breath. English writes *d* for both and lets speakers sort it out; Bengali writes the difference down, which is more to learn and less to guess.

Count what this chapter added. **No new pieces at all** — and three more words handed to the eye:

- চা — *tea*
- জল — *water*

- দুধ — *milk*

Twenty-five pieces, ten words. That is the point of a reading chapter: the eight consonants of the last script chapter were bought once and are still paying, and the three words on this page cost nothing new to read. Two of the three turn on the breathy pairs that chapter drilled, which is the distinction an English-speaking reader has no habit for at all.

Your turn

- *Read it:* চা জল দুধ
- *Write it:* দুধ
- *Write it:* চা জল দুধ

Before you move on

Which letter of দুধ lets the breath out? (**The second.**) How many pieces did this chapter add? (**None.**) And how many words can you read now? (**Ten.**)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

17.4 ড — the tongue curled back

Read দুধ. Then write ড and say what it does.

Script

ড

দ, which you have had since the chapter of breathy letters, is made with the tongue flat against the back of the teeth. ড is the same voiced stop made with the tongue **curled back** to the ridge behind them.

English has neither one exactly. An English *d* lands between the two, which is why an English ear hears দ and ড as the same letter and a Bengali ear hears two, and why this is the pair that gives a learner's accent away first. Say *dô* with the tongue-tip on the teeth, then again with it curled back an inch. The second sound is duller and further away.

Now put the dot you learned two chapters ago underneath it:

ড + ঙ → ড

That is not a *d* at all any more. It is a **flap**: the curled tongue strikes the roof once, on its way past, the way the *tt* in American *butter* does. In running Bengali the flap is far more common than the plain ড, which is why this letter is nearly always met wearing its dot.

Between them, the plain letter and the dotted one are one shape and two very different jobs — the same bargain য and য় struck.

Your turn

- Write it: ড
- Write it: ড
- Say it: দ then ড — teeth, then curled back
- Say it: the flap in ড, once, quickly
- Write it: য ড

Before you move on

Where is ড made? (**Tongue curled back**, behind the teeth-ridge.)
 What does the dot change it into? (**A flap**.) And which other letter you know takes the same dot? (য.)
 Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

17.5 পড়া — to read, read

Write ড and say what the dot did. Then write প.

Script

প + ড + া → পড়া

- প — with its inherent ô
- ড — the flap: curled tongue, one strike
- া — the vowel sign

pôṛā — *to read*. Three pieces, and the middle one is the whole reason this word waited: without the dot it would be *pôḍā*, and Bengali does not say that.

The word is worth having on the page rather than only in the ear, because it is the one word in this book that names what the book is asking you to do. The verbs chapter gave it to you as a sound. The flap it hangs on arrived one lesson ago.

One thing to hear rather than see. The flap is **fast**. A learner who has been told “curl the tongue back” tends to hold the position and produce a long, deliberate *ḍ*; the Bengali sound is a single strike in passing, gone before it is noticed. If it feels careful, it is wrong.

And two words from the food chapter, back for a moment:

চা · জল

Your turn

- *Read it:* পড়া
- *Write it:* পড়া
- *Read it:* চা
- *Read it:* জল
- *Say it:* *pôṛā* — flap it, do not hold it

Before you move on

How many pieces in পড়া? (**Three**.) What would it say without the dot? (*pôḍā* — a sound Bengali does not use here.) And should the flap feel long or short? (**Short** — one strike.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 18

Friend, Family, Brother, and Sister

Modes: 👁 eyes (4) ⇌ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a friend, my family, my brother and my sister in Bengali, none of them marked for gender, and say which are borrowed whole from Sanskrit and which evolved by sound change, including one that turns out to share a root with the previous chapter's rice.

The chapter closes on বোন, which is not related to English 'sister' at all: it traces through Sanskrit bhaginī and bhaga, 'a share,' back to the same √bhaḥ that named Chapter 10's ভাত. The reader names all four people (bôndhu, pôribār, bhāi, bon), states which two are tatsamas kept whole from Sanskrit (বন্ধু, পরিবার) and which two are tadbhavas worn down by sound change (ভাই, বোন), and counts a sibling or two using Chapter 6's numbers. It reaches back to rescue all five of Chapter 6's numbers atoms, unrevisited since the chapter that introduced them.

18.1 বন্ধু (bôndhu) — “friend,” someone you are bound to

Chapter 3 taught you to exchange names. This chapter names the people themselves — starting with the one whose acquaintance you were glad to make.

You'll want to know: বন্ধু

বন্ধু — bôndhu — friend

আমার বন্ধু (*āmār bôndhu*) — my friend. One word, whether that friend is a man or a woman: Chapter 13 already told you Bengali carries no grammatical gender on its verbs, its adjectives, or its nouns, and বন্ধু is the plainest place to feel it — no ending changes, no second word to learn.

The letters in this word

বন্ধু is ব (*bô*) + ঙ্গ (*ndhô*, a conjunct: ন joined to the breathy dental ধ) + ু (*u*). The conjunct is two consonants pressed together with no vowel between them, said as one cluster: *n-dhu*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

বন্ধু is Sanskrit বন্ধু (*bandhu*), kept essentially whole rather than worn down the way চা or ভাত were — Bengali took this one straight from Sanskrit rather than inheriting it through centuries of sound change. It is built on $\sqrt{\text{bandh}}$ (“to bind, to tie”), from PIE **b^hend^h-* — and here, unusually, the English cousin is not buried: **bind**, **bond** and **band** all come from the very same root. Bengali did not need to explain what a friend is; the word does it for you. A বন্ধু is, at the root, someone you are bound to.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “bôndhu” — friend
- *Say it*: “āmār bôndhu” — my friend, no gender marked either way
- *Say it*: the root, and its English family — “bandh ... bind, bond, band”
- *Recall*: say *pôṛā*, then read লেখা, then say *neowā*

Before you move on

Give “my friend” in Bengali. (আমার বন্ধু.) What root is বন্ধু built on, and which English words share it? ($\sqrt{\text{bandh}}$, “to bind” — **bind**, **bond**, **band**.) Is বন্ধু a word Bengali inherited through sound change, or one it kept whole from Sanskrit? (**Kept whole** — a *tatsama*.) Does বন্ধু change for a friend who is a woman? (**No** — Chapter 13 already told you why: no grammatical gender, anywhere in the language.)

18.2 পরিবার (pôribār) — “family,” what surrounds you

Last lesson named one person you are bound to. This one names the whole group.

You’ll want to know: পরিবার

পরিবার — *pôribār* — family

আমার পরিবার (*āmār pôribār*) — my family.

The letters in this word

পরিবার is প (*pô*) + রি (*ri*) + বা (*bā*) + র (*r*, silent at the end, a bare consonant with nothing written after it). Four syllables in the spelling, three said aloud: *pô-ri-bār*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

পরিবার is Sanskrit পরিবার (*parivāra*), a second word Bengali kept whole from Sanskrit rather than letting it wear down — like বন্ধু, another tatsama. It is built from **pari-**, “around, about” (PIE ***peri-**, the same prefix English itself borrowed for **peri-meter** and **peri-phery**), plus *√vr̥* (“to cover, to surround,” PIE ***h₂wer-**). That root’s secure cousins are Latin *operiō*, “to cover,” and Lithuanian *suverti*, “to shut” — no English word is claimed here, since none is secure. Put the pieces together and a পরিবার is, at the root, **what stands around you and covers you**.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “pôribār” — family
- *Say it:* “āmār pôribār” — my family
- *Say it:* the two pieces — “pari-, around ... vr̥, to cover”
- *Say it:* a friend, then a family — “bôndhu ... pôribār”
- *Recall:* say *jijñāsā kôrā*, then read সাহায্য করা, then say *bhālo lāgā*

Before you move on

Give “my family” in Bengali. (আমার পরিবার.) What does পরিবার mean at the root, piece by piece? (“**Around**” plus “**to cover**” — **what surrounds and covers you.**) Does its root *vṛ* have a secure English cousin? (**No** — the secure cousins are Latin and Lithuanian.)

18.3 ভাই (bhāi) — “brother,” which never stopped being the word “brother”

Two tatsamas so far, both kept whole from Sanskrit. This one took the other road — worn down by sound change until it barely looks related to where it started. Except it does.

You’ll want to know: ভাই

ভাই — *bhāi* — brother

আমার ভাই (*āmār bhāi*) — my brother.

The letters in this word

ভাই is ভা (*bhā*, the breathy *b* from ভাত and ভালো) plus ই (*i*), a full vowel letter rather than a sign — the two vowels run together into one syllable, *bhāi*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

ভাই is Sanskrit *bhrātṛ*, worn down through Magadhi Prakrit *bhāi* — a **tadbhava** this time, not a tatsama like বন্ধু and পরিবার: Bengali inherited this one through centuries of sound change rather than lifting it whole. And PIE **b^hréh₂tēr* sits behind *bhrātṛ*, the same root that gives English **brother**, Latin **frāter** and Greek **phrátēr**. Nothing here is a cousin standing in for the real thing: ভাই and “brother” are, six thousand years apart, **the same word**.

Bengali also uses family words to address people outside the family: an older man might be called দাদা (*dādā*, “elder brother”) as a mark of respect, whether or not he is any relation at all. That is a light touch on a habit this chapter will not turn into a system — but it is worth

naming, since it means বন্ধু and ভাই are not always as far apart as they look.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “bhāi” — brother
- *Say it*: “āmār bhāi” — my brother
- *Say it*: the same word, two languages — “bhrāṭṛ ... brother”
- *Say it*: friend, family, brother — “bôndhu ... pôribār ... bhāi”
- *Recall*: say *chā*, then read জন

Before you move on

Give “my brother” in Bengali. (আমার ভাই.) Is ভাই a cousin of English “brother,” or the same word by descent? (**The same word** — PIE *b^hréh₂tēr*, no invention needed.) Is ভাই a tatsama like বন্ধু and পরিবার, or a tadbhava? (**A tadbhava** — worn down through Prakrit, not kept whole.)

18.4 বোন (bon) — “sister,” and the root it shares with rice

ভাই (*bhāi*) turned out to be the very word “brother.” This one does not — and where it comes from instead is the surprise this chapter has been saving.

You’ll want to know: বোন

বোন — *bon* — sister

আমার বোন (*āmār bon*) — my sister.

The letters in this word

বোন is ব with the vowel sign ো (*bo*) plus ন (*n*), silent at the end — one plain consonant, no cluster, so the inherent vowel drops exactly as it did on দুধ and ভাত: *bon*, not *bono*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

English “sister” descends from PIE ***swésōr**. বোন **does not**. It is a tadbhava through Magadhi Prakrit **bahinī*, from Old Indo-Aryan **baghinī* — a doublet of Sanskrit’s own *bhaginī*, “one with a share,” built on *bhaga*, “a share, a portion, good fortune.” And *bhaga* is a noun from the very same verb that named this chapter’s rice two lessons ago: *√bhaj* (“to divide, to share out”), PIE ***b^heh₂g-**. ভাত is “the portion given”; বোন is “the one with a portion.” Bengali’s word for sister and Bengali’s word for rice are, underneath, cousins. Its word for sister and English’s are not.

The same light touch as last lesson’s দাদা applies here: an older woman may be addressed as দিদি (*didi*, “elder sister”) as a mark of respect, family or not.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bon” — sister, no trailing vowel
- “āmār bon” — my sister
- the shared root — “bhaj ... bhāt, bon”
- all four of this chapter’s people — “bôndhu, pôribār, bhāi, bon”
- a count of them, using Chapter 12’s numbers — “āmār ek bhāi. āmār dui bon.” — one brother. two sisters.

Before you move on

Is বোন related to English “sister”? (**No** — different root entirely.) What is it related to instead? (ভাত — both trace to *√bhaj*, “to share.”) Say “one brother” and “two sisters.” (**Ek bhāi. Dui bon.**) Which of those two numbers keeps a vowel Hindi and Marathi lost? (দুই — the *-i* after the old *dv-*.) And which number wears the chandrabindu? (পাঁচ, five — not needed here, but still the only one that has it.)

Chapter 19

Family, on the Page

Modes: ✍ pen (2) ⇔ Hands-free start: none of the 2 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can read পরিবার and ভাই, and say why the i at the end of ভাই takes its full letter even though it is nowhere near the start of the word.

Brother read as three pieces, with the independent-vowel rule doing work in an unexpected place — nothing to lean on turns out to mean what it says, not start of word.

19.1 পরিবার — family, read

Write প, then write ি and say which side of a consonant it goes on.

Script

প + র + ি + ব + া + র → পরিবার

Six pieces — the longest word this book has asked anyone to assemble.

- প — bare, so it carries its own inherent vowel: *pô*
- র with ি in front of it — *ri*
- ব with া — *bā*
- র — *rô*, worn away at the end

pôribār — *family*, the tatsama from the chapter before this one: *pari*-“around” plus a root meaning “to cover.” What surrounds you.

The first letter is the lesson here. প wears no sign at all, and a reader who has spent two chapters looking for marks will skate over it and say *pri*. It is *pô*. **A consonant with nothing on it is not silent — it is carrying the vowel this whole script is named for.**

That inherent ô was the very first thing the script chapters taught, back on ন, and this is the first word long enough to make it matter in the middle of a reading rather than at the start of a letter.

Your turn

- Read it: পরিবার
- Read it: চা
- Write it: পরিবার

Before you move on

What vowel does the bare প carry? (ô.) How many pieces are in পরিবার? (Six.) And what does the word mean? (***Family***.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

19.2 ভাই — brother, read

Write ই, and say when a vowel gets its own letter instead of a sign.

Script

ভ + া + ই → ভাই

- ভ with া — *bhā*, breath and all
- ই — the full letter, standing on its own

bhāi — *brother*. And the last piece is the rule from the independent-*i* lesson, many chapters back, doing work in an unexpected place: the *i* here is not at the start of the word, yet it still takes its full letter. Why? Because

the thing in front of it is া, a vowel. There is no consonant for a sign to sit on.

“Nothing to lean on” does not mean “start of word.” It means what it says.

The word itself is worth a line. The chapter before this one set it out: this is not a cousin of English *brother*, it **is** that word, worn down through Prakrit from the same ancestor — a tadbhava rather than a tatsama. Its sister বোন, from the same chapter, is not related to English *sister* at all.

Put it beside the family word from two lessons ago and the good from the consonant chapter, and the shared shapes are obvious:

পরিবার · ভালো · ভাই

Your turn

- *Read it:* ভাই
- *Read it:* পরিবার ভালো ভাই
- *Write it:* ভাই

Before you move on

Why does ভাই end in the full letter ই rather than the sign? (The piece before it is a **vowel** — nothing to lean on.) And is ভাই a cousin of English *brother*, or the same word? (**The same word.**) Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 20

Eye, Mouth, Nose, and Heart

Modes: 👁 eyes (4) ⇌ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name my eye, my mouth, my nose and my heart in Bengali, and say which of those four words is settled Indo-European, which is a genuinely disputed origin, and which is borrowed whole from Sanskrit with the widest confirmed cousin family in this book.

The chapter closes on হৃদয়, whose root hṛd traces to PIE kṛd- alongside English heart, Greek kardía and Latin cor — the widest, most secure cousin family taught anywhere in this track. The reader names all four body words (chokh, mukh, nāk, hridoy) and states each one’s status: চোখ an ardhatsama half worn down by sound change, মুখ a tatsama with a genuinely disputed

Dravidian-versus-Indo-European origin, নাক a tadbhava with a settled root, হৃদয় a tatsama with a poetic tadbhava twin, হিয়া. It reaches back to rescue Chapter 8’s flapped-ড sound rule and its causative -আনো grammar, neither revisited since Chapter 8.

20.1 চোখ (chokh) — “eye,” built on the root of “to see”

A new chapter, and a new use for Chapter 5’s check-in — the parts of you that check-in is actually asking about.

You’ll want to know: চোখ

চোখ — *chokh* — eye

আমার চোখ (*āmār chokh*) — my eye.

The letters in this word

চোখ is চ with the vowel sign ষ্চো (cho) plus খ (kh, the puffed sound you already own from খাওয়া), silent at the end — one bare consonant, so no trailing vowel: *chokh*, not *chokho*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

চোখ traces to Sanskrit *cakṣus*, “eye” — a noun built directly on $\sqrt{cakṣ}$ (“to see”), from PIE $*k^wek-$, “to appear, to see.” The nearest named cousin outside Indo-Aryan is Persian *čašm*, “eye”; no secure English descendant is claimed for this one. And the word itself has travelled: Old Bengali softened *cakṣus* down through *cakhu* and *coukh* to today’s চোখ — half kept from Sanskrit, half worn smooth by three centuries of sound change, which is why this kind of word gets its own name, **ardhatatsama**, “half a tatsama.”

Your turn

- *Say it*: “chokh” — eye, no trailing vowel
- *Say it*: “āmār chokh” — my eye
- *Say it*: the verb it grew from — “cakṣ ... cakṣus ... chokh”
- *Say it*: the other “see” verb you already own — “dækhā”
- *Recall*: say *dudh*, then read ভাত

Before you move on

Give “my eye” in Bengali. (আমার চোখ.) What Sanskrit verb is চোখ built on? ($\sqrt{cakṣ}$, “to see.”) Is চোখ a tatsama, kept whole like বন্ধু, or fully worn down like ভাই? (Neither — an **ardhatatsama**, half of each.)

20.2 মুখ (mukh) — “mouth, face,” a word two families both claim

চোখ (*chokh*) was half old sound, half new. This word is a full tatsama again — and its own history is a real, unresolved argument among linguists.

You'll want to know: মুখ

মুখ — *mukh* — **mouth, face**

আমার মুখ (*āmār mukh*) — my mouth, my face.

The letters in this word

মুখ is ম with the vowel sign ঁ (*mu*) plus খ (*kh*), silent at the end — one bare consonant again: *mukh*, not *mukho*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

মুখ is a **tatsama**, taken whole from Sanskrit মুখ (*mukha*) — a tadbhava twin, মু (*mu*), also exists, but only buried inside compound words, never standing alone. What makes মুখ worth pausing on is where *mukha* itself came from, and nobody fully agrees. One well-known account, Pokorny's, derives it from **Dravidian**, a language family with no Sanskrit or PIE connection at all. Another, Mayrhofer's, argues for an **Indo-European** source instead, pointing to the word's presence in the Rigveda and in Iranian languages as evidence it is old enough to be inherited rather than borrowed. Both scholars are serious; neither has won. The honest report is that মুখ's deepest root is still an open question.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “mukh” — mouth, face
- “āmār mukh” — my face
- the two rival accounts — “Dravidian ... or Indo-European”
- an eye, then a mouth — “chokh ... mukh”

Before you move on

Give “my face” in Bengali. (আমার মুখ.) Is মুখ's ultimate origin settled? (**No** — genuinely disputed between a Dravidian and an Indo-European account.) What is মুখ's tadbhava twin, and where does it survive? (মু, **only inside compound words, never**

alone.)

20.3 নাক (nāk) — “nose,” the same word as English’s, worn down differently

মুখ’s origin was an open argument. This one is settled, and it lands somewhere you have seen before.

You’ll want to know: নাক

নাক — *nāk* — nose

আমার নাক (*āmār nāk*) — my nose.

The letters in this word

নাক is ন with the vowel sign া (*nā*) plus ক (*k*), silent at the end: *nāk*, not *nāko*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

নাক is Sanskrit *nas*, inherited through Prakrit **ṇakka** — a tadbhava, like ভাই and বোন before it. Its PIE root is ***néh₂s-**, and this one is as secure as roots get: it is the direct ancestor of English **nose** itself, and of Latin **nāsus**, which gives English **nasal**. Three languages, one inherited word, three different roads of sound change — Bengali’s road ran the vowel through Prakrit’s *a*, dropped Sanskrit’s final *-s*, and doubled the *k* along the way.

Your turn

- Say it: “nāk” — nose
- Say it: “āmār nāk” — my nose
- Say it: the three cousins — “nāk ... nose ... nāsus”
- Say it: three of this chapter’s words — “chokh ... mukh ... nāk”
- Recall: say *bôndhu*, then read পরিবার

Before you move on

Give “my nose” in Bengali. (আমার নাক.) Which two English words share নাক’s root directly? (**Nose**, and **nasal** by way of Latin *nāsus*.) Is that link as secure as মুখ’s, or more so? (**More** — নাক’s root is settled; মুখ’s is still argued over.)

20.4 হৃদয় (hridoy) — “heart,” the oldest cousin this book has shown you

Three body words, three different histories — half-worn, disputed, and settled. This last one closes the chapter on the most secure cousin of them all.

You’ll want to know: হৃদয়

হৃদয় — *hridoy* — **heart**

আমার হৃদয় (*āmār hridoy*) — my heart.

The letters in this word

হৃদয় is হ with the vowel sign ্র (hri, the “vocalic r” sign, a vowel Bengali keeps only in words borrowed from Sanskrit) plus দ (*dô*) plus য় (*yô*, a glide, not a plain stop — this is why the word ends audibly, *-doy*, rather than falling silent the way দুধ and নাক did).

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

হৃদয় is a **tatsama**, Sanskrit হৃদয় (*hṛdaya*) taken whole. A tadbhava twin also exists, হিয়া (*hiya*), but it lives in poetry and song rather than everyday speech — the reverse of মুখ’s pair, where the tatsama is the everyday word. Inside হৃদয় sits *hrd*, and its PIE root is ***kérđ-**, “heart” — the direct ancestor of English **heart** itself, Greek **kardía** (English **cardiac**), and Latin **cor** (English **core**, **courage**). Four languages, one root, and nowhere in this book has the family been so wide or so certain.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “hridoy” — heart
- “āmār hridoy” — my heart
- the wide family — “hṛd ... heart, kardía, cor”
- all four of this chapter’s words — “chokh, mukh, nāk, hridoy”
- one more word from Chapter 18, sharing this lesson’s warmth of feeling — “bhāi,” brother

Before you move on

Give “my heart” in Bengali. (আমার হৃদয়.) Name three English words that share হৃদয়’s root. (**Heart, cardiac, core** — or **courage**.) Two quick reaches further back: what does the dot under ড় tell you to do, the letter পড়া taught? (**Flap it**, curling the tongue back.) And what does the ending -আনো do to a verb, the way ভাবা showed on দেখা? (**Hands the doing to someone else** — দেখা “see” becomes দেখানো “show.”)

Chapter 21

The Face on the Page

Modes: ✍ pen (5) ⇌ Hands-free start: none of the 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can read চোখ, নাক, মুখ and হৃদয় off the page, hear which of them ends in breath and which in silence, and write the one sign the fourth of them needed.

Heart is read last because it is the only one of the four words that needed a new sign, and the chapter ends with all four read back — thirteen pieces, one of them bought today.

21.1 চোখ — eye, read

Read ভাই. Then write চ.

Script

চ + ো + খ → চোখ

- চ wrapped in ো — *cho*
- খ — the breathy *k*, and at the end of a word the breath is what a listener actually hears

chokh — *eye*. Three pieces, no new shapes, and it is the first word of the chapter on the face.

Look at the ো again. It is the one vowel sign that arrives in two halves, one on each side of its consonant, and the eye has to take the whole cluster in at once rather than reading left to right through it. That is a small

demonstration of something true of the whole script: **a Bengali syllable is a unit on the page, not a sequence.** The letters inside it may be written before, after, above or below each other, and the reader assembles the syllable, not the strokes.

It is worth noticing what this word is asking of you at the moment you read it. The organ named is the one doing the reading.

Your turn

- *Read it:* চোখ
- *Write it:* চোখ
- *Write it:* চ ছ
- *Say it:* *chokh*, letting the breath out at the end

Before you move on

How many pieces in চোখ? (**Three.**) Which sign sits on both sides of its consonant? (়.) And how many of the three shapes were new today? (**None.**)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

21.2 নাক — nose, read

Read চোখ. Then write ক.

Script

ন + া + ক → নাক

nāk — *nose*. Every piece of this word came out of the chapter that taught you to read the greeting, several thousand words ago. Nothing has been added since, and nothing needed to be.

Two things about the last letter. ক ends the word, so its inherent *ô* is gone — the mouth closes and stops, with no vowel after it. And the closure is **clean**: no breath escapes, which is the whole difference between this letter and the খ that ended চোখ a moment ago. Read the two words one after the other and the contrast is unmissable:

চোখ — ends in air নাক — ends in silence

That pair is the best short demonstration of aspiration this book can offer, because both words are things you can point at on your own face.

Say it and mean it. নাক is a plain, unglamorous, everyday word, and being able to read one of those off the page without help is a better measure of progress than being able to read a beautiful one.

Your turn

- *Read it:* নাক
- *Read it:* চোখ নাক
- *Write it:* নাক
- *Write it:* ক খ গ
- *Say it:* *chokh*, then *nāk* — air, then silence

Before you move on

What happens to ক's inherent vowel at the end of নাক? (**It is gone.**) Which of চোখ and নাক ends in breath? (চোখ.) And which chapter's letters is নাক built from? (**The first script chapter's.**) Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

21.3 মুখ — mouth, read

Write খ, then write ু underneath it.

Script

ম + ু + খ → মুখ

- ম with ু hanging under it — *mu*
- খ — the breathy *k*, and at the end of a word its inherent vowel is gone, so what is left is the closure and the puff

mukh — *mouth*, from the chapter on the face. A tatsama: kept whole out of Sanskrit rather than worn down on the way.

The end of this word is where a new reader loses the breath. English speakers finishing a word on *k* stop the air dead; Bengali lets it out. Say *mu*,

close on the back of the tongue, and then open. If the last thing a listener hears is air, it was right.

There is a smaller thing worth seeing on the page. Three letters, one sign, and the sign is the only mark below the head-line in the whole word. A Bengali word's information is not spread evenly — most of it rides on the band, and the occasional piece that drops below is doing work the eye must not skip.

Your turn

- *Read it:* মুখ
- *Read it:* ভালো
- *Write it:* মুখ

Before you move on

What happens to the breath at the end of মুখ? (It **comes out** — the letter is the breathy one.) And where is the only mark below the head-line? (Under the **first** letter.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

21.4 ঙ্গ — the vowel that used to be an *r*

Read মুখ. Then write ঙ্গ and say which side of the head-line it hangs on.

Script

ঙ

A hook hanging under its consonant, in the same country as ঙ্গ. It is a **vowel sign**, and it says **ri**.

The reason it is filed with the vowels and not with ঞ is a piece of history worth two minutes. Sanskrit had a sound that behaved like a vowel and was made like an *r*: a syllable you could build a word around with no other vowel in it at all. English does this without noticing — the second syllable of *butter* has no vowel letter doing any work, only the *r*. Sanskrit wrote that syllable, and counted it among its vowels.

Bengali kept the sign and gave up the sound. What a Bengali reader says today is plain **ri**. So the mark is a vowel that no longer sounds like the thing it is named after, and its position in the alphabet is a fossil.

হ + ্র → হ্র

Look at where it goes and what it does to the letter above it. On হ the hook is tucked into the letter's own tail, which is why this combination looks like a single new shape rather than a letter plus a mark. That is normal for this sign and it is the main difficulty it presents: ্র is a mark that hides.

Your turn

- Write it: ্র
- Write it: হ্র
- Write it: ্র then ্র — both below the line
- Read it: নাক

Before you move on

Is ্র a consonant or a vowel sign? (**A vowel sign.**) What does it say in Bengali today? (**ri.**) And is it the letter র? (**No** — a different mark, in a different place.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

21.5 হৃদয় — heart, and the face read whole

Write হ্র. Then write দ.

Script

হ + ্র + দ + য় → হৃদয়

- হ্র — the breath with the hidden hook under it, *hri*
- দ — the dental *d*, carrying its inherent *ô*
- য় — the dotted glide, closing the word

hridoy — *heart*. Four pieces, and three of the four are things this book bought for other words entirely: the **দ** came from milk, the **য়** came from the verb of being, and only the hook was bought for this word alone.

That is the ordinary economy of a syllabary, and it is why a reader's progress accelerates. The first word cost nine lessons. This one cost one.

The spelling is also a small piece of evidence. **হৃদয়** is a **tatsama** — a word Bengali took out of Sanskrit whole rather than wearing it down over centuries — and you can see that in the letters. A worn-down word would have lost this hook long ago, the way **ভাই** lost the one its Sanskrit ancestor had. Spelling is where a language keeps its receipts.

Now the whole chapter, off the page:

চোখ · নাক · মুখ · হৃদয়

Four words, thirteen pieces, one new sign between them.

Your turn

- *Read it:* হৃদয়
- *Read it:* চোখ নাক মুখ হৃদয়
- *Write it:* হৃদয়
- *Say it:* all four, pointing at each

Before you move on

How many pieces in **হৃদয়**? (**Four**.) How many of them were bought for this word? (**One** — the hook.) Which letter is wearing a dot? (**য়**.) And name the four words of this chapter in Bengali. (চোখ, নাক, মুখ, হৃদয়.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 22

Please, Sorry, and Welcome

Modes: 👁 eyes (4) ⇌ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say please and sorry in Bengali, excuse myself politely, and welcome someone with a word that carries the same 'hither' prefix already met on the verb for coming.

The chapter closes on স্বাগতম, 'welcome', literally 'a good coming': su-, 'good' (PIE h1su-, cousin of Greek eu-), fused by ordinary sandhi onto āgata, 'arrived', which opens with the same ā- 'hither' prefix already met on āsā, this time riding √gam, PIE g^wem-, the secure direct ancestor of English come. The reader gives all four new words of the chapter — doya kore, dukkhito, maf korben, shbagotom — closing the two courtesy concepts, please and sorry, this book had never taught, and a third greeting concept, welcome.

22.1 দয়া করে (doya kore) — “please,” a kindness done

The heart word closed the last chapter. A new one opens on a feeling that starts in the same place — and a word this book has never taught you before now.

You'll want to know: দয়া করে

দয়া করে — *doya kore* — please

দয়া করে বসুন (*doya kore bôshun*) — please, sit.

The letters in this word

দয়া is দ (*dô*) plus য় (the glide already met inside হৃদয়) with the vowel sign া (*ā*): *doyā*. করে is ক (*kô*) plus র (*r*) with the vowel sign ে (*e*): *kôre*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

দয়া is Sanskrit दया (*dayā*), “compassion, pity.” Most Indo-Europeanists trace its root back to PIE **deh₂-*, “to divide, to apportion” — the same root proposed for Greek *daíomai*, “to divide,” and *dêmos*, “a portion of land, the people,” which English holds without inheriting it directly: **democracy**, **epidemic**, **demographic**. If the comparison is right, compassion and sharing are the same idea at the root — you feel दया for someone by dividing your own good fortune with them, the warmth this book already located in हृदय, the heart.

Grammar Lens: করা wears a new outfit

Noun plus করা already builds a verb — কাজ করা, “to work”; জিজ্ঞাসা করা, “to ask.” Here করা takes a different shape, করে, “having done”: not a full sentence on its own, but a piece that leans on the next word.

shape of করা	job	example
a finite ending (করি, করে, করেন...)	states an action	আমি কাজ করি — I work
করে, unchanged	“having done,” leaning forward	দয়া করে বসুন — please, sit

দয়া করে literally says “having done a kindness, [now do this]” — the kindness is named, then the actual request follows.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “doya” — compassion, then “kore” — having done
- “doya kore bôshun” — please, sit
- the family this word joins — “kāj kôrā ... jījñāsā kôrā ... doya kore”

Before you move on

What does দয়া করে mean literally, piece by piece? (“**Having done a kindness**” — দয়া “compassion” + করে “having done.”) Is করে here a full sentence by itself? (**No** — it leans forward onto the request that follows it.) One quick reach back: what root does দয়া share with a very old disputed argument about **democracy**? (PIE **deh₂-**, “**to divide**” — the same proposed root behind Greek *dêmos*, and behind the warmth হৃদয়, the heart, already carries — two lessons after নাক, the nose, which shares none of it.)

22.2 দুঃখিত (dukkhito) — “sorry,” and a prefix that reaches Greek

Last lesson’s kindness gets a request said politely. This lesson is what you say when the kindness came too late.

You’ll want to know: দুঃখিত

দুঃখিত — *dukkhito* — **sorry**

আমি দুঃখিত (*āmi dukkhito*) — I’m sorry.

The letters in this word

দুঃখিত is দ (*dô*) with the vowel sign ু (*u*), then ঃ — a new mark, the **visarga**, two small stacked dots that add a light breath after the vowel — then খ (*kh*) with the vowel sign ি (*i*), then ত (*t*, silent at the end). Spelled *duḥkhita*, said *dukkhito*: the breath mark softens toward the consonant that follows it rather than staying a separate sound.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

দুঃখিত is built on Sanskrit দুঃখ (*duḥkha*), “sorrow, suffering” — the word Buddhism made famous as *dukkha*. Take it apart and one half is certain: দুঃ/দুস্ (*dus-*) means “bad, difficult,” from PIE ***dus-**, the very prefix inside Greek **dys-**: **dystopia**, **dysfunctional**. The other half, খ (*kha*), is where the certainty ends. Sanskrit’s own grammatical tradition explains it as “an axle-hole” — a *duḥkha* journey is a **bad axle-hole**, a rough ride, set against সুখ (*sukha*), “a good axle-hole,”

comfort. It is a vivid story, and it is repeated everywhere. It is also, by the account of modern Sanskritists including Mayrhofer, not a story to trust: the axle-hole reading may be a later folk explanation grafted onto a word whose real root is lost. दुः's cousin is real; थ's is a story, reported and not settled.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “dukkhito” — sorry
- *Say it*: “āmi dukkhito” — I’m sorry
- *Say it*: the secure half and its Greek cousin — “dus- ... dystopia”
- *Say it*: last lesson’s request again — “doya kore bôshun”
- *Recall*: read ভাই

Before you move on

Say “I’m sorry” in Bengali. (আমি দুঃখিত.) Which half of দুঃখ is a secure PIE prefix, and which English word shares it? (दुः/dus-, “bad” — **dystopia**, by way of Greek *dys*-.) Is the “bad axle-hole” story of थ settled fact? (No — a repeated tradition, treated with real skepticism by modern Sanskritists.) Sorrow, like compassion, can weigh somewhere specific — where? (हृदय, the heart.)

22.3 माफ करबेन (maf korben) — “excuse me,” borrowed and softened

Last lesson’s word for “sorry” was a native Sanskrit word. This one is a loanword — the very same loanword Hindi uses in its own “sorry” phrase — and it softens a request in a way you have not met yet.

You’ll want to know: माफ करबेन

माफ करबेन — *maf korben* — **excuse me**

माफ करबेन, एकट्ठु जायगा देबेन? (*maf korben, êktu jāyga debên?*) — excuse me, could you make a little room?

The letters in this word

মাফ is ম (*mô*) with া (*ā*) plus ফ (*ph*, the puffed *p*). Notice what is missing: Hindi marks this same borrowed sound with a small dot under its own letter for *pha*, a *nuqtā*, to write a dedicated letter for *f*. Bengali’s script has no such mark at all — ফ alone serves for both the native puffed *p* and this borrowed *f*, and only habit tells a reader which one a given word means.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

মাফ is not Bengali, and not Sanskrit: it is borrowed, by way of Persian, from Arabic *’afw*, “to pardon, to wipe a wrong away.” Hindi borrowed the identical word for the identical job. Bengali also keeps a formal, Sanskritic cousin for the same idea, ক্ষমা করবেন, from ক্ষমা (*kṣamā*), “patience, forbearance” — the everyday loan and the bookish native word side by side, the same split Hindi keeps.

Grammar Lens: the future, asked to be gentle

The tea-offering pattern you already own reuses a **present** verb — আপনি খান — to make a request. করবেন does the same job with a different tense: it is the plain **future**, “you will do,” not a command at all by its grammar, and yet its job here is exactly a request — a third shape for করা, beside last lesson’s participle করে.

tense used	what it does	example
present habitual	states, and doubles as a request	আপনি খান — you eat / please eat
future	states, and doubles as a <i>softer</i> request	মাফ করবেন — you will excuse / please excuse

The future’s distance is what buys the softness: asking rather than telling, even grammatically.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “maf korben” — excuse me
- the two soft requests compared — “chā khān ... maf korben”

Before you move on

Where does মাফ come from? (**Arabic** 'afw, “to pardon,” by **way of Persian** — the same loan Hindi’s own “sorry” phrase uses.) What tense is করবেন, and why does that make it gentler than a command? (**Future** — “you will do,” asking rather than telling.)

22.4 স্বাগতম (shbagotom) — “welcome,” a good arrival

This chapter has taught what to say after a mistake. It closes on what to say before anything goes wrong at all — a word built on the same “hither” you have carried since the verb for **coming**.

You’ll want to know: স্বাগতম

স্বাগতম — *shbagotom* — **welcome**

আমাদের বাড়িতে স্বাগতম (*āmāder bārite shbagotom*) — welcome to our house.

The letters in this word

স্বাগতম is স্ব (a conjunct, স joined straight to ব with no vowel between — *sbô*, tilted by the same *s*→*sh* habit every Sanskrit word in this book has shown) plus া (*ā*), then গ (*gô*), ত (*tô*), and ম (*mô*, keeping its own inherent vowel at the very end): *shbā-go-to-m*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

স্বাগতম is Sanskrit স্বাগতম (*svāgatam*), built from two pieces fused together. The second piece, *āgata*, “arrived, come,” opens with the very same আ-, “hither,” that আসা’s own lesson already named — except here it rides a different verb, √*gam* (“to go, to come”), not আসা’s own unsettled stem. √*gam* is PIE **g^wem-*, and this root is about as secure as roots get: it is the direct ancestor of English **come**, and, by way of Latin **venīre**, of **advent** and **convene** too. The first piece, *su-* (“good”), loses its vowel to the glide ব when the next syllable also opens with a vowel — ordinary Sanskrit sandhi, the same trade *su-* plus *āgata* makes every time: *svāgata*. *su-* is PIE **h₁su-*,

cousin of Greek **eu-**, the “good” inside **eulogy** and **euphoria**. Put the pieces back together: স্বাগতম is, literally, “a good coming.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “shbagotom” — welcome
- “āmāder bārite shbagotom” — welcome to our house
- the shared prefix — “ā-, hither” — on āsā, then on āgata
- the two secure cousins — “gam ... come” and “su- ... eu-”

Before you move on

Give “welcome” in Bengali. (স্বাগতম.) What does স্বাগতম mean, piece by piece? (“**Good**” plus “**come**” — a good arrival.) Which prefix does it share with আসা, and on a different verb this time? (আ-, “**hither**” — on √gam here, not আসা’s own uncertain stem.) Run this chapter’s three other new words back: a kindness done, a word for sorrow, and a borrowed pardon. (দয়া করে, দুঃখিত, মাপ করবেন.) One more reach: what tense softened that pardon into a request? (**Future** — করবেন, “you will do.”)

Chapter 23

Five Colors

Modes: 👁 eyes (5) ⇌ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name five colors in Bengali and say which came from Persian, which from Sanskrit, and which is the one color where Bengali and Hindi genuinely parted ways.

The chapter closes on সবুজ, 'green', a second Persian loan (sabz, the same root behind Hindi and Urdu's sabzī, 'vegetable') that sets beside লাল's own Persian gem-name. The reader names all five colors — lāl, nīl, kālo, shādā, shôbuḡ — and sorts them by origin: two Persian loans, two Sanskrit words, and one worn down by sound change, a more even split between inherited and borrowed than food or family showed.

23.1 লাল (lal) — “red,” a gemstone’s name first

A new small set of words: not people, not verbs, not places, but the colors of the things around you — starting with the one Bengali did not invent for itself.

You’ll want to know: লাল

লাল — lāl — red

লাল চা (lāl chā) — “red tea,” the everyday way to ask for tea without milk.

The letters in this word

লাল is ল (*lô*) with the vowel sign া (*ā*), plus a second ল (*l*, silent at the end): *lāl*, one long vowel between two of the same consonant.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

লাল is a Persian loan, from Persian *la' l*, which named one specific thing first: a deep-red gemstone, a ruby or a spinel. Only later did the gem's name widen into the ordinary word for the color itself. Bengali did not build this word out of its own materials, and it did not borrow it alone — Hindi's own word for red is this identical Persian loan, carried into both languages by the same jewelers' trade routes rather than independently invented twice.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “lāl” — red
- *Say it*: “lāl chā” — tea without milk
- *Say it*: what it named first — “a ruby, not a color”
- *Recall*: say *chokh*, then read মুখ, then say *nāk*

Before you move on

What did লাল originally name, before it meant “red”? (**A deep red gemstone.**) Did Bengali and Hindi each invent this word separately? (**No** — both borrowed the identical Persian loan.) One more reach: give the polite excuse-me again, and its softening tense. (মাফ করবেন — **the future**, “you will do.”)

23.2 নীল (nil) — “blue,” and a word that only looks like “indigo”

The last color was foreign, borrowed whole. This one is Sanskrit's own — and it comes with a famous false friend worth clearing up honestly.

You'll want to know: नील

नील — *nīl* — blue

नील जल (*nīl jôl*) — blue water.

The letters in this word

नील is न (*nô*) with the vowel sign ी (a long *ī*, the same sound as the short *i* but held longer), plus ल (*l*, silent at the end): *nīl*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

नील is Sanskrit नील (*nīla*), “dark blue” — also the name of the **indigo plant** and the dye made from it, the same root Hindi's own *nīlā* carries. One difference is worth stating plainly: Hindi's *nīlā* changes shape, *nīlā/nīlī*, for the noun it describes; नील **never does**, one form whether the water, the sky, or the dress is blue.

Here is the honest, careful version of a famous connection. English “**indigo**” does **not** come from *nīla* by sound change. It comes from **Greek** *indikón*, “the Indian [thing]” and no more — because Greek and Roman traders imported the dye *from* India and named it for its source. *Nīla* and “indigo” are not the same word wearing two disguises; they are two **separate** words for the same dye, linked by the history of trade, not by descent from a shared root.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “*nīl*” — blue
- *Say it*: “*nīl jôl*” — blue water
- *Say it*: one form, always — “*nīl*,” never *nīlā* or *nīlī*
- *Recall*: read হৃদয়

Before you move on

Does नील change shape for the noun it describes, the way Hindi's *nīlā* does? (**No** — one form, always.) Does English “indigo” come directly from नील/*nīla*? (**No** — it is Greek *indikón*, “the Indian thing”; the two words are linked by trade, not by sound change.)

Give “welcome” once more. (स्वागतम्.)

23.3 कालो (kalo) — “black,” the same word as “time”

Blue carried a false friend. This color hides something bigger inside it: the very word Sanskrit uses for time itself, and for death.

You’ll want to know: कालो

कालो — *kālo* — black

कालो चा (*kālo chā*) — black tea.

The letters in this word

कालो is क (*kô*) with the vowel sign ा (*ā*), plus ल (*l*) with the vowel sign ो (*o*): *kā-lo*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

कालो is built on Sanskrit काल (*kāla*), a word that covers both “**black, dark**” and “**time.**” Sanskrit’s own tradition ties the two together poetically — time devours everything, and that devouring is imagined as dark — and the same word names the fierce goddess **Kālī** (“the black/dark one”) and stands as an epithet of **Yama**, the god of death. Hindi’s own *kālā* carries the identical root and the identical story. Be honest, though: whether “black” and “time” are truly **one and the same root**, or two separate ancient words that poetry and theology later **fused** into a single idea, is a real, still-debated question among linguists — the cultural connection is certain; the precise etymology underneath it is not.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “kālo” — black
- *Say it:* “kālo chā” — black tea

- *Say it:* what else কাল means — “time,” and by extension, death
- *Recall:* say *dukkhito*

Before you move on

What does কালো’s root, কাল, also mean, besides “black”? (**Time** — and by extension, death; the same word names the goddess Kālī and Yama’s epithet Kāla.) Is it settled that “black” and “time” are the same root? (**No** — the cultural link is real and ancient, but linguists still debate whether it is one true root or two words later fused.)

23.4 সাদা (shada) — “white,” the color where the cousins part ways

Every color so far has matched Hindi’s, word for word. This one does not — and it is the more interesting choice for it.

You’ll want to know: সাদা

সাদা — *shādā* — **white**

সাদা দুধ (*shādā dudh*) — white milk.

The letters in this word

সাদা is স (*sô*, carrying its familiar tilt to *sh*) with the vowel sign া (*ā*), plus দ (*dô*) with the vowel sign া (*ā*) again: *shā-dā*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

সাদা is usually traced to Sanskrit श्वेत (*śveta*), “white,” worn down through Middle Bengali into today’s everyday word — a **tadbhava**, the same road মুখ’s own twin travelled, only in reverse: here the tadbhava is the common word and the **tatsama**, শ্বেত (*śveto*), survives kept whole inside compounds, like শ্বেতাঙ্গ (*śvetāngo*), “pale-skinned.” This is the one color where Bengali and Hindi genuinely part ways. Every other color word met so far — the borrowed gem-name, the indigo plant, the time-word — Bengali and Hindi share outright. For white, Hindi replaced its own Sanskrit-derived word with a **Persian** loan, *safed*. Bengali did not: it kept the native word as its everyday

one, and the Persian loan never took hold here the way it did next door.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “shādā” — white
- *Say it:* “shādā dudh” — white milk
- *Say it:* the compound cousin — “śveto ... śvetāngo”
- *Recall:* read দয়া করে

Before you move on

Is সাদা a tatsama, kept whole, or a tadbhava, worn down by sound change? (**A tadbhava** — its tatsama twin, শ্বেত, survives only in compounds, the same split মুখ’s own twin showed.) Of the colors met so far, which one did Hindi replace with a Persian loan while Bengali kept the native word? (**White** — Hindi’s *safed* against Bengali’s সাদা.)

23.5 সবুজ (shobuj) — “green,” and five colors, counted up

One color left, and it is a second loan from the same language that gave লাল its gem — but this time the loan travelled somewhere you already have a word for.

You’ll want to know: সবুজ

সবুজ — *shôbuj* — green

সবুজ চা (*shôbuj chā*) — green tea.

The letters in this word

সবুজ is স (*sô*, tilted to *sh*, keeping its own inherent vowel since nothing joins it) plus ব (*bô*) with the vowel sign ঊ (*u*), plus জ (*j*, silent at the end): *shô-bu-j*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

সবুজ is borrowed from Persian **sabz**, “green” — the very same Persian word that gave Hindi and Urdu their word for “vegetable,” **sabzī**, literally “the green things.” লাল’s own Persian gem-name arrived by the same route, from the same trading world, into a different corner of the vocabulary.

Step back and count the five colors this small set has taught: two Persian loans (লাল, সবুজ), two Sanskrit words kept recognizably close to their root (নীল, কালো), and one worn down by sound change (সাদা). A more even split between inherited and borrowed than the food words or the family words showed — color, it turns out, came into Bengali from everywhere at once.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “shôbuj” — green
- “shôbuj chā” — green tea
- all five colors — “lāl, nīl, kālō, shādā, shôbuj”
- the two Persian loans, then the two Sanskrit words, then the one worn down — “lāl, shôbuj ... nīl, kālō ... shādā”

Before you move on

What Persian word gives both সবুজ and Hindi’s word for “vegetable”? (**sabz**, “**green**” — Hindi’s *sabzī* is literally “the green things.”) Of the five colors, how many are Persian loans, how many are Sanskrit words, and how many are worn down by sound change? (**Two, two, and one** — লাল and সবুজ; নীল and কালো; সাদা.) Name all five colors, in order. (লাল, নীল, কালো, সাদা, সবুজ.)

Chapter 24

The Last Sign, and Six Words Back

Modes: ✍ pen (7) ⇌ Hands-free start: none of the 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can read the colours and two of the numerals off the page, write the long-i sign that completes the script this book teaches, and say why every one of these words reached my ear before it reached my eye.

One read as a vowel opening a word with no consonant to carry it, which finally makes visible the claim the numbers chapter could only assert; then twenty-six pieces and nineteen words counted back, all of them heard before they were seen.

24.1 लाल — red, and the day-word that runs both ways

Write ल once, then say where the tongue sits for it.

Script

ल + ा + ल → लाल

The same letter twice, with the mātrā between them. The first ल takes the sign and becomes *lā*; the second keeps its own inherent vowel, which at the end of a word is barely voiced at all. So the word comes out **lāl** — one syllable to an English ear, the colour **red**, the Persian gem-word from the chapter on colours.

Swap the first shape for क and you get another word already in your mouth:

ক + া + ল → কাল

kāl — the word that means **tomorrow** and **yesterday** both, and which the farewell chapter used in *kāl dækhā hōbe*. Bengali does not think the two days need separate names; the distance from today is what the word records, and the direction comes from the verb.

Two words, three pieces each, one shape different between them. Reading is starting to be recombination rather than recognition.

Your turn

- Read it: লাল
- Read it: কাল
- Read it: আমি
- Write it: লাল

Before you move on

Why is the second ল in লাল not said *lô*? (Its inherent vowel is **barely voiced at the end of a word.**) And which two days does কাল cover? (**Yesterday and tomorrow** — both.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

24.2 কালো — black, read

Write ক়ো, and name the two signs it is made of.

Script

ক + া + ল + ো → কালো

- ক with া after it — *kā*
- ল with ো around it — *lo*

kālo — *black*, the colour that is the same word as Sanskrit *kāla*, “time,” and stands behind both Kālī and Yama.

This is the first word in the book with **two different vowel signs on two consecutive letters**, and it is the moment the eye has to stop scanning

and start parsing. There are three marks after the first ক and only two of them belong together. Work it as the last lesson said: find the consonant, then look around it.

Set it beside the red from the last chapter and the two are nearly twins on the page:

লাল and কালো

Both open with a consonant plus া; both close on ল. What separates them is which letter the ল is and what is hanging on it.

Your turn

- Read it: কালো
- Read it: লাল
- Read it: কেমন
- Write it: কালো

Before you move on

Which letter in কালো is wearing the o-sign? (The ল — the second one.) And what else does the same Sanskrit word behind it mean? (Time.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

24.3 সাদা — white, read

Write দ, and say what separates it from ত.

Script

স + া + দ + া → সাদা

Two consonants, each wearing the same mātrā. As plain a spelling as this book has shown.

shādā — *white*. And notice the first sound: the letter is the *s*-letter, and it is said **sh**. That was the news of the greeting back in the first script chapter, and it has not changed. In Bengali this letter is *sh* far more often than it is *s*, which is the second leg of the track's sound-fingerprint.

Three colours are now readable:

লাল *lāl* — red কালো *kālo* — black সাদা *shādā* — white

White is the one of the three where Bengali and Hindi went different ways: Hindi took a Persian loan for it and Bengali kept its own word, where for red both took the same Persian gem-name. A page of Bengali colour words is a small map of who borrowed what.

Your turn

- Read it: সাদা
- Read it: লাল কালো সাদা
- Write it: সাদা

Before you move on

The first letter of সাদা is written *s*. How is it said? (*sh.*) And which of the three colours is the one Bengali kept where Hindi borrowed?

(সাদা — white.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

24.4 ী — the second i-sign

Read জল, then write ি and say which side it goes on.

Script

ী

A second sign for **i** — and in modern Bengali speech it sounds **exactly like the first one**.

Sanskrit distinguished a short *i* from a long *ī*, and held words apart by that length alone. Bengali gave the distinction up. The two signs survive because the spellings survive: a word inherited from Sanskrit keeps whichever sign it always had, and the reader learns it word by word rather than by ear.

That is worth stating plainly rather than apologising for. **A script records the history of a language as well as its present**, and the cost of that is a handful of spellings a listener could never have guessed. English readers know the arrangement well — the *k* in *know*, the *gh* in *night*.

The two signs sit on opposite sides:

ি goes **before** its consonant ী goes **after** it, like া

So they are hard to confuse on the page even while being impossible to tell apart in the ear.

ন + ী → নী

Your turn

- Write it: ী
- Write it: নী
- Read it: জল

Before you move on

Do ি and ী sound different in Bengali today? (**No.**) Did they in Sanskrit? (**Yes** — short and long.) And which side does ী go on? (**After** its consonant.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

24.5 নীল — blue, read

Write ী, and say which side of its consonant it goes on.

Script

ন + ী + ল → নীল

nīl — *blue*, the colour from Sanskrit *nīla*, the dye that gave English *indigo* its trade and gave the Bengal countryside its indigo plantations.

The sign in the middle is the long one, and that is not a choice a speaker could make. Sanskrit *nīla* had a long *ī*, so Bengali writes ী — even though a Bengali speaker says it no differently from the short sign. The spelling is inherited, and the previous lesson’s point is now something you have to act on rather than agree with.

Four colours are now readable:

লাল — red কালো — black সাদা — white নীল — blue

Of these, blue is the one whose spelling carries a fact about Sanskrit rather than about Bengali. Red is a Persian gem-name; black is the word for time; white is the homegrown one Hindi replaced. Four words, four different histories, and the page shows one of them.

Your turn

- *Read it:* নীল
- *Read it:* লাল কালো সাদা নীল
- *Write it:* নীল

Before you move on

Why does নীল take the long i-sign? (Because **Sanskrit *nīla* had a long i.**) Can a speaker hear the difference? (**No.**) And how many colours can you read now? (**Four.**)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

24.6 তিন — three, read

Write ত, then write ি, and say which side of a consonant the second one goes on.

Script

ত + ি + ন → তিন

Read it the way the mouth needs it, not the way the eye meets it:

- ত — the dental *t*, tongue on the teeth
- ি — leaning on that ত from the left, heard after it
- ন — *nô*, its inherent vowel almost silent at the end

tin — *three*, counted since the numbers chapter.

The hook in front of ত is the same trap as আমি, and it will keep being the same trap until the hand has written it twenty times. On the page: hook, t, n. In the mouth: t, i, n.

This word is also about as old as words get. Sanskrit *tri*, Latin *trēs*, Greek *treîs*, English *three* — the numbers chapter set that out, and the point here is only that you can now meet it on a page in Kolkata instead of in a table.

Your turn

- *Read it:* তিন
- *Read it:* লাল
- *Write it:* তিন

Before you move on

In তিন, is the hook read before or after the ত? (**After** — it is only written before.) And what does the word mean? (**Three**.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

24.7 এক — one, and the words this reader can now take off a page

Write এ and ই, and say what decides when a vowel gets its own letter.

Script

এ + ক → এক

ek — *one*. Two pieces, and the first of them is a vowel standing on its own because a word cannot open on a sign.

The numbers chapter made a remark that could not be checked at the time: it said those five numerals were no good for showing off the inherent **ô**, because এক opens on an independent vowel. Here is what that meant. There is no consonant at the front of this word to carry a vowel, so there is no inherent vowel to hear. The claim is now something you can see rather than take on trust.

And তিন, read two lessons ago, is on the page too, so two of the five numerals are now shapes rather than sounds.

Count the whole holding. Twenty-six pieces, gathered nine, four, four, eight and one across five script chapters. And with them, nineteen words:

- নমস্কার *the greeting* · নাম *name* · তুমি *you* · আমি *I* · কেমন *how*
- আবার *again* · ভালো *good* · চা *tea* · জল *water* · দুধ *milk*
- পরিবার *family* · ভাই *brother* · মুখ *mouth* · লাল *red* · কালো *black*
- সাদা *white* · নীল *blue* · তিন *three* · এক *one*

with নাক, কি, আসি, আমার and কাল riding along free.

Every one of them was in the mouth before it was on the page. That order was the whole design: hear a word, use it, and only then be shown what it looks like. A reader who had been handed the alphabet first would have spent twenty-six lessons decoding shapes that meant nothing yet. Every script chapter in this book sits between two chapters of speech for that reason.

Your turn

- *Read it:* মুখ লাল কালো সাদা নীল
- *Read it:* এক তিন
- *Write it:* এক
- *Write it:* এ ই আ া ি া ে ো

Before you move on

Why is there no inherent vowel to hear at the start of এক? (It opens on an **independent vowel**, not a consonant.) How many pieces do you hold now? (**Twenty-six**.) How many words? (**Nineteen**.) And which came first for every one of them — the sound or the shape? (**The sound**.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 25

Cloth, Shirt, Sari, and Glasses

Modes: 👁 eyes (4) ⇌ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name cloth, a shirt, a sari and glasses in Bengali, and say which word English borrowed directly and which is built on the same Persian word already met for 'eye'.

The chapter closes on চশমা, 'glasses', built on Persian chashm, 'eye' — the very word চোখ's own lesson once named as its only cousin outside the family, here turned into 'eye-thing'. The reader names all four garments — kāpor, jāmā, shāri, chôshmā — states that শাড়ি reached English as a direct modern loanword rather than through a shared ancient root, and reaches back to rescue the dative construction and ভালোবাসা, unrevisited since they were taught.

25.1 কাপড় (kapor) — “cloth,” a word five languages share

Five colors named. Now the things they color, starting with the plainest word for cloth itself — and a sound you have not needed since the verb for reading.

You'll want to know: কাপড়

কাপড় — kāpor — cloth, clothing

সাদা কাপড় (shādā kapor) — white cloth.

The letters in this word

কাপড় is ক (*kô*) with the vowel sign া (*ā*), plus প (*pô*), plus ড — the flapped letter, the same curled-tongue sound the reading verb needed, silent-final here: *kā-po-r*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

কাপড় traces to Sanskrit *karpāṭa*, “rag, old cloth.” Here the honesty runs deeper than usual: even Sanskrit’s own dictionaries label *karpāṭa* a **deśī** word — homegrown vernacular vocabulary that was already sitting inside classical Sanskrit rather than inherited from any older reconstructed root. No further ancestor is claimed for it at all. What makes it worth teaching anyway is how far it travelled sideways: the identical word, worn down by the same kind of sound change, gives Hindi *kaprā*, Marathi *kapāḍā*, Gujarati *kapāḍū*, and Punjabi *kaprā* — five Indo-Aryan languages sharing one root together, none of them borrowing from the others.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “kāpoṛ” — cloth
- *Say it*: “shādā kāpoṛ” — white cloth
- *Say it*: the flap, again — “poṛā ... kāpoṛ”
- *Say it*: the family sharing this root — “kāpoṛ ... kaprā ... kapāḍā”
- *Recall*: say *maf korben*, then read স্বাগতম

Before you move on

Does কাপড়’s root, *karpāṭa*, trace back to a reconstructed PIE ancestor? (**No** — Sanskrit’s own dictionaries call it a homegrown, **deśī** word.) Name two other Indo-Aryan languages that share this exact root. (**Hindi’s** *kaprā*, **Marathi’s** *kapāḍā* — or Gujarati’s *kapāḍū*, or Punjabi’s *kaprā*.)

25.2 জামা (jama) — “shirt,” a third word from Persian

Cloth in general, now a specific garment — and Persian, again, supplies the word.

You’ll want to know: জামা

জামা — *jāmā* — shirt

লাল জামা (*lāl jāmā*) — a red shirt.

The letters in this word

জামা is জ (*jô*) with the vowel sign া (*ā*), plus ম (*mô*) with the vowel sign া (*ā*) again: *jā-mā*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

জামা is a Persian loan, *jāma*, “robe, garment” — carried into Hindi and Urdu as the identical word, *jāmā*. Count it up: of the clothing and color words in this small set, three now trace to Persian rather than Sanskrit — লাল, সবুজ, and জামা. Bengali’s everyday wardrobe vocabulary leans on the same trading world its colors did.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “jāmā” — shirt
- *Say it*: “lāl jāmā” — a red shirt
- *Say it*: the three Persian loans so far — “lāl ... shôbuj ... jāmā”
- *Recall*: read লাল, then say *nil*, then read কালো

Before you move on

Where does জামা come from? (**Persian *jāma***, “robe, garment,” the identical word Hindi and Urdu also use.) How many of this set’s clothing and color words now trace to Persian? (**Three** — লাল, সবুজ, জামা.)

25.3 শাড়ি (shari) — “sari,” a word English borrowed whole

Every English cousin this book has traced so far has been buried deep — a shared PIE root, worn down over thousands of years past recognizing. This word’s road into English was much shorter.

You’ll want to know: শাড়ি

শাড়ি — *shāri* — sari

লাল শাড়ি (*lāl shāri*) — a red sari.

The letters in this word

শাড়ি opens with শ — a second letter for an *s*-family sound, a different one from স. Sanskrit distinguished three of these (স, শ, and a third, ষ); modern Bengali speech has merged them into one sound, but the spelling keeps them apart. Then া (*ā*), ড় (the flap you now know from কাপড়), and ি (*i*): *shā-ri*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

শাড়ি traces to Sanskrit *śātī*, “a strip of cloth, a garment,” worn down through Middle Indic *साडी* (*sāḍī*) into Bengali and Hindi’s shared *śārī*/*sārī*. Here is the unusual part: every English cousin this book has traced so far — heart, nose, bind, come — went underground for thousands of years, worn down by sound change on both ends until only a shared ancient root connects them. This word took a different road. It entered English directly, in the modern era, as an ordinary borrowed word: “**sari.**” No PIE root, no centuries of drift — a garment’s name, carried whole into another language’s dictionary.

Your turn

- Say it: “shāri” — sari
- Say it: “lāl shāri” — a red sari
- Say it: the second *s*-letter — “শ, beside স”
- Say it: three garments so far — “kāpoṛ ... jāmā ... shāri”

- *Recall:* say *shada*, then read সবুজ

Before you move on

How did শাড়ি reach English — through a shared ancient root, worn down over millennia, or as a direct modern loanword? (**A direct loanword** — “sari,” borrowed whole, no PIE root involved.) How many distinct *s*-family letters did Sanskrit distinguish, now merged in Bengali speech? (**Three** — স, শ, ষ.)

25.4 চশমা (choshma) — “glasses,” built on an old cousin’s name

Three garments named. This one closes the chapter by returning to the very body part the eye lesson once traced to a single named Persian cousin — and building something new out of it.

You’ll want to know: চশমা

চশমা — *chôshmā* — glasses

আমার চশমা (*āmār chôshmā*) — my glasses.

The letters in this word

চশমা is spelled চ (*chô*) + শ (*shô*, the second *s*-letter শাড়ি introduced a moment ago) + ম (*mô*) + া (*ā*) — four sounds by the spelling. Ordinary speech thins it to three: *chôsh-mā*, not *chô-sho-mā* — an everyday shortening this particular loanword has settled into.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

চশমা is built on Persian *chashm*, “eye” — the exact word the eye lesson once named as চোখ’s only named cousin outside the Indo-Aryan family, with no secure English descendant claimed for চোখ itself. চশমা takes that word and adds a suffix that turns “eye” into “eye-thing”: **spectacles**, the thing that sits in front of your eyes. Bengali did not build this the way it built জিজ্ঞাসা করা or সাহায্য করা, by hanging করা on a noun; it took a ready-made South Asian coinage on a Persian root, the same formation Hindi and Urdu also use.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “chôshmā” — glasses
- “āmār chôshmā” — my glasses
- the eye it is built on — “chashm ... chôshmā”
- all four garments of this chapter — “kāpor, jāmā, shārī, chôshmā”

Before you move on

What Persian word is চশমা built on, and where did this book meet it before? (**Chashm**, “eye” — named as চোখ’s only cousin outside the family.) Say all five colors and all four garments this small set has now taught. (লাল, নীল, কালো, সাদা, সবুজ; কাপড়, জামা, শাড়ি, চশমা.) Two reaches further back, to close out: who is the subject of *āmār bhālo lāge*, “I like it”? (**Not you** — the good is, the same shape as *āmār chôshmā*, “to me, glasses.”) And is *āmi bhālobāsi*, “I love,” built the same inverted way? (**No** — loving takes you as subject; liking happens to you.)

Chapter 26

The Distant Band

Modes: ✍ pen (9) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 9 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can retrieve, with nothing uncovered, the words and letters this book taught between ninety-eight and a hundred and four lessons ago — and I can tell the difference between a word I have lost and a word I now know to go back for.

Four chapter-closing practice lessons, untouched for the length of a whole book, are answered in one sitting; nothing in the chapter is new, and that is the measurement.

26.1 তুমি, at the far end

Before anything is uncovered: say *you* to a friend, *you* to a stranger, and *what*.

Your turn — the distant band

This chapter has one job, and it is not to teach you anything.

Everything asked for here was first taught between a hundred and a hundred and four lessons ago. That distance is deliberate. A thing recalled after a day is being remembered; a thing recalled after a hundred lessons is being **owned**, and the only way to find out which you have is to reach that far and see what comes back.

Nothing new arrives in this chapter. If a word does not come, do not treat that as a failure — treat it as the measurement working.

Say these aloud:

- *you*, to a friend — *tumi*
- *you*, to someone you have only now met — *āpni*
- *what* — *ki*
- the whole question, “what’s your name?” — *tomār nām ki?*
- the same question, respectfully — *āpnār nām ki?*

Three of those five you have not been asked for in eighty lessons.

Writing — from sound

Cover every Bengali model in this book. Write *tumi* from the sound alone, then write the vowel ই standing on its own.

Write these out:

- তুমি
- ই

Before you move on

Which sign in তুমি hangs below the line? (্.) And which “you” would you use with a shopkeeper you do not know? (আপনি.)

26.2 নাম, and two pieces from the signs chapter

Say *name*, then *my*, then put them together.

Your turn — the distant band

Say these aloud:

- *name* — *nām*
- *my* — *āmār*
- “my name is —” with your own name in it
- what Bengali does *not* put in that sentence (**no “is”**)

The missing verb is the part that decays first, because English keeps insisting it belongs there. Say the sentence once more without it.

Writing — from sound

Cover every model. Write the dental consonant, then the sign that hangs beneath a letter, then the word for *name*.

Write these out:

- ত
- ু
- নাম

Before you move on

Is Bengali's ত made at the teeth or behind them? (**At the teeth.**)
And how many pieces are in নাম? (**Three.**)

26.3 য, and the thanks it hides in

Say *thank you*, and then the thing a Bengali speaker is more likely to say instead of it.

Your turn — the distant band

Say these aloud:

- *thank you* — *dhônyobad*
- “it’s no matter / you’re welcome” — *kono bæpār nā*
- what য sounds like standing alone (*j*)
- what it sounds like hung under another letter (**nothing** — it bends the vowel to **æ**)

Both of the words above carry that hung য, and it is the same job in each: the **ny** in *dhônyobad* and the **byæ** in *bæpār*. Two words from two different chapters, one piece of machinery.

Writing — from sound

Cover every model. Write the letter that is written *y* and said *j*, then the mark that kills an inherent vowel, then hang the first under a হ.

Write these out:

- য
- ঁ
- হ্য

Before you move on

What is the scribes' name for a য হুং below? (*jô-phôla*.) And what does ঁ do? (**Deletes the inherent vowel.**)

26.4 ঁ, from above the line

Say *yes* and *no*.

Your turn — the distant band

Say these aloud:

- *yes* — *hyã*, through the nose
- *no* — *nā*, not through the nose
- the number five — *pãch*, and notice the same nasal
- where on the line the mark that writes it sits (**above**)

Three words in this whole book carry that crescent, and they are spread across three chapters. That is exactly the shape of thing a reader loses: rare enough to go, common enough to matter.

Say *hyã* and *nā* one after another until the difference is in the nose and not in the effort.

Writing — from sound

Cover every model. Write the crescent-with-a-dot, then put it on नाँ.

Write these out:

- ँ
- नाँ

Before you move on

Is ँ a consonant? (**No.**) What does it change? (**The vowel** — it goes through the nose.) And is it the only mark above the head-line? (**Yes.**)

26.5 ह्यँ and नमस्कार, side by side

Say the greeting, with the hands.

Your turn — the distant band

Say these aloud:

- hello, and goodbye, with one word — *nômoshkar*
- *yes* — *hyã*
- how many pieces are in each (**seven**, and **five**)

These two words are the bookends of the reading strand. The greeting was the first thing you could decode and it took nine lessons of letters to earn. *Yes* came three chapters later and cost three.

The difference is not that the second word is simpler. It is that by the time it arrived you already owned four of its five pieces — which is the argument for buying letters early and spending them often, made in two words.

Writing — from sound

Cover every model. Write *yes*, then the breath-letter alone, then the last consonant of the greeting.

Write these out:

- হ্যাঁ
- হ
- র

Before you move on

Which piece of হ্যাঁ makes no sound? (য.) And which word took nine lessons to become readable? (নমস্কার.)

26.6 আমি, and the sentence that can drop it

Say *I*.

Your turn — the distant band

Say these aloud:

- *I — āmi*
- “my name is —”
- “pleased to meet you” — *ālāp kore bhālo lāglo*
- “I am well” **without** the pronoun (*bhālo āchhi*)

That last one is the test. The pronoun is carried by the ি on the end of the verb, so a speaker who drops আমি loses nothing at all — and a learner who cannot drop it is still translating rather than speaking.

Say the polite formula once more, whole, at speed. It is the longest thing this book asks anyone to say from memory.

Writing — from sound

Cover every model. Write *I* from the sound alone.

- Write it: আমি

Before you move on

Which piece of the verb carries “I”? (**The ি ending.**) So is আমি required? (**No** — it is emphasis.)

26.7 কেমন, and the whole exchange

Say *how*.

Your turn — the distant band

Say these aloud:

- *how* — *kēmon*
- “how are you?” to a friend — *tumi kēmon āchho?*
- the same to a stranger — *āpni kēmon āchhen?*
- “okay / I see / go on” — *āchchhā*

Two of those four change one ending and nothing else. If the respectful form did not come, it is because the familiar one is the one you have practised, and a question you can only ask a friend is half a question.

Run the exchange with yourself, both sides, twice.

Writing — from sound

Cover every model. Write *how* from the sound alone.

- Write it: কেমন

Before you move on

What changes between *āchho* and *āchhen*? (**Only the ending** — who you are speaking to.) And which sign in কেমন goes in front of its consonant? (ে.)

26.8 ভালো, and the reply it lives in

Say *good*.

Your turn — the distant band

Say these aloud:

- *good, well* — *bhālo*
- “I am well” — *āmi bhālo āchhi*
- the goodbye that literally means “I’ll come again” — *āshi*
- why a Bengali speaker prefers that goodbye (**it promises a return**)

ভালো has appeared in more lessons than any other word in this book, which makes it the fair test in the other direction: not “did a rare thing survive?” but “did constant exposure actually put a thing where you can get at it?”

If it came back instantly, that is a result worth having. Frequency is supposed to do that, and it is worth knowing when it worked.

Writing — from sound

Cover every model. Write *good*, then *am*, then the two together with *I* in front.

Write these out:

- ভালো
- আছি
- আমি ভালো আছি

Before you move on

Which sign wraps around the ল in ভালো? (ো, on both sides.) And what does *āshi* literally promise? (**That you will come again.**)

26.9 The band closed

Greet someone, introduce yourself, and say goodbye — all before anything is uncovered.

Your turn — the near edge of the band

Four chapters of this book ended in a practice lesson, and each of those lessons has been sitting untouched for the length of a whole book. Answer all four now, in order, out loud:

Say these aloud:

- the five greeting words — *nômoshkar*, *dhônyobad*, *hyã* / *nā*, *āchchhā*, *āshi*
- the introduction exchange, both halves
- the how-are-you exchange, both halves
- the two farewells — *ābār dækhā hôbe*, *kāl dækhā hôbe*

That is the whole speaking spine of the book in four breaths.

Now the thing worth saying plainly about this chapter. Nothing in it was new. Every item was first taught between ninety-eight and a hundred and four lessons ago, and the reason to gather them here rather than to press on is that **a curriculum that only ever adds is not teaching, it is delivering**. What you could still reach for today is what you actually have.

Anything that did not come back is not lost. It is located.

Writing — from sound

Cover every model in the book. Write *I*, then the consonant that was read beside it.

Write these out:

- আমি
- ল

Before you move on

How many new things did this chapter teach? (**None**.) How far back did it reach? (**About a hundred lessons**.) And is a word you could not retrieve today a word you have lost? (**No** — it is a word you now know to go back for.)

Chapter 27

Three Ways to Say No

Modes: ⇄ voice (5) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can deny any sentence this book has taught me — one negator for a sentence with a verb, one for a sentence without, one for a thing that is not there — and I can turn every one of them into a yes-or-no question without moving a word.

Three negators and one question shape, run against frames the book has been teaching since chapter three: the name frame denied with না, the verb denied with নী, the missing thing denied with নেই, and each of the three asked back with a rising voice.

27.1 না (nā) — the word that goes after

The first chapter of this book taught না as an answer, and twenty-six chapters have gone by without it doing anything else. It is about to do the largest job in the language.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the cloth word — *kāpor*

You'll want to know: না after the verb

আমি জানি না — *āmi jāni nā* — **I do not know.**

আমি ভাত খাই না — *āmi bhāt khāi nā* — **I do not eat rice.**

Take any sentence in this book, keep every word exactly where it stands, and put না at the end. That is the whole operation. English drops *not* in

front of the verb and rebuilds the sentence around it — *I know* becomes *I do not know*, with a *do* that came from nowhere. Bengali adds one syllable and moves nothing.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

না is one of the oldest words a reader of English owns. Sanskrit *na*, Latin *ne*-, Greek *nē*-, Old English *ne*: it is the syllable behind **no**, **not**, **never**, **none** and **nay**. Chapter five already handed it over inside কোনো ব্যাপার না (*kono bāpār nā*), “no matter” — a whole phrase ending in the negator, exactly where this lesson puts it. One sentence this book cannot yet print is *āmi bujhi nā*, “I do not understand” — the most useful sentence a beginner can carry. The verb is taught, in chapter fourteen; the letter in the middle of it is not, so the words stay in romanization until a script lesson pays for that letter.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *āmi jāni* — then again with the negator — *āmi jāni nā*
- *āmi bānglā bôli nā*
- *āmi khāi nā* — I do not eat
- the sentence in romanization — *āmi bujhi nā*

Before you move on

Where in the sentence does না stand? (**After the verb, at the end** — nothing else moves.) What did chapter one teach it as? (**The answer “no”** — one word doing two jobs.) And what does English have to borrow to negate *I know*? (**A verb *do* that means nothing** — Bengali borrows nothing.) Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

27.2 নয় (nôy) — denying a sentence with no verb in it

The lesson before this one put **না** after a verb. Now try it on **আমার নাম রাম** — and notice there is no verb there to put anything after.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the shirt word — *jāmā*

You'll want to know: **নয়**

আমার নাম রাম নয় — *āmār nām rām nôy* — **my name is not Ram.**

আমি ভালো নই — *āmi bhālo nôi* — **I am not well.**

Chapter three taught the frame **আমার নাম ...** and said plainly that it carries no word for *is*. Bengali leaves the present-tense *is* out. To deny that sentence you cannot negate a verb that was never said, so the language supplies one, and it supplies it only here: **নয়**.

Grammar Lens: the form follows the person

about	say
me	নই (<i>nôi</i>)
you, or anybody else	নয় (<i>nôy</i>)

That is the whole paradigm a beginner needs. **আমি ভালো নই** denies your own state; **রাম ভালো নয়** denies somebody else's. Notice what the affirmative looks like beside it: **আমি ভালো** is a complete Bengali sentence with no verb at all. The copula in this language is a ghost — it is audible only when you refuse it.

The letters in this word

নয় ends in **য়**, which is **য** wearing the dot chapter ten taught. Without the dot the letter says *j*; with it, a glide, so the word is *nôy* and not *nôj*. The dot is doing exactly the job that lesson gave it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *āmār nām rām nôy*
- *āmi bhālo nôi* — then the affirmative it denies, *āmi bhālo*
- the verb kind beside the verbless kind — *āmi jāni nā ... āmi bhālo nôi*

Before you move on

Which negator does a sentence with a verb take, and which does a sentence without one? (না after the verb; নয় when there is none.) Which form goes with আমি? (নেই.) And where is the *is* in আমি ভালো? (Nowhere — it exists only to be denied.) Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

27.3 নেই (nei) — the third negator, for things that are not there

Two negators so far: one after a verb, one for a sentence with no verb. A third is coming, and it exists because Bengali refuses to build this one out of the first two.

- *Recall*: two chapters back, the woven strip of cloth — *shāṛi*

You'll want to know: নেই

আমার চা নেই — *āmār chā nei* — **I have no tea.**

আমার ভাই নেই — *āmār bhāi nei* — **I have no brother.**

Chapter five taught আমি ভালো আছি, “I am well,” on the stem আছ-, which means *to be present*. নেই is that stem’s denial, and it comes as a single word rather than as আছি না, which no Bengali says.

Grammar Lens: having, in a language with no verb for it

Bengali has no verb *to have*. It says *of-me tea is-present*, using the same আমার chapter three taught for *my*. So আমার চা নেই is literally *of me, tea is not present* — and the same shape covers **I have no tea** and **there is no tea of mine**, because in Bengali those were never different sentences.

নেই does not change for the person. আমার নেই, তোমার নেই: one form for everybody, which makes it the easiest of the three negators and the one a traveller reaches for first.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *āmār chā nei*
- *āmār jôl nei* — I have no water
- all three in a row — *jāni nā ... bhālo nôi ... chā nei*

Before you move on

Which stem is **নেই** the denial of? (আছ-, the *being present* stem behind **আছি**.) Why is there no **আছি না**? (Because the **negator and the stem fused into one word** long ago.) And how does Bengali say *I have*? (With **আমার** — *of me*, and no verb *to have* at all.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

27.4 তুমি ভালো? — a question with nothing added

Three chapters have taught you how to say **হ্যাঁ** and **না** to a question nobody in this book has been able to ask.

- *Recall*: two chapters back, the eye-thing — *chôshmā*

You'll want to know: the rising voice

তুমি ভালো — *tumi bhālo*. — **you are well.**

তুমি ভালো? — *tumi bhālo?* — **are you well?**

Those are the same four syllables in the same order. The only difference is that the second one ends higher than it began. English rebuilds the sentence — *you are* becomes *are you* — and Bengali does not touch it.

Grammar Lens: what the rise turns into a question

Every frame in this book can now be asked as well as said, at no cost:

said	asked
আমার চা নেই তুমি ভাত খাও	তোমার চা নেই? তুমি ভাত খাও?

A negative asked this way is the ordinary way to check something you suspect: তোমার চা নেই? — *you have no tea?* And the answer is one of the two words chapter one taught.

Bengali also has a written question particle, কি, which chapter three taught as the word for *what*. In a yes-or-no question it does the job the rising voice does in speech. The voice is what a speaker needs first.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *tumi bhālo*. flat — then *tumi bhālo?* rising
- *tomār chā nei?* — and answer it *hyā* or *nā*
- *āpni bhālo?* — the respectful one

Before you move on

What moves when a Bengali statement becomes a yes-or-no question? (**Nothing** — only the pitch at the end.) What does English have to move? (**The verb, in front of the subject.**) And which two words answer it? (হ্যাঁ and না, from the first chapter.) Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

27.5 Three ways to say no, and one way to ask

Three negators arrived in this chapter and each one owns a different kind of sentence. Name them in the order you met them, and name what each one denies.

Your turn

- *Say it*: the sentence with a verb — *āmi jāni nā*

- *Say it:* the sentence with none — *āmār nām rām nôy*
- *Say it:* the thing that is missing — *āmār chā nei*
- *Say it:* each of those three again with a rising end, and hear a question
- *Recall:* the sentence chapter eleven taught, then deny it — *āmi bānglā bôli nā*

Before you move on

Which negator would you use to deny আমার নাম রাম, which for আমি জানি, and which for আমার চা আছে? (নয়, then না, then নেই.)
What has to change to turn any of the three into a question? (**The pitch at the end, and nothing else.**)

Chapter 28

Two Things at Once

Modes: ⇄ voice (5) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can put two nouns in one sentence with আর, mark either of them with -ও, offer a choice between them with বা, and refuse both with না ... না.

The colours, foods and family words of eleven earlier chapters, joined two at a time for the first time: added with আর, marked with -ও, offered with বা, and refused with না ... না.

28.1 আর (ār) — and

The chapter before this one gave you three ways to deny a sentence. This chapter gives you the first way to make a sentence longer than one idea.

- *Recall:* the missing-thing negator — *nei*
- *Recall:* five chapters back, the first two colours — *lāl, nāl*

You'll want to know: আর

চা আর দুধ — *chā ār dudh* — **tea and milk.**

আমার চা আর জল নেই — *āmār chā ār jōl nei.* — **I have no tea and no water.**

This book has taught four foods, four garments, five colours, four family words and four parts of the body — a hundred and thirty-nine lessons of

nouns that could only ever be named one at a time. আর is the word that ends that.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

আর comes from Sanskrit *apara*, “the other one, the further one” — so the joining sense grew out of a counting sense, *one more*. It still carries that older meaning when it stands in front of a noun on its own: আর চা, *more tea*. Chapter seven’s আবার (*ābār*, “again”) is built on the same idea of one more time, which is why the two words sound like relatives. They are.

Bengali also writes *ebông* for *and* in formal prose. It joins clauses more than nouns, and it needs a letter this book has not taught yet, so it is named here in romanization — *ebông* — and left for the script chapters.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *chā ār dudh*
- *jôl ār bhāt* — water and rice
- *lāl ār nīl* — red and blue
- *āmār chā ār jôl nei*

Before you move on

What did আর mean before it meant *and*? (**More, the other one** — Sanskrit *apara*.) Which word taught in chapter seven is its relative? (আবার, *again* — one more time.) And what happens to a negator when two nouns are joined? (**Nothing** — it still sits at the end.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

28.2 -ও (-o) — the joiner that is one vowel long

The lesson before this taught আর, which stands between two things. This one goes on the end of one thing, and means much the same.

- *Recall*: the letter chapter ten taught standing alone — ও

You'll want to know: -ও

আমিও — *āmi-o* — **me too.**

আমিও ভালো — *āmi-o bhālo.* — **I am well too.**

-ও never stands by itself. It is written onto the back of the word it attaches to, and it means *that one as well*. Where আর joins two nouns from between them, -ও marks each of them from behind: ভাই আর বোন is *brother and sister*; ভাইও বোনও is *the brother as well, and the sister as well*.

Grammar Lens: the smallest word does the most work

Attaching -ও to a different word moves the emphasis without moving a syllable of the sentence:

said	means
আমিও ভালো	<i>I too</i> am well — somebody else is as well
আমি ভালোও	I am well <i>as well as</i> whatever else I am

English has to say *too* at the end and hope, or move the stress with the voice. Bengali puts the mark exactly on the word it belongs to. This is Sanskrit *api*, “also” — the particle Hindi still says whole as *bhī*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *āmi-o* — me too
- *āmi-o bhālo*
- the pair joined both ways — *bhāi ār bon*, then *bhāi-o bon-o*

Before you move on

Where does -ও stand, and where does আর stand? (-ও on the back of a word; আর between two of them.) Can -ও be said on its own? (**No** — it has no life apart from the word it rides.) Which Hindi

word is its cousin? (*bhā*, from the same Sanskrit *api*.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

28.3 বা (bā) — or

Two joiners so far, and both of them add. Name them, and say which one stands between and which one hangs off the back.

You'll want to know: বা

চা বা দুধ — *chā bā dudh* — **tea or milk.**

চা বা দুধ? — *chā bā dudh?* — **tea or milk?**

Until this lesson nothing in this book could offer anybody a choice. আর gives them both; বা makes them pick. It sits exactly where আর sits, between the two things, and nothing else in the sentence changes.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

বা is Sanskrit *vā*, and it is one of the oldest unchanged words in this book: the same particle survives at the end of Latin *sive* (“or if”) and *neve* (“nor”). Four thousand years and one syllable.

Put it inside the rising question this chapter’s neighbour taught and you have the whole shape of an offer: two nouns, বা between them, and a voice that goes up at the end. That is how tea gets poured.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *chā bā dudh*
- the same pair joined instead of split — *chā ār dudh*
- *bhāt bā jôl* — rice or water
- it as an offer, with the voice rising — *chā bā dudh?*

Before you move on

Which joiner adds and which one chooses? (আর adds; বা chooses.)
Where does বা stand? (**Between the two things**, exactly where আর does.) And what turns an offer into a question? (**The rising voice** — nothing is added.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

28.4 না ... না ... — neither, nor

Chapter twenty-seven was firm about this: না goes after. There is exactly one construction in which it goes first, and it is the one that denies both halves of a choice.

- *Recall*: the word that offers the choice — বা

You'll want to know: না ... না ...

না চা, না দুধ — *nā chā, nā dudh* — **neither tea nor milk.**

আমার না চা আছে, না দুধ — *āmār nā chā āchhe, nā dudh* — **I have neither tea nor milk.**

One না in front of each thing refused. The pattern is the mirror image of আর: where *and* stood once, between two nouns, *neither* stands twice, before each of them.

Grammar Lens: three ways to refuse two things

shape	how it refuses
আমার চা আর দুধ নেই	one negator at the end covers both
চা-ও নেই, দুধ-ও নেই	each thing marked with -ও, each denied
না চা, না দুধ	the flat refusal, and the emphatic one

All three are correct Bengali. The first is what you say without thinking about it; the third is what you say when you want the refusal heard.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *nā chā, nā dudh*
- the same refusal the ordinary way — *āmār chā ār dudh nei*
- the marked way — *chā-o nei, dudh-o nei*

Before you move on

Where does না stand in an ordinary negative sentence, and where in this one? (**After the verb** ordinarily; **in front of each refused thing** here.) Which joiner does the pattern mirror? (আর, one *and* between two becoming one *no* before each.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

28.5 Two things at once

Three joiners landed in this chapter. Name them, and say for each one whether it adds, marks, or chooses.

Your turn

- *Say it*: two colours joined — *kālo ār shādā*
- *Say it*: the same two as a choice — *kālo bā shādā*
- *Say it*: yourself added to somebody — *āmi-o*
- *Say it*: both refused — *nā kālo, nā shādā*
- *Recall*: five lessons back, the negator for a verbless sentence — *nôy*

Before you move on

Which joiner turns a statement into an offer once the voice rises? (বা — two things and a choice between them.) How many না does a double refusal need, and where do they go? (**Two, one in front of each thing.**) And which of this chapter's joiners cannot stand on its own? (-ও.)

Chapter 29

Agreeing, Differing, and Saying Why

Modes: ⇨ voice (3) 👁 eyes (1) ⇨ Hands-free start: none of the 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can agree with somebody and disagree with them, turn a second clause against the first with কিন্তু, and give a reason for either with কেননা.

The first three-clause sentence in the track: a position, an objection to it, and a reason for the objection, built from কিন্তু, একমত and কেননা over the negators and joiners of the two chapters before.

29.1 কিন্তু (kintu) — but

The chapter before this joined things and offered a choice between them. Neither joiner can disagree with anything.

- *Recall:* the two joiners of the last chapter — *ār, bā*

You'll want to know: কিন্তু

আমি ভালো, কিন্তু আমার চা নেই — *āmi bhālo, kintu āmār chā nei*
— I am well, but I have no tea.

আর puts two things on the same side. কিন্তু puts the second one against the first. It stands at the head of the clause it turns, after a comma in writing and after a small drop of the voice in speech.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

কিন্তু is Sanskrit *kim-tu*, and both halves are recoverable. *Kim* is “what” — the same ancient word standing behind কি, which chapter three taught. *Tu* is an old particle meaning “however”. So *but* in Bengali is literally *what-however*, a shrug frozen into a conjunction. Look at the middle of the written word: ক্ত is ন and ত fused by the mark chapter two taught for deleting the inherent vowel. Two letters, one shape, and no new letter to learn.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *āmi bhālo, kintu āmār chā nei*
- the same two clauses with the other joiner — *āmi bhālo ār āmār chā nei*
- and hear what changed — the second one no longer argues

Before you move on

What are the two Sanskrit pieces inside কিন্তু ? (*Kim*, “what”, and *tu*, “however”.) Which word taught in chapter three is built on the first of them? (কি.) And what does কিন্তু do that আর cannot? (Turn the second clause against the first.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

29.2 একমত (ekmôt) — of one mind

আচ্ছা has been in this book since chapter one and it says *I see*. It does not say *I agree*, and nothing else here does either.

- *Recall*: the word that turns a clause against the one before it — *kintu*

You’ll want to know: একমত

আমি একমত — *āmi ekmôt* — **I agree**.

আমি একমত নই — *āmi ekmôt nôî* — I do not agree.

The word is two words: এক, “one”, which chapter twelve counted, and মত, “opinion”. *Of one mind*. English builds the same picture out of Latin when it says *unanimous* — *ūnus animus*, one spirit.

Grammar Lens: agreeing needs no verb, and disagreeing needs no new word

আমি একমত has no verb in it, like আমি ভালো before it — so it is denied the same way, with নই. The whole of agreement and disagreement in Bengali is now two words the reader already owns arranged in two orders.

Put কিন্তু in front and you have the shape every conversation turns on: আমি একমত, কিন্তু ... — *I agree, but ...*

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *āmi ekmôt*
- *āmi ekmôt nôî*
- the polite half-agreement — *āmi ekmôt, kintu ...*
- the one-word answers it can replace — *hyã ... nã*

Before you move on

What are the two pieces of একমত? (*Ek*, one, and *môt*, opinion.) Which negator denies it, and why that one? (নই — the sentence has no verb to put না after.) And which English word is built the same way out of Latin? (**Unanimous**.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

29.3 কেননা (kenonā) — because

Two lessons ago you could contradict somebody, and one lesson ago you could agree with them. Neither lets you say **why**.

- *Recall*: the two items before this one — *kintu, ekmôt*

You'll want to know: কেননা

আমি একমত নই, কেননা আমার চা নেই — *āmi ekmôt nôi, kenonā āmār chā nei* — **I do not agree, because I have no tea.**

কেননা stands at the head of the reason, the way কিন্তু stands at the head of the objection. The order is fixed: the claim first, the reason after it.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Pull কেননা apart and the negator of chapter twenty-seven falls out of it: কেন (“why”) plus না (“not”). Bengali’s word for *because* is a rhetorical question worn smooth — *why not?* — which is the same move English made in *forasmuch as* and *inasmuch as* before those went out of use.

Bengali writes another word here in everyday speech, *kāraṇ*, from Sanskrit *kāraṇa*, “cause”. It is the commoner of the two and it needs a letter this book has not taught, so it is named in romanization and left for a script lesson. কেননা costs no new letters at all — every piece of it is already yours.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *āmi ekmôt nôi, kenonā āmār chā nei*
- the two halves the word is made of — *kænô ... nā*
- an objection and then a reason — *kintu ... kenonā ...*
- *āmi jāni nā, kenonā āmi bhābi nā*

Before you move on

What two words is কেননা built from? (কেন, why, and না, not.) Which comes first, the claim or the reason? (**The claim** — the reason follows it.) And which word does the same job at the head of an objection? (কিন্তু.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

29.4 Agreeing, differing, and saying why

Three items landed in this chapter, and between them they cover objecting, agreeing and explaining. Name all three.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *āmi ekmôt* — then deny it, *āmi ekmôt nôî*
- *Say it:* the three-clause sentence — *āmi ekmôt, kintu āmār chā nei, kenonā āmār dudh-o nei*
- *Recall:* eight lessons back, the joiner that offers a choice — *bā*
- *Recall:* eleven lessons back, the negator of a verbless sentence — *nôy*

Before you move on

Which of this chapter's three words heads an objection, and which heads a reason? (কিন্তু the objection; কেননা the reason.) What is inside কেননা that chapter twenty-seven taught? (না.) And what would make the whole three-clause sentence a question? (**A rising voice at the end**, and nothing else.)

Chapter 30

When You Are Lost

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can report what I think with যে, put one event beside another in time with যখন ... তখন, and ask somebody to say it again, slowly, when I have not followed.

A learner who has stopped following says so and gets the sentence back: I do not understand, say it again, slowly — assembled out of না from chapter twenty-seven and two words the book taught in chapters seven and eleven — and then reports an opinion with যে and places it in time with যখন ... তখন.

30.1 যে (je) — that

ভাবা, “to think”, has been in this book since chapter fourteen, and in all that time nobody has been able to say what they think.

- *Recall:* two items back, the word that heads a reason — *kenonā*

You’ll want to know: যে

আমি ভাবি যে চা ভালো — *āmi bhābi je chā bhālo* — **I think that tea is good.**

আমি জানি যে তুমি ভালো — *āmi jāni je tumi bhālo* — **I know that you are well.**

যে does one job: it takes a whole sentence and turns it into the object of a verb of thinking, knowing or saying. Everything before it is the frame; everything after it is the thought, unchanged, in the order it would have had standing alone.

Grammar Lens: what English drops and Bengali keeps

English can leave *that* out — *I think tea is good* is ordinary English. Bengali speech drops যে too, and Bengali writing keeps it. A learner should say it: the sentence is easier to hear coming when the joint is marked.

The word is the Sanskrit relative stem *ya-*, an inheritance shared with Latin *qui* and English *who*. That is why the same syllable will later introduce a relative clause as well — one word, two jobs, and this lesson teaches the simpler one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *āmi bhābi je chā bhālo*
- *āmi jāni je tumi bhālo*
- an opinion, then an objection to it — *āmi bhābi je chā bhālo, kintu dudh nôy*

Before you move on

What does যে attach to the verb in front of it? (**A whole sentence**, as its object.) Does the sentence after it change shape? (**No** — it stands exactly as it would alone.) And which verb, taught in chapter fourteen, has been waiting for this word? (ভাবা, to think.) Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

30.2 যখন (jôkhon) — when

The lesson before this took the relative stem য and hung a sentence off a verb with it. The same stem, with an ending, hangs a sentence off a moment.

- *Recall*: the complementiser from the lesson before — *je*

You'll want to know: যখন

যখন আমি আসি, তখন চা খাই — *jôkhon āmi āshi, tôkhon chā khāi*
— **when I come, then I drink tea.**

Bengali does not leave the pair half-finished the way English does. যখন opens the clause and তখন answers it, and a fluent speaker says both. English would say *when I come, I drink tea* and let the *then* be understood; Bengali puts it in.

Grammar Lens: one frame, three prefixes

word	prefix	job
যখন	য-, the relative	when ... (opens a clause)
তখন	ত-, the demonstrative	then (answers it)
কখন	ক-, the interrogative	when? (asks)

One ending, three heads. The same three letters begin যে (relative), তুমি (demonstrative in origin) and কি and কেমন (interrogative) — which is to say the reader has been meeting this pattern since chapter three without being shown it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *jôkhon āmi āshi, tôkhon chā khāi*
- the pair on its own — *jôkhon ... tôkhon*
- a reason and a time in one breath — *kenonā jôkhon āmi jāi ...*

Before you move on

Which word answers যখন, and does a Bengali speaker leave it out? (তখন, and no — both halves get said.) What do যখন, তখন and কখন share? (**One ending**, with the relative, demonstrative and interrogative heads in front of it.) And which word from the previous lesson shares the first of those heads? (যে.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

30.3 আবার বলবেন — say it again

আবার was taught in chapter seven and বলা in chapter eleven. Nineteen chapters later they have never stood next to each other, and the sentence they make is the one a beginner needs more than any other.

- *Recall*: two items back, the complementiser — *je*

You'll want to know: আবার বলবেন

আবার বলবেন — *ābār bôlben* — please say it again.

দয়া করে আবার বলবেন — *doyā kore ābār bôlben* — the same request, with *please* in front of it.

The ending is not new. Chapter twenty-two taught *māf kôrben*, “excuse me”, and named -বেন as the polite ending that sounds like a future and works as a request. Put it on বলা and you have asked somebody to repeat themselves without learning a single new word.

Grammar Lens: the whole repair kit, in two sentences

A learner who is lost needs to say two things and no more: *I do not understand* and *say it again*. Chapter twenty-seven built the first out of না. This lesson builds the second out of two words from chapters seven and eleven. Neither needed new vocabulary; both needed somebody to put the pieces together.

দয়া করে goes in front when the request should be softer, exactly as chapter twenty-two taught it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *ābār bôlben*
- *doyā kore ābār bôlben*
- the pair a lost learner needs — *āmi bujhi nā ... ābār bôlben*

Before you move on

Which ending makes this a polite request, and where was it taught? (-বেন, in chapter twenty-two, on *māf kôrben*.) How many new words does this sentence need? (**None** — both were already in the book.) And what goes in front to soften it? (দয়া করে.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

30.4 ধীরে (dhīre) — slowly

Asking somebody to repeat themselves only helps if they repeat themselves at a speed you can follow.

- *Recall*: the request from the lesson before — *ābār bôlben*

You'll want to know: ধীরে

ধীরে বলবেন — *dhīre bôlben* — **please speak slowly.**

ধীরে ধীরে বলবেন — *dhīre dhīre bôlben* — the same thing, said the way Bengali actually says it.

The doubling is not emphasis for a foreigner's benefit. Bengali turns an adverb up by repeating it, and ধীরে ধীরে is the ordinary form of this word in speech; the single ধীরে is what a dictionary lists.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

ধীরে is Sanskrit *dhīra*, which meant **steady, composed, deliberate** long before it meant *slow*. The word is about the manner of a person, and only then about the speed of a thing — which is why asking somebody to speak *dhīre* is a gentler request than asking them to speak slowly in English.
Its second letter carries the long *i*-sign chapter twenty-four taught on নীল. Four pieces, all of them already read.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *dhīre bôlben*

- the doubled form — *dhīre dhīre bôlben*
- the whole repair kit — *āmi bujhi nā ... ābār bôlben ... dhīre dhīre*

Before you move on

What did ধীরে mean in Sanskrit before it meant *slowly*? (**Steady, composed** — a word about a person.) Why do Bengali speakers say it twice? (**Doubling is how the language intensifies an adverb.**) And which sign sits on its second letter? (**The long *i***, from নীল.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

30.5 When you are lost

Four items landed in this chapter. Two of them join clauses and two of them rescue a conversation. Name all four.

Your turn

- *Say it*: an opinion — *āmi bhābi je chā bhālo*
- *Say it*: a time — *jôkhon āmi āshi, tôkhon chā khāi*
- *Say it*: the repair kit in order — *āmi bujhi nā ... ābār bôlben ... dhīre dhīre*
- *Recall*: eight lessons back, the word that heads an objection — *kintu*
- *Recall*: fourteen lessons back, the joiner that adds — *ār*

Before you move on

Four chapters ago this book could not deny a sentence, join two nouns, give a reason or ask for a repeat. Say the sentence that agrees and then objects. (আমি একমত, কিন্তু ...) Say the one that reports a thought. (আমি ভাবি যে ...) And say the two sentences a lost learner needs. (*āmi bujhi nā* and আবার বলবেন.)

Chapter 31

The Letter in the Way

Modes: ⇄ voice (4) ✍ pen (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say the shirt, a shirt and another shirt — because the letter 𑖞 finally exists and the classifier that does the work of the exists with it.

Sixty nouns taught across chapters ten to fifteen — a pantry, a family, a face and a wardrobe — become pickable-out for the first time: the shirt, a shirt, another shirt, and the polite form for people.

31.1 𑖞 — the fourth corner

Write 𑖞, then 𑖟, then 𑖠. Say for each one where the tongue goes and whether the voice is on.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the joiner that puts one event beside another — *jôkhon*

Script

𑖞

You have been carrying three corners of a square without being shown the square.

	voice off	voice on
tongue on the teeth	𑖞 <i>tô</i>	𑖟 <i>dô</i>
tongue curled back	𑖞̣ <i>ṭô</i>	𑖠 <i>ḍô</i>

Two switches, four letters. ট is the one the book never filled in: the tongue curled back to the ridge, exactly where you put it for ড, and the voice switched off, exactly as you do for ত. If you can make the other three you can already make this one — you have never been asked to.

An English *t* lands between the two rows, which is the same trap দ and ড set. To an English ear ত and ট are one letter. They are not, and they spell different words.

With the mātrā:

ট + া → টা

Hold on to that syllable. It is the shape of the next four lessons, and it is the reason this letter could not wait any longer.

Your turn

- Write it: ট
- Write it: টা
- Say it: ত then ট — teeth, then curled back, voice off for both
- Say it: ট then ড — curled back for both, voice off then on
- Write it: ত ট দ ড

Before you move on

Which two switches make the square? (**Where the tongue is**, and **whether the voice is on**.) Which letter is ট with the voice switched on? (ড.) And which is it with the tongue brought forward onto the teeth? (ত.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

31.2 টা (-ṭā) — the ending that means “the”

Write the letter from the lesson before, then write it with the mātrā. Then say জামা.

You'll want to know: টা

জামা — *jāmā* — shirt.

জামাটা — *jāmāṭā* — the shirt.

চা — *chā* — tea.

চাটা — *chāṭā* — the tea.

Bengali has no word for **the**. Thirty chapters of this book have taught nouns that float free — *shirt, tea, brother* — with no way to say you mean **that one, the one we are both thinking of**. The way you say it is not a word in front. It is টা, stuck on the end.

Nothing goes between the noun and it, and nothing comes before the noun. The noun and its ending are written as one word.

Grammar Lens: why this is called a classifier and not an article

An article does one job: it says *definite*. টা does that and one more. Bengali will not put a number directly on a noun, so টা is also the piece a count has to pass through — you will meet that in the next lesson. There is a polite twin, টি, used for people and in careful writing:

- ভাইটা — *bhāiṭā* — the brother, plainly
- ভাইটি — *bhāiṭi* — the brother, respectfully

Same slot, same job, different warmth. Learn টা and recognise টি.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *jāmāṭā* — the shirt
- *chāṭā* — the tea
- *bhāiṭā*, then the polite *bhāiṭi*
- the red one — *lāl jāmāṭā*

Before you move on

Where does টা go — in front of the noun or on the end of it? (**On the end**, written as one word.) Does Bengali have a word for **the**? (**No** — this ending is what it has instead.) And which form would you use of a person you were being careful about? (টি.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

31.3 একটা (ekṭā) — a, one

Say **the shirt**. Then read এক.

You'll want to know: একটা

একটা জামা — *ekṭā jāmā* — **a shirt**.

একটা বন্ধু — *ekṭā bôndhu* — **a friend**.

Chapter twenty-four taught you to count এক দুই তিন চার পাঁচ, and then gave you nothing to count. This is why. এক cannot sit next to a noun. Bengali makes a number reach its noun through the classifier, and এক plus টা is একটা — which then means both *one* and *a*, because in Bengali those are the same thought.

So the ending you learned one lesson ago turns out to have been two doors:

- জামাটা — **the** shirt, the one we mean
- একটা জামা — **a** shirt, any one

Same টা. Nothing in front of it, or a number in front of it.

Grammar Lens: where the ending goes, and it moves

Watch which word carries the suffix:

	Bengali	the ending is on
the shirt	জামাটা	the noun
a shirt	একটা জামা	the number

When a number turns up, the classifier leaves the noun and attaches to the number instead. That is one rule, and it is the rule that will carry

every count you ever make in this language.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *ekṭā jāmā* — a shirt
- *ekṭā bôndhu* — a friend
- the pair, back to back — *jāmātā*, then *ekṭā jāmā*
- a tea — *ekṭā chā*

Before you move on

Can এক stand next to a noun on its own? (**No** — it goes through the classifier.) When a number appears, which word carries টা? (**The number**, not the noun.) And what two English words does একটা cover? (**A**, and **one**.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

31.4 আরেকটা (āreṭā) — another one

Say **a shirt**. Then say the joiner from chapter twenty-eight that means **and**.

You'll want to know: আরেকটা

আরেকটা চা — *āreṭā chā* — **another tea**.

Take the word apart and it is already three things you own:

আর (and) + এক (one) + টা (the classifier) → আরেকটা

Which is why it does not merely mean *a different one*. It means **one more**, with the *and* still inside it.

Grammar Lens: the pair that hands things out one at a time

Bengali uses একটা ... আরেকটা as a fixed pair to run down a list of things one by one, the way English uses *one ... another*:

একটা লাল, আরেকটা কালো — *ekṭā lāl, āreṭā kālō* — **one**

red, another black.

This is the first time in this book that two things can be picked out and set side by side as separate items. Before the classifier existed there was no way to say **one** of anything, so there was no way to say **another** either.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *ārekṭā chā* — another tea
- the pair — *ekṭā lāl, ārekṭā kālō*
- two shirts, one at a time — *ekṭā jāmā, ārekṭā jāmā*
- the three pieces inside the word — *ār, ek, ṭā*

Before you move on

What three pieces is আরেকটা built from? (আর, এক and টা.) What does the first piece add to the meaning? (**And** — so it is *one more*, rather than only *a different one*.) And what is the word it pairs with? (একটা.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

31.5 One, the one, and another

One ending arrived in this chapter and did three different jobs. Name the three, and say for each one where the ending sits.

Your turn

- *Write it:* ট, then টা
- *Say it:* *jāmāṭā, ekṭā jāmā, ārekṭā jāmā*
- *Recall:* two chapters back, the joiner that opens a clause about a moment — *jôkhon*

Your turn: the distant band — every noun in the book, picked out one at a time

This is what the chapter bought. Chapters ten to fifteen taught a pantry, a family, a face and a wardrobe, and not one of those nouns could be pointed at as **the** one or counted as **a** one. Every one of them can now. Take them cold, from memory.

Say these aloud:

- the four things you drink and eat, each as **the** one — *chāṭā, jôṭṭā, dudhṭā, bhāṭṭā*
- the same four as **a** one — *ekṭā chā, ekṭā jôl, ekṭā dudh, ekṭā bhāt*
- the family, respectfully — *bhāṭi, bônṭi, bôndhuṭi*
- the wardrobe and its colours — *lāl jāmāṭā, kālō kâpôṭṭā, nāl jāmāṭā, shādā jāmāṭā*
- the face, one part at a time — *ekṭā chokh, ārekṭā chokh, then nākṭā, mukṭā*
- the whole family in one word — *pôribārṭā*

Before you move on

Does Bengali have a word for **the**? (**No** — it has this ending.)
 When a number stands in front, which word carries the ending?
 (**The number.**) Which form is the careful one, for people? (ট.)
 And which letter had to be taught before any of this chapter could
 be written down? (ঐ.)
 Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 32

Pointing at Things

Modes: ⇄ voice (5) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can point at something near me and something across the room, put a pointer and a classifier on the same phrase, and ask what is this?

The near and far heads arrive together, stack with the classifier at the opposite end of the phrase, and stand alone as এটা — which with the কী of chapter three makes the commonest beginner question in any language sayable for the first time.

32.1 এই (ei) — this

Say **the shirt**, then **a shirt**, then **another shirt**.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the word that opens a clause about a moment — *jôkhon*

You'll want to know: এই

এই জামা — *ei jāmā* — **this shirt**.

এই চা — *ei chā* — **this tea**.

Thirty-one chapters, and nothing in the room could be pointed at. টা says *the one we both mean*; it does not say *this one, here, the one I am looking at*. That is a different job and it needs a different word.

এই goes **in front** of the noun — the opposite end from the classifier, and worth noticing, because those two are about to appear in the same phrase.

Grammar Lens: the near head

Bengali builds a family of pointing words on one frame with three heads, and you met the frame in chapter thirty:

head	means	you have seen it in
এ-	near — <i>this</i>	এই
ও-	far — <i>that</i>	the next lesson
ক-	asking — <i>which, where</i>	কেমন, কখন

So এই is not a word to be memorised on its own. It is one square of a grid, and the rest of the grid arrives over the next six lessons.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *ei jāmā* — this shirt
- *Say it:* *ei chā* — this tea
- *Say it:* the contrast — *ekṭā jāmā*, then *ei jāmā*
- *Write it:* এই

Before you move on

Which end of the noun does এই go on? (**The front** — unlike the classifier.) What does it say that টা does not? (**Here, near me** — it points.) And which head of the pointing frame is it? (এ-, the near one.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

32.2 ওই (oi) — that

Say **this shirt**. Then write ও.

You'll want to know: ওই

ওই জামা — *oi jāmā* — **that shirt**.

এই লাল, ওই কালো — *ei lāl, oi kālō* — **this one red, that one black**.

Swap the head and you have crossed the room. এ- is here; ও- is there. That is the whole system: Bengali has **two** distances, not three. Spanish insists on *este*, *ese* and *aquel*; Bengali stops at two and lets context do the rest.

Grammar Lens: one letter, two jobs

You have met ও before, in chapter twenty-eight, as the joiner meaning **also**. It is the same letter and it is not an accident: a word that means *that one over there* and a word that means *and that too* are the same gesture, pointing away from the speaker.

Told apart by where it sits:

- ও alone, between two things — *also, and*
- ওই in front of a noun — *that*

You will meet a third job for it two chapters from now, when it turns into a person — and it is still the same gesture.

Your turn

- Say it: *oi jāmā* — that shirt
- Say it: the pair, pointing twice — *ei jāmā, oi jāmā*
- Say it: *ei lāl, oi kālō*
- Write it: এই ওই

Before you move on

How many distances does Bengali point to? (**Two** — here and there.) What is the only difference between এই and ওই? (**The head** — near against far.) And what else does ও do, on its own? (**Also, and.**)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

32.3 এই জামাটা (ei jāmāṭā) — this shirt, the one here

Say **this shirt**, then **that shirt**, then **the shirt**.

You'll want to know: both ends at once

এই জামাটা — *ei jāmāṭā* — **this shirt** (the one here, and we both know which).

ওই কাপড়টা — *oi kāpôṛṭā* — **that cloth**.

English cannot do this. *The this shirt* is not English, because *the* and *this* are fighting over one slot in front of the noun and only one of them can win. In Bengali they are nowhere near each other:

এই + জামা + টা · pointer · noun · classifier

Front and back. No competition, so no choice to make — and a Bengali speaker uses both far more often than an English speaker would expect, because leaving the classifier off sounds unfinished.

Grammar Lens: the fixed order

Once a number and an adjective join in, the order still does not move:

slot	what goes there	example
first	pointer	এই
second	number	একটা
third	adjective	লাল
last	noun + classifier	জামাটা

Everything before the noun is in a fixed queue, and the only thing that ever attaches to the noun itself is the classifier at the back. Bengali will keep adding suffixes at that back end for the rest of this book, always one at a time, always in order.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *ei jāmāṭā*
- *oi kāpôṛṭā*
- both ends, then the front alone — *ei jāmāṭā*, then *ei jāmā*
- the long queue — *ei lāl jāmāṭā*

Before you move on

Can a pointer and a classifier appear in the same phrase? (**Yes** — they sit at opposite ends.) Why can English not do the same? (**Its *the* and its *this* want the same slot.**) And which of the two attaches to the noun itself? (**The classifier**, at the back.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

32.4 এটা (eṭā) — this one

Say **this shirt**, with both ends. Then say the question from chapter two that asks somebody their name.

You'll want to know: এটা

এটা কী? — *eṭā ki?* — **what is this?**

এটা জল — *eṭā jôl* — **this is water.**

Take the noun out of এই জামাটা and keep the two ends. What is left — এ and টা — is এটা, and it means *this thing*, standing on its own as the subject of a sentence.

Chapter two taught কী as the question word inside *what is your name*, and then gave you nothing else to ask it about. এটা is the missing half. Between them they make the first question a learner of any language actually uses, and it has been out of reach for thirty-one chapters.

The far one works the same way: ওটা — *oṭā* — **that one.**

Grammar Lens: no verb in the middle

Notice what is **not** in এটা জল. There is no *is*. Bengali joins a subject to what it is by putting the two side by side and stopping, exactly as chapter twenty-seven showed when it taught you to deny such a sentence with নয়:

- এটা জল — this is water
- এটা জল নয় — this is not water

So the sentence and its denial both arrive at once, because the denier was already taught and had nothing to deny.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *eṭā ki?*
- *eṭā jôl*, then *eṭā chā*
- the denial — *eṭā jôl nôy*
- the far one — *oṭā ki?*
- with a noun and without — *ei jāmāṭā*, then *eṭā*

Before you move on

What two pieces is এটা made of? (এ-, the near head, and the classifier.) Is there a word for **is** in এটা জন? (**No** — the two halves sit side by side.) And which word denies it? (নয়.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

32.5 Pointing at things

How many distances does Bengali point to, and what is the only piece that changes between them? Then say **this one** and **that one** with no noun at all.

Your turn

- *Say it: ei jāmāṭā*, then *oi jāmāṭā*
- *Say it: eṭā ki?* — and answer it
- *Say it: the denial — eṭā chā nôy*
- *Recall: from the chapter before, the ending that means the — -ṭā*

Your turn: the distant band — the room, pointed at

Two chapters ago none of this could be said. Take the whole book's nouns and point at them, near and far, cold.

Say these aloud:

- the drinks, near then far — *ei chāṭā, oi chāṭā; ei jôḷṭā, oi dudhṭā*
- the wardrobe with a colour in the queue — *ei lāl jāmāṭā, oi kālō kāpôṛṭā, ei nīl jāmāṭā*
- the family, respectfully and at a distance — *ei bhāiṭi, oi bônṭi*
- one and then another — *ekṭā chā, ārekṭā chā*
- asking about each, then denying the answer — *eṭā ki? ... eṭā jôḷ nôy*
- the face — *ei mukhṭā*
- the other job of the far head, from chapter twenty-eight — **ও**
meaning *also*

Before you move on

Which end of the phrase does the pointer sit on, and which end does the classifier sit on? (**Front** and **back**.) Can both appear at once? (**Yes** — and a Bengali speaker usually uses both.) What is **এটা** made of? (**The near head and the classifier**, with no noun.) And which letter, taught one chapter ago, is inside every one of these? (**ঐ**.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 33

More Than One

Modes: ⇨ voice (4) 👁 eyes (1) ⇨ Hands-free start: first 2 of 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can sort a noun into living or not, put the plural its group demands on it, and stand an adjective in front of it.

One question about a noun — is it alive? — chooses between two plural endings, and every noun the book owns goes through the one its group demands. The adjective rule that thirty-two chapters used without stating is stated.

33.1 জীব আর জিনিস (jīb ār jinish) — alive, and not

Ask **what is this?** Then say **this shirt**, with both ends.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the ending that turns a noun into *the* one — *-tā*

You'll want to know: the split

Every noun you have learned belongs to one of two groups, and Bengali has been waiting to be told which:

group	what is in it	examples from this book
জীব — living	people and animals	ভাই, বোন, বন্ধু
জিনিস — thing	everything else	জামা, চা, জল, নাক

This is not decoration. It decides two things that are about to matter:

- **which ending makes it plural** — the next two lessons
- **which classifier counts it** — you have met one of them already

Spanish makes the same kind of demand and answers it with gender, which has to be learned word by word because a table has no visible femininity. Bengali's question — *is it alive?* — can be answered by looking.

Grammar Lens: the borderline, and what to do about it

Two warnings, and they are the whole difficulty:

Body parts are things. নাক and মুখ belong to a living person and are themselves জিনিস. The test is whether the noun names something alive, not whether it belongs to something alive.

Respect can move a noun up. A person spoken of warmly takes the living endings even when a plain speaker might not bother. That is the same warmth টি carries, and it runs right through Bengali grammar.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- which group — *bhāi, bôn, bôndhu*
- which group — *jāmā, chā, jôl, nāk*
- the two group names — *jīb, jinish*
- the tricky one, and why — *nāk* is জিনিস

Before you move on

What question does Bengali ask about a noun that Spanish answers with gender? (**Is it alive?**) Which group does নাক belong to, and why? (জিনিস — the test is what the noun names, not what it is attached to.) And what two things does the answer decide? (**The plural ending, and the classifier.**)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

33.2 রা (-rā) — more than one, and alive

Which group is ভাই in, and which is জামা in?

You'll want to know: রা

ভাই — *bhāi* — brother.

ভাইরা — *bhāirā* — **brothers**.

বন্ধু — *bôndhu* — friend.

বন্ধুরা — *bôndhurā* — **friends**.

Twenty chapters of family and friends, and every one of them has been strictly one person. রা on the end makes them many — and it is allowed **only** on the living group. Put it on a shirt and a Bengali speaker will stop you.

When the noun ends in a consonant, an এ appears to carry the ending:

বোন — *bôn* — sister.

বোনেরা — *bônerā* — **sisters**.

Grammar Lens: Bengali does not insist

English forces the choice on every noun in every sentence: it is *brother* or *brothers*, never neutral. Bengali does not. A bare ভাই is happy to mean one brother or several, and the ending goes on only when the plurality is the point.

That is why the ending has felt absent from this book: it has not been hiding. Bengali has not needed it yet.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *bhāi*, then *bhāirā*
- *bôndhu*, then *bôndhurā*
- the one that needs the extra vowel — *bôn*, then *bônerā*
- pointing at them — *ei bhāirā*

Before you move on

Which group of nouns may take রা? (**The living one.**) What appears before it after a consonant? (এ.) And must a Bengali noun be marked plural whenever it is plural? (**No** — only when it matters.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

33.3 গুলো (-gulo) — more than one, and not alive

Make ভাই plural. Then try the same ending on জামা and say why it is wrong.

You'll want to know: গুলো

জামাগুলো — *jāmāgulo* — **the shirts.**

চোখগুলো — *chokhgulo* — **the eyes.**

The জিনিস half of the split gets its own ending, and it is a longer one. Where রা only pluralises, গুলো pluralises **and** definitises: it means *the* shirts, the particular ones, not shirts in general.

So this ending is doing the classifier's job as well as the plural's — which is exactly what you should expect from a language whose singular *the* is also a stuck-on piece.

Grammar Lens: the full table, finally

group and noun	one, definite	more than one
জীব — ভাই	ভাইটি	ভাইরা
জিনিস — জামা	জামাটা	জামাগুলো

Read the last column and the split earns itself. Two endings, chosen by one question you can answer by looking, and the whole of Bengali's number system for an A1 learner is in that table.

There is a careful twin here too — গুলি, standing to গুলো as টি stands to টা. Recognise it; say গুলো.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *jāmāgulo* — the shirts
- the two halves back to back — *bhāirā, jāmāgulo*
- pointing — *ei jāmāgulo, oi jāmāgulo*
- with a colour in front — *lāl jāmāgulo*
- the pair of eyes — *chokhgulo*

Before you move on

Which group takes গুলো? (জিনিস — the not-living one.) What does it add beyond plurality? (**Definiteness** — *the* shirts.) And what is the careful form? (গুলি.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

33.4 লাল জামা (lāl jāmā) — a red shirt

Say **the shirts**. Then say **red**.

You'll want to know: where the adjective goes

লাল জামা — *lāl jāmā* — a red shirt.

Chapter twenty-six gave you five colours and used every one of them as a sentence on its own — *the shirt is red*. Not once did a colour stand **in front of** a noun, which is where an adjective actually lives most of the time.

It goes **in front**, and — this is the part worth keeping — it **never changes**. Not for the group the noun is in, not for how many there are, not for anything:

- লাল জামা — a red shirt
- লাল জামাগুলো — the red shirts
- লাল জামাটা — the red shirt

One form of লাল, three phrases. Spanish would have made you write *rojo*, *rojos* and *roja*.

Grammar Lens: the queue, filled in

Chapter thirty-two laid out a queue and left a slot empty. This is the word that fills it:

slot	what goes there	example
first	pointer	এই
second	number	একটা
third	adjective	লাল
last	noun + ending	জামা

And ভালো, which you have had since chapter three as *well* and as *good*, is an adjective like any other and takes the same slot: ভালো বন্ধু — a good friend.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *lāl jāmā* — a red shirt
- all five colours in front of the same noun — *lāl, kālō, nīl, shādā, shôbuj jāmā*
- unchanged across number — *lāl jāmā, lāl jāmāgulo*
- the whole queue — *ei ekṭā lāl jāmā*
- *bhālo bôndhu*

Before you move on

Which side of the noun does a Bengali adjective sit on? (**In front.**)
 Does it change for number or for the noun's group? (**No** — never.)
 And which slot of the queue is it? (**The third**, between the number and the noun.)
 Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

33.5 More than one

One question decides which of two endings a noun takes. What is the question, and what are the two endings?

Your turn

- *Say it: bhāirā, bōnerā, bōndhurā*
- *Say it: jāmāgulo, chokhgulo*
- *Say it: unchanged in front — lāl jāmā, lāl jāmāgulo*
- *Recall: two chapters back, the ending that makes a noun the one — -ṭā*

Your turn: the distant band — the whole book, in the plural

Sort every noun this book owns into its group, then pluralise it the way its group demands. Cold, from memory.

Say these aloud:

- the living ones — *bhāirā, bōnerā, bōndhurā*
- the things — *jāmāgulo, kāpôṛgulo, chokhgulo, nākgulo*
- the two that catch people out, and why — *nāk* and *hridôy* are জিনিস
- the food, definite and plural — *bhātḡulo, chāḡulo*
- with a colour and a pointer — *ei lāl jāmāgulo, oi kālō kāpôṛgulo*
- one, another, then all of them — *ekṭā jāmā, ārekṭā jāmā, jāmāgulo*
- the family, singular and plural — *pôribārṭā*, then *bhāirā*
- asking about a pile of them — *eṭā ki?*

Before you move on

Which ending does a living noun take, and which does a thing take? (রা and গুলো.) Which of the two also means *the*? (গুলো.) Where does an adjective stand, and does it change? (**In front**, and **no**.) And which letter, three lessons before this chapter, made all of it writable? (ট.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 34

Somebody Else

Modes: ⇐ voice (3) ⇐ eyes (2) ⇐ Hands-free start: none of the 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can talk about a third person, choose the respectful form when I should, sort them by how far away they are, and say what is theirs.

The third person arrives — graded for respect on the same ladder as তুমি and আপনি, and sorted by distance on the same heads as এই and ওই — and with it the possessive column reaches its third of six cells.

34.1 সে (she) — he, she

Say **I**. Say the two words for **you**, and say which one is for somebody you are careful with.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the word that points at something near — *ei*

You'll want to know: সে

সে ভালো — *she bhālo* — **he is well**, or **she is well**.

Thirty-three chapters, and every sentence this book can build has been about আমি or তুমি. Somebody is either speaking or being spoken to. Nobody has ever been **talked about**.

সে is the word that changes that, and it does two things at once that English needs two words for. It is *he* and it is *she*, and Bengali will not tell you which. Sex is not marked on a Bengali pronoun at all — not here, not anywhere.

Grammar Lens: the third row of a table you already half know

person	plain	careful
I	আমি	—
you	তুমি	আপনি
he, she	সে	<i>next lesson</i>

Chapter two taught you that Bengali grades **you** for respect. It grades the third person the same way, on the same ladder, and the careful form arrives in the next lesson. What the table shows is that **সে** is the *plain* one: it is what you use of a child, a friend, a younger sibling — and what you must not use of somebody's grandmother.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *she bhālo*
- the three persons in a row — *āmi, tumi, she*
- pointing and then naming — *ei bhāṭi ... she bhālo*
- it covers both — *she* for a brother, *she* for a sister

Before you move on

Does **সে** mean *he* or *she*? (**Both** — Bengali does not mark it.) Which rung of the respect ladder is it on? (**The plain one**, like **তুমি**.) And what could this book not do before this word? (**Talk about anybody** who was not speaking or being spoken to.) Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

34.2 তিনি (tini) — he, she, respectfully

Say **he is well** with the plain pronoun. Then say the careful word for **you**.

You'll want to know: তিনি

তিনি ভালো — *tini bhālo* — **he is well**, said of somebody you respect.

The table from the last lesson is now complete:

person	plain	careful
I	আমি	—
you	তুমি	আপনি
he, she	সে	তিনি

Two rungs in the second person, two rungs in the third, and the choice is made the same way both times: age, standing, and how well you know them.

Grammar Lens: the cost of getting it wrong

This is not a nicety a learner can put off. Bengali offers no neutral pronoun to hide behind: every time you mention a third person you have to pick a rung, and picking the low one about somebody's elder is a real discourtesy — the kind you would then be apologising for with *dukkhito*.

The safe habit while you are learning: **তিনি** for anybody older than you or unknown to you, **সে** for children and for friends your own age. Over-politeness is heard as slightly formal. Under-politeness is heard as rude.

Notice too that **তিনি** and **আপনি** share their ending. The careful rung is built the same way on both rows, which is one shape to learn rather than two.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *tini bhālo*
- the two rungs, back to back — *she bhālo, tini bhālo*
- all four pronouns — *tumi, āpni, she, tini*
- of an elder brother, carefully — *ei bhāiṭi ... tini bhālo*

Before you move on

Which second-person word does **তিনি** match? (**আপনি** — same rung, same ending.) Can a Bengali speaker avoid the choice? (**No** — there is no neutral third-person pronoun.) And which one do you

use of somebody older than you? (তিনি.)
 Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

34.3 ও (o) — him, her, the one standing there

Say **that shirt**. Then say what ও does when it stands between two things.

You'll want to know: ও as a person

ও ভালো — *o bhālo* — **he is well** — said of somebody standing right there.

Chapter thirty-two promised this letter a third job, and here it is. ও on its own, in front of a verb, is a **person**: the one nearby, the one you could gesture at.

Three jobs, one syllable, and they are told apart by position:

where it sits	what it is
between two things	also, and
in front of a noun, as ওই	that
standing alone as a subject	him, her

Grammar Lens: near, there, and away

Bengali's third person is not one word but a small set sorted by **how far away the person is**, exactly the way its pointing words are:

- এ — this one, right here
- ও — that one, over there
- সে — him, her, away from us both, or not present at all

They are all the plain rung. তিনি is the careful rung for all three distances at once, which is why it has no near-and-far partners. So the pointing system you built two chapters ago was never only about shirts. It sorts people too, and that is why এই and ওই were worth a whole chapter.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *o bhālo*
- the three distances — *e, o, she*
- the three jobs of one syllable — *bhāi o bôn; oi jāmā; o bhālo*
- the careful rung, which covers all three — *tini bhālo*

Before you move on

What are the three jobs of ঔ, and what tells them apart? (**Also, that, him or her** — told apart by **where it sits.**) Which of the plain third-person words is for somebody not present? (সে.) And how many careful forms are there? (**One** — তিনি covers every distance.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

34.4 তার (tār) — his, her

Say **my**. Then say **he is well**.

You'll want to know: তার

তার ভাই — *tār bhāi* — **his brother**, or **her brother**.

তার জামাটা — *tār jāmāṭā* — **his shirt** (that one).

Chapter two taught আমার and তোমার and left it there, so possession has been available for exactly two people out of everybody in the world. তার is the third, and it is built the way the other two are:

person	pronoun	possessive
I	আমি	আমার
you	তুমি	তোমার
he, she	সে	তার

An -র on the end, every time. That is not a coincidence to be memorised: it is a **case ending**, the same kind of stuck-on piece as the classifier, and it is the second of several you will meet.

The careful form follows the same rule from তিনি: তাঁর — *tār* — with the moon-dot you learned in chapter five sitting over the vowel.

Grammar Lens: order does not change

A possessive takes the front slot, in front of everything, and the noun keeps its own ending at the back exactly as before:

তার লাল জামাটা — *tār lāl jāmāṭā* — **his red shirt.**

Front to back: **whose**, then **what kind**, then **the thing** with its ending. Nothing you learned about the queue has changed; one more slot has been filled at its head.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *tār bhāi*
- the three possessives in a row — *āmār, tomār, tār*
- the careful one — *tār bhāi*
- the full queue — *tār lāl jāmāṭā*

Before you move on

What ending turns a Bengali pronoun into a possessive? (-র.)
Which pronoun is তার built on? (সে.) And where in the phrase does a possessive stand? (**At the front**, before everything.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

34.5 Somebody else

Three plain third-person words arrived in this chapter, sorted by distance, and one careful word that covers all three. Name them.

Your turn

- *Say it: she bhālo, tini bhālo, o bhālo*
- *Say it: tār bhāi, then the careful tār bhāi*
- *Say it: and the denial — she bhālo nôy*
- *Recall: two chapters back, the ending that pluralises a living noun — -rā*

Your turn: the distant band — the whole family, talked about

Until this chapter every sentence in this book was about the speaker or the listener. The family of chapter twenty-one has been sitting in the book for a hundred lessons and could never once be the subject of a sentence. Take them cold.

Say these aloud:

- the six persons in order — *āmi, tumi, āpni, she, tini, o*
- the three possessives — *āmār, tomār, tār*
- a brother, pointed at and then talked about — *ei bhāiṭi ... tini bhālo*
- a friend, plainly — *oi bôndhuṭā ... she bhālo*
- whose face — *tār mukhṭā*
- his family, and his brothers — *tār pôribārṭā, tār bhāirā*
- whose shirt, with everything in the queue — *tār lāl jāmāṭā*
- the three jobs of one syllable, once more — *bhāi o bôn; oi jāmā; o bhālo*

Before you move on

Does Bengali mark *he* against *she*? (**No.**) How many rungs of respect does the third person have? (**Two** — **ঐ** and **তিনি**.) What sorts **এ**, **ও** and **সে** from each other? (**How far away the person is.**) And what ending makes a possessive? (**-র**.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 35

All of Us

Modes: ⇨ voice (2) 👁 eyes (3) ⇨ Hands-free start: first 2 of 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can talk about more than one of us, more than one of you and more than one of them, and say what belongs to any of those groups.

The plural ending taught two chapters earlier on nouns turns out to build every plural pronoun in the language without one exception, and a different ending replaces it when the pronoun has to own something — the first sight of the rule that the back slot holds one suffix at a time.

35.1 আমরা (āmrā) — we

Say **I**. Then make ভাই plural, and say which group of nouns is allowed that ending.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the word that asks *what is this?* — *eṭā ki*

You'll want to know: আমরা

আমরা ভালো — *āmrā bhālo* — **we are well.**

Look at what has happened. আমি plus the living plural -রা is আমরা, and there is nothing else to learn: a pronoun is a living noun, so it takes the living noun's ending.

English cannot show you this. *I* becomes *we*, two words with no letter in common, and a learner has to memorise the pair. Bengali charges you nothing, because you paid two chapters ago.

Grammar Lens: exclusive or inclusive? Bengali does not say

Some languages have two words for *we* — one that includes the person you are talking to and one that shuts them out. Bengali has one, exactly as English does, and leaves it to context:

আমরা ভালো can mean *we (you and I) are well* or *we (my family, not you) are well*.

Nothing marks the difference. When it matters, a Bengali speaker names the group: আমরা, and then who.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *āmrā bhālo*
- the singular and the plural — *āmi bhālo*, *āmrā bhālo*
- the same ending on a noun — *bhāirā*
- naming the group — *āmrā*, *āmār pôribār*

Before you move on

What two pieces is আমরা made of? (আমি and the living plural -রা.) Why that ending and not the other one? (**A person is** জীব.) And does Bengali have two words for *we*? (**No** — one, like English.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

35.2 তোমরা (tomrā) — you, more than one

Say **we**. Then say the plain word for **you** and the careful one.

You'll want to know: তোমরা

তোমরা ভালো — *tomrā bhālo* — **you are all well.**

Same ending again. তুমি plus -রা, with the vowel settling to তোম-, and Bengali has a word English lacks: *you*, plural, unambiguously.

The careful rung pluralises too:

- তুমি → তোমরা — you, plainly
- আপনি → আপনারা — you, respectfully

Four words where English has one, and every one of them is that same -রা.

Grammar Lens: the grid, complete for two of three persons

	one	more than one
I	আমি	আমরা
you, plainly	তুমি	তোমরা
you, carefully	আপনি	আপনারা

One ending, applied without exception. Nothing here is irregular, which is worth saying out loud because the equivalent English table is nothing but exceptions.
The third row is the next lesson.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *tomrā bhālo*
- singular then plural — *tumi bhālo*, *tomrā bhālo*
- the careful pair — *āpni*, *āpnārā*
- to a room of friends — *tomrā*, *āmār bôndhurā*

Before you move on

What is the plural of আপনি? (আপনারা.) How many words does Bengali need where English says *you*? (**Four** — two rungs, two

numbers.) And which ending builds every one of them? (-রা.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

35.3 তারা (tārā) — they

Say **you, all of you**. Then say **he is well**, plainly.

You'll want to know: তারা

তারা ভালো — *tārā bhālo* — **they are well**.

The stem of সে is তা- — you saw it last chapter inside তার — and with the living plural on the end it is তারা. The careful form does what you would now expect: তাঁরা, with the moon-dot.

That completes the grid. Six persons, in a language that spent thirty-three chapters able to talk about two:

	one	more than one
I	আমি	আমরা
you, plainly	তুমি	তোমরা
you, carefully	আপনি	আপনারা
he, she, plainly	সে	তারা
he, she, carefully	তিনি	তাঁরা

Grammar Lens: one ending did all of it

Read the right-hand column downwards and every entry ends the same way. There is no irregular plural anywhere in the Bengali pronoun system — no *I/we*, no *he/they*, nothing to memorise as a pair. And it is the same -রা that pluralises ভাই and বোন. One rule, learned once, for people and for pronouns alike, because Bengali does not think those are different kinds of word.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *tārā bhālo*
- the careful one — *tārā bhālo*

- the three plurals in a row — *āmrā*, *tomrā*, *tārā*
- the same ending on a noun — *bônerā*
- singular against plural, all three persons — *āmi/āmrā*, *tumi/tomrā*, *she/tārā*

Before you move on

What stem is **তারা** built on? (তা-, the stem of সে.) Is there an irregular plural pronoun in Bengali? (No — every one takes -রা.) And what is the careful form? (তঁারা.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

35.4 আমাদের (āmāder) — our

Say **my**, **your** and **his**. Then say **we**.

You'll want to know: আমাদের

আমাদের পরিবার — *āmāder pôribār* — **our family**.

Here is the piece that finishes the possessive column. Watch what happens to the plural ending:

আমরা → আমাদের, not *āmrār*.

The -রা does not survive. In its place comes -দের, which is the plural possessive ending and is used across the board:

	mine	ours
I / we	আমার	আমাদের
you, plainly	তোমার	তোমাদের
he, she / they	তার	তাদের

Grammar Lens: one suffix at a time

This is the first sight of a rule that governs the whole back end of a Bengali word: **the slot holds one ending, and only one**. Plural and possessive cannot both be there, so a single ending is used that carries both meanings at once.

You have already seen the same economy without being told: গুলো does plural *and* definite, so it occupies the place টা would otherwise

have taken. Bengali merges endings where English would stack them.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *āmāder pôribār*
- the whole column — *āmār, tomār, tār, āmāder, tomāder, tāder*
- the ending that vanishes — *āmrā*, but *āmāder*
- their brothers — *tāder bhāirā*

Before you move on

What happens to **-রা** when a possessive is needed? (**It is replaced** by **-দের**.) How many endings may the back slot hold at once? (**One.**) And which ending you already knew does two jobs for the same reason? (**গুলো** — plural and definite.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

35.5 All of us

One ending made every plural pronoun in this chapter, and a different one made every plural possessive. Name both, and say why they cannot appear together.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the six persons — *āmi, āmrā, tumi, tomrā, she, tārā*
- the careful rungs — *āpnī, āpnārā, tini, tārā*
- the whole possessive column — *āmār, tomār, tār, āmāder, tomāder, tāder*

Your turn: the distant band — four chapters back, and everything since

Four chapters ago the letter ট did not exist in this book and nothing could be pointed at, counted, pluralised or owned by anybody but you and the person in front of you. Run the whole distance, cold.

- *Write it:* ট, then টা
- *Say it:* the classifier and the indefinite — *jāmāṭā, ekṭā jāmā, ārekṭā jāmā*
- *Say it:* pointing near and far — *ei jāmāṭā, oi jāmāṭā*
- *Say it:* the two plurals, sorted by group — *bhāirā, jāmāgulo, chokhgulo*
- *Say it:* an adjective that never changes — *lāl jāmā, lāl jāmāgulo*
- *Say it:* the third person, both rungs — *she bhālo, tini bhālo, o bhālo*
- *Say it:* whose, singular and plural — *tār pôribār, amāder pôribār, tader bhāirā*
- *Say it:* the whole queue, with an owner on the front — *amāder ei lāl jāmāṭā*
- *Say it:* asking about it — *eṭā ki?*

Before you move on

Which ending makes every plural pronoun? (-রা.) What replaces it when the pronoun has to own something? (-দের.) Is any Bengali plural pronoun irregular? (No.) And which ending you met four chapters ago does two jobs for exactly the same reason? (গুলো.) Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 36

The One It Happens To

Modes: ⇄ voice (3) 👁 eyes (2) ⇄ Hands-free start: first 2 of 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can mark the person a thing is done to, say me, you and him as objects, and ask who?

The object ending goes on living nouns only — the animacy question paying for the third time — and fills the slot in chapter nine’s dative frame, which had been taught with nothing to put in it for twenty-seven chapters.

36.1 কে (-ke) — the one it happens to

Which group is ভাই in and which is জামা in? Then say **our family**.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the word for *he* on the careful rung — *tini*

You’ll want to know: কে

ভাইকে — *bhāike* — **to the brother**, or **the brother**, as the one it is done to.

বন্ধুকে — *bôndhuke* — **the friend**, as the one it is done to.

Another ending on the back of the noun, and it marks something new: that this person is not doing the action but **receiving** it. English marks that with word order alone; Bengali marks it on the word.

And it is choosy in a way you can now predict. কে goes on জীব nouns — people — and not on things:

- ভাইকে — yes
- জামাকে — no; a shirt stays জামা

The animacy split you learned three chapters ago is doing this too. That one question keeps paying.

Grammar Lens: the same slot, still one at a time

Line the endings up and the system is visible:

ending	what it says	goes on
-র	whose	anything
-কে	the one it happens to	living nouns
-দের	whose, plural	living nouns
-টা	the one we mean	things, mostly

All four sit in the same slot at the back of the noun, and the rule from the last chapter still holds: **one at a time**. That is why -দের exists at all, and why you will never see two of these stacked.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *bhāike, bônke, bôndhuke*
- the one that takes no ending, and why — *jāmā*, because it is জিনিস
- whose, then to whom — *tār bhāi*, then *tār bhāike*
- the four endings in the slot — *-r, -ke, -der, -ṭā*

Before you move on

What does -কে say about a noun? (**That it is the one the action happens to.**) Which nouns take it? (**Living ones.**) And how many of these endings can sit on one noun at once? (**One.**)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

36.2 আমাকে (āmāke) — me

Put the object ending on ভাই. Then say **I** and **my**.

You'll want to know: আমাকে

আমাকে — *āmāke* — **me, to me.**

A pronoun is a living noun, so it takes the living noun's ending — the third time this book has said that and the third time it has been true without an exception:

job	the word	ending
I	আমি	—
my	আমার	-র
me	আমাকে	-কে

Same stem আমা-, three endings, no memorisation.

Grammar Lens: the frame that had no filler

Chapter nine taught something odd and important: Bengali does not say *I like tea*. It says, near enough, **tea is good to me** — the liking is not something you do, it is something that happens **to** you. That frame needs a *to me*, and the book had none. It has one now:

আমাকে চা ভালো লাগে — *āmāke chā bhālo lāge* — **I like tea** (literally, *tea feels good to me*).

A whole family of Bengali sentences works this way — liking, needing, feeling cold, being hungry — and every one of them was out of reach for want of this word.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three forms — *āmi*, *āmār*, *āmāke*
- *āmāke chā bhālo lāge*
- the plural of the same — *āmāder*
- on a noun, for comparison — *bhāike*

Before you move on

What stem do আমি, আমার and আমাকে share? (আমা-.) What does Bengali say instead of *I like tea*? (**Tea feels good to me.**) And which ending makes the *to me*? (-কে.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

36.3 তোমাকে (tomāke) — you, as the one it happens to

Say **me**. Then say the plain and the careful words for **you**.

You'll want to know: তোমাকে

তোমাকে — *tomāke* — **you**, as the one it is done to.

And with the third person, built from the stem you already met in তার:

তাকে — *tāke* — **him, her**.

Now the whole table, and it is worth looking at as a table rather than as a list:

person	possessive	object
আমি	আমার	আমাকে
তুমি	তোমার	তোমাকে
সে	তার	তাকে

Three stems, three endings, nine words, nothing irregular.

Grammar Lens: what English makes you memorise and Bengali does not

The English column is *I, my, me — he, his, him*, and there is no rule in it: a learner memorises each cell. The Bengali column is one stem with -র or -কে stuck on. Nothing about তাকে has to be learned once তার is known.

The careful rungs behave, too: আপনাকে and তাঁকে.

And you can now be polite to a specific person, which chapter twenty-two could not do — it taught দয়া করে with nobody to address it to.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the object row — *āmāke, tomāke, tāke*
- one stem, two endings — *tār*, then *tāke*
- the careful ones — *āpnāke, tākē*
- politely, to you — *doyā kore ... tomāke*

Before you move on

What is the object form of সে? (তাকে.) What do তার and তাকে share? (**The stem তা-**.) And how many of these nine forms are irregular? (**None.**)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

36.4 কে (ke) — who?

Put the object ending on ভাই. Then say **you**, as the one it is done to.

You'll want to know: কে standing alone

কে? — *ke?* — **who?**

সে কে? — *she ke?* — **who is he?**

This is a different word from the ending you learned two lessons ago. They are spelled identically and they are not related, and Bengali tells them apart the way it tells ও apart from ও: by where they sit.

where	what it is
stuck to the back of a noun	-কে, the object ending
standing on its own	কে, <i>who?</i>

You now have both of the questions a stranger opens with. এটা কী? asks about a thing; কে? asks about a person — and the two are told apart only by their vowel, so say them carefully.

Grammar Lens: the asking head, for the third time

Chapter thirty laid out three heads on one frame — the relative **য**-, the demonstrative **ত**-, and the asking **ক**-. Every question word in this book starts with the last of them:

- **কী** — what
- **কেমন** — how
- **কখন** — when
- **কে** — who

Four words, one letter at the front of each. And the answers come from the **ত**- column: **তিনি**, **তার**, **তখন**. Ask with **ক**-, answer with **ত**-.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *ke?*
- *she ke?* — and answer it — *she āmār bhāi*
- the two that sound alike — *bhāike* (the ending), then *ke?* (the question)
- the thing and the person — *eṭā ki?*, then *ke?*
- the four asking words — *ki*, *kemon*, *kôkhon*, *ke*

Before you move on

How do you tell the question **কে** from the ending **-কে**? (**By where it sits** — alone, or stuck to a noun.) Which letter opens every question word in this book? (**ক**-.) And which column do the answers come from? (**ত**-.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

36.5 The one it happens to

Two things in this chapter are written the same and are not the same word. Name both, and say what tells them apart.

Your turn

- *Say it*: the object row — *āmāke, tomāke, tāke*
- *Say it*: on nouns — *bhāike, bônke, bôndhuke*
- *Say it*: the frame that waited twenty-seven chapters — *āmāke chā bhālo lāge*
- *Recall*: two chapters back, the ending that pluralises a living noun — *-rā*

Your turn: the distant band — five chapters of grammar, run cold

Four endings now compete for one slot on the back of a Bengali noun, and one question decides which of them a noun may take. Run all of it.

Say these aloud:

- the four endings, and what each says — *-tā, -r, -ke, -der*
- the question that chooses between them — is it **জীব** or **জিনিস**?
- a living noun through all of them — *bhāiṭi, bhāir, bhāike, bhāirā*
- a thing, which takes fewer — *jāmāṭā, jāmāgulo*
- pointing, counting, colouring — *ei ekṭā lāl jāmā*
- the six persons and their objects — *āmi/āmāke, tumi/tomāke, she/tāke*
- whose, plural — *āmāder, tāder*
- the two questions a stranger opens with — *eṭā ki?* and *ke?*
- liking, for two people — *āmāke chā bhālo lāge, tomāke jôl bhālo lāge*

Before you move on

Which nouns take **-কে**? (**Living ones.**) How many endings may share the slot at once? (**One.**) What does Bengali say instead of *I like tea*? (**Tea feels good to me.**) And what is the difference between the two words spelled **কে**? (**Where they sit** — one is stuck on, one stands alone.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 37

Here, There, and Where

Modes: ⇄ voice (3) 👁 eyes (1) ✍ pen (1) ⇄ **Hands-free start:** none of the 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say something is here or there, ask where it is, and deny that it is anywhere at all.

The nine-cell grid closes: three heads — near, far, asking — across three frames — thing, person, place. The last cell is কোথায়, the question an A1 candidate is asked in the first minute of a speaking test, and answering it needs the letter থ.

37.1 থ — the breathy dental

Write ত, থ and ধ. Say what থ has that ক has not.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the ending that marks the person a thing is done to — *-ke*

Script

থ

Six chapters ago you filled in the fourth corner of a square. This is a different square, and it has been three-quarters full for even longer.

	plain	with breath
voice off	ত <i>tô</i>	থ <i>thô</i>
voice on	দ <i>dô</i>	ধ <i>dhô</i>

All four are made in the same place: the tongue flat on the back of the top front teeth. What separates them is the two switches — the voice, and the puff of breath you learned to hear when থ arrived beside ক.

থ is the puff on the voiceless one. Hold a hand in front of your mouth: for ত the air barely moves, for থ it pushes.

And it is **not** the *th* of English *this* or *thin*. That sound does not exist in Bengali. থ is a *t* with breath after it, nothing more.

Your turn

- Write it: থ
- Say it: ত then থ — same place, breath added
- Say it: the whole square — ত থ দ ধ
- Write it: থা
- Write it: ট থ — the two letters this book waited longest for

Before you move on

Where is থ made? (**On the teeth**, like ত.) What is added? (**Breath**.) Is it the English *th*? (**No** — that sound is not in Bengali.) And which letter is its voiced partner? (ধ.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

37.2 এখানে (ekhāne) — here

Write থ. Then say **this shirt**.

You'll want to know: এখানে

চা এখানে — *chā ekhāne* — **the tea is here**.

সে এখানে — *she ekhāne* — **he is here**.

Thirty-six chapters, and nothing in this book has had a **place**. Things could be named, pointed at, counted, owned and acted upon, and not one of them could be said to be anywhere.

এখানে takes the near head এ- you have owned since chapter thirty-two and puts it on a frame that means *place*. And as with এটা জল, there is no verb in the middle: the thing, then where it is, and stop.

Grammar Lens: the grid, now in three dimensions

head	frame	word
এ- near	thing	এটা
এ- near	person	এ
এ- near	place	এখানে
ও- far	thing	ওটা
ও- far	person	ও
ও- far	place	<i>next lesson</i>
ক- asking	thing	কী
ক- asking	person	কে
ক- asking	place	<i>the lesson after</i>

Nine cells, three heads, three frames. You have met seven of the nine, and the last two arrive in the next two lessons — which is the whole reason the pointing chapter was worth its five lessons.

And the denial is already yours: চা এখানে নেই — *the tea is not here* — using the নেই of chapter twenty-seven, which denies existence rather than identity.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *chā ekhāne*
- *she ekhāne*, then *āmi ekhāne*
- the denial — *chā ekhāne nei*
- with the classifier — *chāṭā ekhāne*
- the near head on all three frames — *eṭā, e, ekhāne*

Before you move on

Which head is inside এখানে? (এ-, the near one.) Is there a word for *is* in চা এখানে? (No.) And which word denies it? (নেই — the one

that denies existence.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

37.3 ওখানে (okhāne) — there

Say **the tea is here**. Then say **that shirt**. Now guess this lesson's word before you read it.

You'll want to know: ওখানে

সে ওখানে — *she okhāne* — **he is there**.

If you guessed it, that is the lesson. Swap the head and cross the room, exactly as এই became ওই five chapters ago. The frame does not change; only the first letter does.

- এখানে — here, where I am
- ওখানে — there, where I am not

Two places, as there were two distances. Bengali does not add a third.

Grammar Lens: eight of nine

head	frame	word
এ- near	place	এখানে
ও- far	place	ওখানে
এ- near	thing	এটা
ও- far	thing	ওটা
ক- asking	thing	কী
ক- asking	person	কে
ক- asking	place	<i>one cell left</i>

Eight cells filled. The ninth is the next lesson, and it is the question an A1 examiner asks in the first minute of a speaking test.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *she okhāne*

- the pair — *āmi ekhāne, she okhāne*
- the denial — *she okhāne nei*
- a whole group over there — *bôndhurā okhāne*
- the far head on all three frames — *oṭā, o, okhāne*

Before you move on

What is the only difference between এখানে and ওখানে? (**The head** — near against far.) How many places does Bengali distinguish? (**Two.**) And which cell of the grid is still empty? (**The asking one, for place.**)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

37.4 কোথায় (kothāy) — where?

Say **here** and **there**. Then ask **who**?

You'll want to know: কোথায়

তুমি কোথায়? — *tumi kothāy?* — **where are you?**

জামাটা কোথায়? — *jāmāṭā kothāy?* — **where is the shirt?**

The ninth cell, and the grid is closed:

head	frame	word
এ- near	thing	এটা
এ- near	person	এ
এ- near	place	এখানে
ও- far	thing	ওটা
ও- far	person	ও
ও- far	place	ওখানে
ক- asking	thing	কী
ক- asking	person	কে
ক- asking	place	কোথায়

Three heads, three frames, nine words — and you were shown the first head six chapters ago and have been filling the table in ever since.

Grammar Lens: the question and its answer are the same shape

Ask down the bottom row and answer up the two rows above it:

তুমি কোথায়? — আমি এখানে

এটা কী? — এটা চা

The same ক- opens কখন, which chapter thirty showed you inside a table of three heads without ever making it a word you could use. The grid was there before the words were.

Note the spelling: কোথায় ends in য়, the dotted য, and it is a glide, not a *j*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *tumi kothāy?* — and answer — *āmi ekhāne*
- *jāmātā kothāy?* — and answer — *jāmātā okhāne*
- the three questions of the bottom row — *eṭā ki?*, *ke?*, *kothāy?*

Before you move on

Which head opens কোথায়? (ক-, the asking one.) Which two words answer it? (এখানে and ওখানে.) And what letter does it end in? (য়, the dotted one — a glide.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

37.5 Here, there, and where

Three heads and three frames make nine words. Say the whole grid out loud, one row at a time.

Your turn

- *Write it:* থ, then ট
- *Say it:* *tumi kothāy?* — *āmi ekhāne* — *she okhāne*

- *Say it*: the denial — *chā ekhāne nei*
- *Recall*: two chapters back, the ending that marks the one a thing is done to — *-ke*

Your turn: the distant band — the whole tranche, cold

Seven chapters ago this book could not write the letter ট, could not say **the** or **a**, could not make a plural, could not name a third person, could not mark who a thing was done to, and could not put anything anywhere. Run all of it, cold, from memory.

Say these aloud:

- the classifier and its two doors — *jāmātā, ekṭā jāmā, ārekṭā jāmā*
- the pointing pair, and both ends at once — *ei jāmātā, oi jāmātā*
- the question that decides the plural — is it জীব or জিনিস?
- the two plurals — *bhāirā, bōnerā; jāmāgulo, nākgulo*
- an adjective that never changes — *shōbuṭ jāmā, shōbuṭ jāmāgulo*
- the six persons — *āmi, āmrā, tumi, tomrā, she, tārā* — and the careful ones, *āpni, tini*
- whose — *āmār, tār, āmāder, tāder*
- to whom — *āmāke, tomāke, tāke, bhāike*
- the three questions — *eṭā ki?, ke?, kothāy?*
- and where things are — *bhātṭā ekhāne, chātṭā okhāne, āmāder pōribār ekhāne*
- the longest phrase this book can now build — *āmāder ei shōbuṭ jāmātā okhāne*

Before you move on

What are the three heads? (এ- near, ও- far, ক- asking.) What are the three frames? (**Thing, person, place.**) One question chose the plural, the classifier and the object ending — what was it? (**Is the noun alive?**) And which two letters had to be taught before any of

these seven chapters could be written? (ট and থ.)
Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

Chapter 38

Which One in the Line

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) 👁️ eyes (1) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 4 of 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say first to fifth in Bengali, put an ordinal in front of a noun without changing it, and say which layer of the language every one of them comes from.

Complete BN-R27-first-to-fifth, run prothom to ponchom, and say which one of the five you could have built from a number you already had.

38.1 দ্বিতীয় (ditiyô) — second, and the second layer it comes from

A second kind of number word starts here, so the recalls come first, at the three growing distances this book can measure.

- *Recall:* write থ — **R2**, five lessons back
- *Recall:* say *he, she* — **R3**, twenty lessons back
- *Recall:* say *welcome* — **R4**, eighty lessons back

You'll want to know: দ্বিতীয়

দ্বিতীয় — *ditiyô* — second

দ্বিতীয় জামাটা — *ditiyô jāmātā* — the second shirt

দুই answers *how many*. দ্বিতীয় answers *which one in the line*, and it stands in front of its noun and never changes, the way লাল does. No agreement to learn.

Read the spelling and the romanization again, because they disagree: written দ্ব -, said *di-*. The cluster is on the page and gone from the mouth.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Chapter twelve told you two things about the old Sanskrit *dv-*: that it is gone from the everyday numeral in Bengali, Hindi and Marathi alike, and that it is **alive in words borrowed straight back out of Sanskrit**. It gave you দ্বার *dvār*, “door”, as its example and left it there. দ্বিতীয় is another of those words, and this time it is a number.

layer	two	second
everyday, inherited	দুই <i>dui</i>	—
borrowed back from Sanskrit	—	দ্বিতীয় <i>ditiyô</i>

Bengali keeps **two layers of number word**. You count in the inherited one; every ordinal in this chapter comes out of the other. That is why none of the five will look much like the numbers you already say.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *dui*, then *ditiyô*
- *ditiyô jāmātā*
- what is written and what is said — *dva* on the page, *di* in the mouth

Before you move on

How many layers of number word does Bengali keep? (**Two**.) Which one do you count in? (**The inherited one** — *ek*, *dui*, *tin*, *chār*, *pāch*.) Does দ্বিতীয় change its ending for the noun? (**No** — like লাল, it never changes.) Sources: Wiktionary: দ্বিতীয়.

38.2 তৃতীয় (tritiyô) — third, and an ending that now has two members

Four recalls, then the second half of a pair.

- *Recall: say second* — **R1**, one lesson back
- *Recall: say here* — **R2**, five lessons back
- *Recall: say the respectful he, she* — **R3**, twenty lessons back
- *Recall: say red* — **R4**, eighty lessons back

You'll want to know: তৃতীয়

তৃতীয় — *tritiyô* — **third**

তৃতীয় লাল জামাটা — *tritiyô lāl jāmātā* — **the third red shirt**

Two adjectives now stand in front of one noun, and neither of them changes. Say তিন, then তৃতীয়: the ত carries over and almost nothing else does.

Same disagreement between page and mouth as last lesson, in a smaller way: the ্ under the ত is written and the *r* it stands for is not said.

What you've built: -তীয় is a shape, not a coincidence

Set the two side by side and the tails match:

ordinal	Sanskrit word it was borrowed from
---------	------------------------------------

দ্বিতীয় — <i>ditīyô</i>	<i>dvitīya</i>
--------------------------	----------------

তৃতীয় — <i>tritiyô</i>	<i>ṭṛtīya</i>
-------------------------	---------------

Wiktionary calls তৃতীয় a learned borrowing from Sanskrit *ṭṛtīya* in those words. Two Sanskrit words ended alike, in *-tīya*, and the two Bengali words borrowed from them end alike too, in -তীয়.

One word ending a certain way is a fact about that word. Two is a shape, and this is the second — which is why the ending is being named now and was not named last lesson.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *tin*, then *tritiyô*
- *ditiyô*, *tritiyô* — the pair, back to back
- *tritiyô lāl jāmāṭā*

Before you move on

What is left of তিন inside তৃতীয়? (**The ত.**) How many words share the -তীয় ending so far? (**Two.**) Why was the ending not named one lesson earlier? (**One word is not a shape.**)

Sources: Wiktionary: তৃতীয়.

38.3 চতুর্থ (choturthô) — fourth, on an ending of its own

Four recalls, then an ordinal that will not join the pair.

- *Recall*: say *third*, and the ending it shares — **R1**, one lesson back
- *Recall*: say *there* — **R2**, five lessons back
- *Recall*: say *him*, *her*, of the one standing there — **R3**, twenty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *blue* — **R4**, eighty lessons back

You'll want to know: চতুর্থ

চতুর্থ — *choturthô* — **fourth**

চতুর্থ নীল জামাটা — *choturthô nīl jāmāṭā* — **the fourth blue shirt**

Say চার, then চতুর্থ. Two pieces cross over this time, the চ and the র, which is more of its number than any ordinal you have met keeps. The tail is থ — the letter this book waited longest for, and its second job in five lessons.

What you've built: three endings, and only one of them repeats

Samsad's *Bengali-English Dictionary* gives চতুর্থ its own headword and romanizes it *caturtha* — the Sanskrit word carried over with nothing altered. Same layer as the last two, different ending:

ending	words
-তীয়	দ্বিতীয়, তৃতীয়
-র্থ	চতুর্থ

One member, so this book will not call it a pattern. It is named so you can see that the borrowed layer arrived with **more than one shape in it** — Sanskrit did not build all its ordinals the same way, and Bengali took them as they were.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *chār*, then *choturthô*
- *ditiyô*, *tritiyô*, *choturthô* — two tails, then a third
- *choturthô nāl jāmātā*

Before you move on

How many endings have the four ordinals shown so far? (**Two** — -তীয় twice and -র্থ once.) Which layer are they all from? (**The borrowed Sanskrit one.**)

Sources: Samsad Bengali-English Dictionary, চতুর্থ, p. 346 (DSAL).

38.4 প্রথম (prothom) — first, and an irregularity Bengali inherited whole

Four recalls, then the word with nothing of its number in it.

- *Recall*: say *fourth* — **R1**, one lesson back
- *Recall*: ask *where?* — **R2**, five lessons back
- *Recall*: say *his*, *her* — **R3**, twenty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *black* — **R4**, eighty lessons back

You'll want to know: প্রথম

প্রথম — *prothom* — first

প্রথম কালো জামাটা — *prothom kālō jāmāṭā* — the first black shirt

Say এক, then প্রথম. Not one sound crosses over. তৃতীয় kept its ত, চতুর্থ kept a চ and a র, and this word keeps nothing.

It carries an everyday second use too: *earliest, chief, best* — *first in the class* as much as *first in the line*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Wiktionary calls প্রথম a learned borrowing from Sanskrit *prathama*, in the same words it uses for তৃতীয়. So all four ordinals so far come out of the same shelf, and three of them are built on their own Sanskrit number: *dvitīya* on *dvi*, *trītiya* on *tri*, *caturtha* on *catur*.

prathama is not built on anything of the kind. Sanskrit's word for **one** was *eka* — the word এক still is — and *prathama* has never shared a sound with it. The gap you are looking at is **older than Bengali**: Bengali borrowed the word entire, hole and all, and had no hand in making it.

Had this word come first you would have had to take it as a Bengali oddity. Coming fourth, after a shape has held twice and a second ending has appeared once, it can be read for what it is.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *ek*, then *prothom* — and notice nothing carries over
- *prothom*, *ditiyô*, *tritiyô*, *choturthô*
- *prothom kālō jāmāṭā*

Before you move on

How much of এক is inside প্রথম? (**None.**) Whose gap is it? (**Sanskrit's** — Bengali borrowed the word as it stood.) What else can প্রথম mean? (*Earliest, chief, best.*)

Sources: Wiktionary: প্রথম; Samsad Bengali-English Dictionary, প্রথম, p. 682 (DSAL).

38.5 ঞ — the nasal of the চ row

Write চ, জ and ন. Say where each one is made.

- *Recall*: say *first* — **R1**, one lesson back
- *Recall*: say *white* — **R4**, eighty lessons back

Script

ঞ

Chapter thirty-seven drew a square: ত থ দ ধ, four letters made in one place, sorted by voice and breath. A row of the Bengali grid has a **fifth** member — a nasal made in that same place. For the teeth row it is ন, and you have been writing it since the first word in this book.

ঞ is the fifth member of a different row, the one whose letters are made with the tongue flat against the roof of the mouth:

the row	letters you have
voiceless	চ <i>chô</i> , ছ <i>chhô</i>
voiced	জ <i>jô</i>
nasal	ঞ <i>nyô</i>

Say চ and then hum through your nose without moving your tongue. That is ঞ.

You will almost never meet it standing on its own. In modern Bengali it does its work joined to the letter beside it, and the joining you need is ঞ — ঞ with চ, the nasal in front of the stop it is made with. That is the next lesson's word.

Your turn

- *Write it*: ঞ
- *Say it*: চ, then ঞ — same place, the nose opened
- *Write it*: ঞ

- *Say it:* the three nasals this book now has — ন, ঞ, and the chandrabindu ঞ̣, which is a nasal with no letter of its own

Before you move on

Where is ঞ made? (**Where চ is** — the tongue on the roof of the mouth.) What makes it different from চ? (**The nose is open.**)

Which joined form will you need? (ঞ.)

Source: Unicode Bengali chart.

38.6 পঞ্চম (ponchom) — fifth, and the two layers touching

Three recalls, then the word the last lesson bought a letter for.

- *Recall:* write ঞ, and say where it is made — **R1**, one lesson back
- *Recall:* say *we* — **R3**, twenty lessons back
- *Recall:* say *green* — **R4**, eighty lessons back

You'll want to know: পঞ্চম

পঞ্চম — *ponchom* — **fifth**

পঞ্চম সবুজ জামাটা — *ponchom sobuj jāmāṭā* — **the fifth green shirt**

There is the ঞ you wrote last lesson, between a প and a ম. Its outline is one you already know: প ... nasal ... চ.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Samsad's dictionary has the entry this chapter has been building towards. Its headword is পঞ্চ *ponchô*, glossed **five**, with পঞ্চম listed under it as **fifth**. The borrowed layer has its own *five*, and its *fifth* is built on it. Put the two fives one above the other:

layer	five
borrowed from Sanskrit	পঞ্চ — <i>ponchô</i>
everyday, inherited	পাঁচ — <i>pāch</i>

Same প. Same চ. Between them, in the borrowed word a whole letter, ঞ; in the everyday word the ঞ̃ you were told in chapter twelve was “the chandrabindu, nasalising the vowel”.

পাঁচ is পঞ্চ with the nasal letter worn down into a moon-dot, and that is not a guess. Wiktionary’s entry for পাঁচ writes its Sanskrit source as পঞ্চ and walks the road between them: *pañca*, then *paṃca*, then a Middle Bengali form already spelled with the mark, then পাঁচ. The letter thins to a nasal sign and then to a nasal vowel.

The two layers this chapter opened with are not two vocabularies that happen to sit side by side. In this word you can watch one of them turning into the other, and the whole of the evidence is four letters wide.

Your turn

- Say it: *pāch*, then *ponchô*, then *ponchom*
- Write it: পঞ্চম
- Say it: *ponchom sobuj jāmātā*

Before you move on

What is পঞ্চম built on? (পঞ্চ, the borrowed *five*.) And what is পাঁচ? (The same word, worn down.) Which ordinal in this chapter is built on no number at all? (প্রথম.)
Sources: Samsad Bengali-English Dictionary, পঞ্চ, p. 604 (DSAL); Wiktionary: পাঁচ.

38.7 First to fifth, in order at last

Four recalls before the run.

- Recall: say *fifth* — **R1**, one lesson back
- Recall: say *second*, and which layer it comes from — **R2**, six lessons back
- Recall: say *you*, more than one — **R3**, twenty lessons back
- Recall: read লাল — **R4**, eighty lessons back

Nothing new arrives here. This is the first time the five stand in numerical order, and that has been deliberate.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *prothom ditiyô tritiyô choturthô ponchom* — the run, without stopping
- the two endings — -তীয় twice, -র্থ once

What you’ve built this chapter, in one table

the layer you count in	the layer the ordinals come from
এক <i>ek</i>	প্রথম <i>prothom</i>
দুই <i>dui</i>	দ্বিতীয় <i>ditiyô</i>
তিন <i>tin</i>	তৃতীয় <i>tritiyô</i>
চার <i>chār</i>	চতুর্থ <i>choturthô</i>
পাঁচ <i>pāch</i>	পঞ্চম <i>ponchom</i>

Read the last row again. Those two are the **same word** at two ends of a long road, and the difference between them is a letter you learned two lessons ago turning into a mark you learned in chapter twelve. The chapter cost exactly one new letter, ঞ, and spent it on the row that proves the point.

Before you move on

Which layer are all five ordinals from? (**The borrowed Sanskrit one.**) Which of them has no number inside it at all? (প্রথম — and the gap is Sanskrit’s, not Bengali’s.) Which two rows of the table are the same word? (পাঁচ and পঞ্চ.)

Chapter 39

Ten Shapes, and Two That Lie

Modes: 👁 eyes (1) ✍ pen (11) 🗨 Hands-free start: none of the 12 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can read any number written in Bengali digits off a page – a price, a year, a house number – and I know exactly which two of the ten shapes my own reading will get wrong.

Complete BN-R28-read-a-number: read a price off a shirt tag, read a year, and read a page number made of all four difficult shapes without hesitating.

39.1 ○ — the Bengali zero

- *Recall:* say *fourth* — **R2**, five lessons back
- *Recall:* say *they* — **R3**, twenty lessons back
- *Recall:* read কালো off the page — **R4**, eighty lessons back

Sixty script lessons have taught you letters. Reading কালো is reading letters. Every one of the twelve lessons ahead of you puts something on the page that is **not a letter at all**, and this book has never done that before.

Script

○

That is the Bengali digit **zero**.

Put it beside the zero you already read: **০**. A ring, closed, standing on the line, meaning *none*. Bengali writes it the same way, and means the same thing.

That is not a coincidence and it is worth knowing before the other nine arrive. Wikipedia describes the Bengali numerals as **a variety of the Hindu–Arabic numeral system** — the same system as the digits on your keyboard, not a rival one. They are positional, they are read left to right, and ০ does the same job at the end of a number as 0 does at the end of 10.

There is no Bengali WORD for zero in this book yet. Today it is a shape you can read.

Your turn

- *Write it:* ০
- *Say it:* the five numbers you can already count — *ek, dui, tin, chār, pāch*

Before you move on

What is ০? (**Zero.**) Is it a letter? (**No** — the first thing in this book that is not.) Which system do the Bengali digits belong to? (**The same one as 0–9.**)

Sources: Unicode Bengali chart; Wikipedia: Bengali–Assamese numerals.

39.2 ২ — the Bengali two

- *Recall:* read ০ — **R1**, one lesson back
- *Recall:* say *first* — **R2**, five lessons back
- *Recall:* say *our* — **R3**, twenty lessons back
- *Recall:* read জাদা off the page — **R4**, eighty lessons back

Script

২

That is the Bengali digit **two**, and you can say it: দুই.

Set it beside **২**. The top curls the other way and the foot is a diagonal rather than a bar, but the gross shape is the same — a turn at the top, a stroke running down to the right. Nobody would call ২ a *two* from nothing; anybody who already reads **২** can be told once and keep it.

So the count of shapes that cost you almost nothing now stands at two, and both of them mean **exactly what the shape you already know means**. Remember that. It stops being true in this chapter, and the place where it stops is the whole point of the chapter.

Your turn

- *Write it:* ২
- *Say it:* দুই, then read ২ and ২০

Before you move on

What is ২? (**Two** — দুই.) What is ২০? (**Twenty**.) How many shapes so far have meant the same as the shape you already knew? (**Both of them.**)

Sources: Unicode Bengali chart.

39.3 ৩ — the Bengali three

- *Recall:* read ২ — **R1**, one lesson back
- *Recall:* write ঞ and say where it is made — **R2**, five lessons back
- *Recall:* write the long ী sign — **R4**, eighty lessons back

ী hangs on a letter and cannot stand alone. A digit is the opposite: it stands alone and hangs on nothing. Keep that difference in front of you, because this one looks like a letter.

Script

৩

That is the Bengali digit **three**, and you can say it: তিন.

Now put it beside a letter you have had since the opening chapters:

	shape
the digit three	৩
the letter <i>o</i>	ও

They are the same rounded body. ও carries a stroke down its right-hand side; ৩ does not, and that is the entire difference between a number and a letter here.

This is the only digit in the chapter that collides with a Bengali letter you have been taught, and the fix is one stroke wide: **if it has the tail on the right, it is a letter.**

Your turn

- Write it: ৩
- Say it: তিন, then read ৩, then read ও
- Write it: ৩০ and ২৩

Before you move on

What tells ও from ৩? (**The stroke on the right.**) What is ২৩?
(**Twenty-three.**)

Sources: Unicode Bengali chart.

39.4 ১ — the Bengali one

- Recall: read ৩, and say what tells it from ও — **R1**, one lesson back
- Recall: say *fifth*, and the cardinal hiding inside it — **R2**, five lessons back
- Recall: put -কে on a pronoun — **R3**, twenty lessons back
- Recall: read নীল off the page — **R4**, eighty lessons back

Script

১

That is the Bengali digit **one**, and you can say it: এক.

Nothing helps you here. ১ is a bare stroke; ৯ is a curl that starts high, comes down and hooks back to the right at the foot. There is no shape you already own to hang it on, and no letter it can be confused with.

That is worth naming rather than hiding: ০, ১ and ২ each arrived carrying something. This one is simply learned, and so are the two after it.

Read ১০ — one, then zero. **Ten.**

Your turn

- *Write it:* ৯
- *Say it:* এক, then read ৯, ১০, ১১

Before you move on

What is ৯? (**One** — এক.) What did it bring with it that the first three digits did? (**Nothing.**) What is ১০? (**Ten.**)

Sources: Unicode Bengali chart.

39.5 ৫ — the Bengali five

- *Recall:* read ৯ — **R1**, one lesson back
- *Recall:* say *me*, the object form — **R3**, twenty lessons back
- *Recall:* read তিন off the page — **R4**, eighty lessons back

That last recall is the one this chapter exists for. তিন is the **word** *three*, spelled with three letters, and you have been able to read it for eighty lessons. ৩ is the **digit** 3, and until two lessons ago you could not read it at all. A book can print either one, and they are not the same object.

Script

৫

That is the Bengali digit **five**, and you can say it: পাঁচ.

Another one that brings nothing: a hooked stroke over an open bowl, like a C with a lid. ৫ will not help you and no Bengali letter you know is close to it.

You can now read every number written out of ০ ১ ২ ৩ ৪ ৫, which is most of a page number and all of a small count.

Your turn

- *Write it:* ৫
- *Say it:* পাঁচ, then read ৫, ৫০, ১৫
- *Say it:* which of these is a word and which is a digit — তিন, ৩

Before you move on

What is ৫? (**Five** — পাঁচ.) What is the difference between তিন and ৩? (**One is the word, the other is the digit.**)

Sources: Unicode Bengali chart.

39.6 ৬ — the Bengali six

- *Recall:* read ৫ — **R1**, one lesson back
- *Recall:* say *you*, as the one it happens to — **R3**, twenty lessons back
- *Recall:* read এক off the page — **R4**, eighty lessons back

Script

৬

That is the Bengali digit **six**: a bowl at the foot with a tail rising away to the right. ৬ does not help — its loop is at the bottom left and its stem comes down from above, which is nearly the reverse.

And here your count runs out. This book has taught you এক to পাঁচ and no further, so you can now read a number you have no Bengali word for. That is a real gap and it is worth stating plainly rather than covering: **from here to the end of the chapter you are learning to READ four numbers you cannot yet SAY.** The words are a separate piece of work.

Reading is still worth having on its own. A page number, a price and a date are all read far more often than they are said aloud.

Your turn

- *Write it:* ৬

- *Say it:* the five numbers you CAN say, then stop where the book stops

Before you move on

What is ঊ? (**Six.**) Can you say it in Bengali yet? (**No** — the count in this book stops at পাঁচ.) Does that stop you reading it? (**No.**)
Sources: Unicode Bengali chart.

39.7 ঳ — the Bengali eight

- *Recall:* read ঊ — **R1**, one lesson back
- *Recall:* ask *who?* — **R3**, twenty lessons back
- *Recall:* say and read কাপড় — **R4**, eighty lessons back

কাপড় is the first thing this book taught you that has a price on it. Hold on to it; you will read a price before this chapter ends.

Script

৳

That is the Bengali digit **eight**: an upright stroke with a single small bowl at the bottom right — much closer to a lower-case **b** than to anything numeric.

Look hard at it and notice what it is **not**. It has **one** bowl. **৳** has **two**, stacked. Whatever the two-loop shape means in Bengali, it does not mean eight — and something has to mean it, because the shape exists.

That is the next lesson, and it is the one place in this chapter where the digits you already read will tell you a lie.

Your turn

- *Write it:* ৳
- *Say it:* how many bowls ৳ has, and how many ৳ has

Before you move on

What is ৮? (**Eight.**) How many bowls does it have? (**One.**) What does the two-bowl shape mean in Bengali? (**Not eight — and you are about to find out what.**)

Sources: Unicode Bengali chart.

39.8 ৮ — the Bengali four

- *Recall:* read ৮, and say how many bowls it has — **R1**, one lesson back
- *Recall:* say and read জামা — **R4**, eighty lessons back

Script

৮

That is the Bengali digit **four**, and you can say it: চার.

It is two loops, stacked. It is the shape of an 8.

shape	in the digits you already read	in Bengali
two stacked loops	eight	four
upright with one bowl	<i>nothing</i>	eight

Read the top row again. Every reflex you have says *eight*, and it is wrong by four every single time — on a price, on a bus number, on a year.

The first three digits of this chapter arrived meaning exactly what their shape already meant to you. This one arrives meaning something else, and it is not a near miss: ৮ and ৮ are the same drawing.

The defence is the lesson before this one. If you are unsure, ask how many bowls: **two bowls is four; one bowl is eight.**

Your turn

- *Write it:* ৮
- *Say it:* চার, then read ৮, ৮৮, ৮৮

Before you move on

What is ৪? (**Four** — চার.) What does your eye want it to be? (**Eight.**) Which question settles it? (**How many bowls?**)
Sources: Unicode Bengali chart; Wiktionary: ৪.

39.9 ঙ — the Bengali nine

- *Recall:* read ৪, and say what your eye wants it to be — **R1**, one lesson back
- *Recall:* write ঞ — **R3**, twenty lessons back
- *Recall:* say *sari*, *shāri* — **R4**, eighty lessons back

Script

ঙ

That is the Bengali digit **nine**: a small closed body with a tail sweeping up and away to the right.

Once again, look at what it is **not**. ৯ is a ring with a straight stem dropping below it. ঙ has no dropped stem at all; its tail goes the other way, upward.

You have seen this pattern one lesson ago. The Bengali digit for eight did not take the ৪ shape, and the ৪ shape turned out to belong to four. The Bengali digit for nine does not take the ৯ shape either — so ask the same question. **Something takes it.**

Your turn

- *Write it:* ঙ
- *Say it:* which way the tail of ঙ goes, and which way the stem of ৯ goes

Before you move on

What is ঙ? (**Nine.**) Does it look like ৯? (**No** — the tail goes up, not down.) Which two Bengali digits have now refused the shape you expected? (**Eight and nine.**)
Sources: Unicode Bengali chart.

39.10 ৭ — the Bengali seven

- *Recall:* read ষ, and say which way its tail goes — **R1**, one lesson back
- *Recall:* say *here* — **R3**, twenty lessons back
- *Recall:* say *glasses, choshma* — **R4**, eighty lessons back

Script

৭

That is the Bengali digit **seven**, and it is the shape of a **9**: a closed body at the top with a straight stem dropping from its right side.

The chapter's second false friend, and the last shape in the set:

shape	in the digits you already read	in Bengali
two stacked loops	eight	four
body with a dropped stem	nine	seven

Both lies run the same way. In each case the Bengali digit **for** that value — ৮ for eight, ষ for nine — took a different shape, leaving the familiar one standing empty; and in each case a smaller number moved into it.

Two out of ten shapes will actively mislead you. The other eight will not. That ratio is worth carrying, because it is the reason to slow down on exactly two shapes rather than to distrust the whole page.

Your turn

- *Write it:* ৭
- *Say it:* the two shapes that lie, and what each one really means

Before you move on

What is ৭? (**Seven.**) What does the shape say? (**Nine.**) How many of the ten shapes mislead? (**Two.**)

Sources: Unicode Bengali chart.

39.11 The two that lie, and the eight that do not

- *Recall:* read ৭, and say what the shape claims — **R1**, one lesson back
- *Recall:* say *there* — **R3**, twenty lessons back

Script

Ten shapes are in your hand. Here they are in order:

০ ১ ২ ৩ ৪ ৫ ৬ ৭ ৮ ৯

A rule with an edge at each end, and both edges matter:

the band	what it means for you
where the shapes AGREE	০ is a 0 and means zero. ২ is close to a 2 and means two. Trust these.
where they are simply NEW	১ ৩ ৫ ৬ ৮ ৯ carry no Western digit's shape at all, so there is nothing to be misled by. ৩ is the one to watch against a letter , not against a digit: ৩ is the same body with a stroke down its right side.
where they LIE	৪ is drawn as an 8 and means four . ৭ is drawn as a 9 and means seven . Nowhere else.

Two of ten. Say them as a pair and they stay a pair: **the eight is a four, the nine is a seven** — and in both cases the Bengali digit that really means eight or nine is a shape you would never mistake for anything.

That is the whole rule. Eight shapes ask you to learn them; two ask you to un-learn something first.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the two that lie, then the eight that do not

Before you move on

Which two shapes mislead? (**The 8-shape, which is four; the 9-shape, which is seven.**) Which digit is confusable with a **letter** rather than with a digit? (৩, against ৩.) How many of the ten are

safe? (**Eight.**)

Sources: Unicode Bengali chart.

39.12 Reading a number off a page

Two recalls, then the reading.

- *Recall*: name the two shapes that lie — **R1**, one lesson back
- *Recall*: ask *where?* — **R3**, twenty lessons back

Nothing new arrives here.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- কাপড়, then read a price beside it — ৳০
- কোথায়?, then read a house number — ৩৪

What you've built this chapter

Sixty script lessons taught you letters, and one of them, long ago, taught you to read তিন. That was the *word*. Until this chapter you could not read ৩, and so you could not read a price, a date, a clock face or a page number — the things a reader meets far more often than they meet a sentence.

Ten shapes closed that. Eight of them were simply learned; ০ and ২ cost almost nothing because the Bengali digits and the digits on your keyboard are one system rather than two; and two of them — ৪ and ৭ — had to be taken away from a reflex before they could be given to you.

What this chapter did **not** do is teach you to SAY six, seven, eight, nine or zero. Those words are not in this book yet. You can read every number on the page and speak the first five of them, and the gap between those two abilities is now the most useful thing left undone in this column.

Before you move on

Read 89. (**Forty-seven** — not ninety-eight.) Which numbers can you now read? (**All of them.**) Which can you say? (**One to five.**)

Chapter 40

Reading — Words, Lines, and a First Passage

Modes: 🗣️ voice (2) 👁️ eyes (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: none of the 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can read a Bengali word by its shape under the head-line, read the lines I would say to a stranger, and hold a whole passage without translating it word by word.

Thirty-six words of Bengali with no new word in them, carried by three joiners of which only one is borrowed, and with the verb last in every line that has one.

40.1 (reading) — six words under one line

Every word below you have written. Not one is new.

What is new is that nobody says them first.

Read this

ভাত চা জল দুধ ভাই বোন

Read down the list once, without stopping.

Again, and look at the top of each word rather than at the letters.

What to know first

Bengali hangs its letters from a line instead of standing them on one. That line runs unbroken across a whole word and stops at its edge.

So the line is a word boundary you can see before you have read anything. A Bengali word looks like one object first and a row of signs second, which is the opposite of how you learned to write it.

ভাই and বোন are the shortest pair here and the easiest to tell apart at a glance, for exactly that reason.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the six words down the list, once, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

How many of the six were new? (**None.**)

What shows you where a Bengali word ends? (**The line stops.**)

40.2 (reading) — six lines, and a bow nobody makes

The last lesson gave you words. These are things you would say.

You have said every one of them.

Read this

নমস্কার। ধন্যবাদ। হ্যাঁ। না। দয়া করে। স্বাগতম।

Read down once, without stopping.

Again — and notice the mark at the end of each line. It is not a full stop but a দাঁড়ি, a single upright stroke.

What to know first

নমস্কার is a bow written down: *namas* plus *kara*, the making of a bow. The commonest word in the language is a gesture that stopped being made.

দয়া করে is two words and means *having done kindness*. Bengali asks for things by describing what the other person has already generously done, which is a habit worth noticing on the page where it sits complete.

Six lines, and four of them are a single word.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the six lines, once, in order, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

What ends a Bengali sentence? (A দাঁড়ি — one upright stroke.)
What is নমস্কার, literally? (The making of a bow.)

40.3 (reading) — the first passage

Six words, then six lines. Now thirteen of them together.

Thirty-six words, and not one of them is new.

Read this

নমস্কার। আমার নাম রাম। আমি ভালো। এটা আমার ভাই। আমার
পরিবার ভালো। আমি ভাত আর দুধ খাই। চা বা জল। আমি পড়ি।
আমার বন্ধু এখানে। জামা লাল, কিন্তু কাপড় নীল। প্রথম আর
দ্বিতীয়। হ্যাঁ, ভালো। ধন্যবাদ।

Read it once without stopping. Do not translate as you go — let the sentences arrive.

Now read it again and find the three joining words.

What to know first

আর adds. বা offers a choice. কিন্তু turns the sentence.

Two of those are inherited and the third is not: কিন্তু came through Persian, which is why it does not sound like its neighbours. You can hear the borrowing without being told about it.

Notice also that the verb is last in every line that has one. আমি ভাত আর দুধ খাই — the eating comes after everything eaten, which is where Bengali always puts it.

This is the first whole passage the book has asked you to hold at once, and it works because everything in it was paid for.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the passage aloud, once, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

Where does a Bengali verb go? (**Last.**)

Which of the three joiners is borrowed? (কিন্তু, through Persian.)

The Bengali script — a reference

A **reference**, not a chapter — the lessons teach reading through real words. This page gathers the system and flags what is special about the **Bengali script** and Bengali sounds.

How the Bengali script works (the three facts)

1. **Consonants carry a built-in vowel — and it is ô, not “a”.** ক = kô, ন = nô, ম = mô — written left to right under a connecting top line, like Devanagari but with rounder shapes. This single fact ($a \rightarrow \hat{o}$) is why Sanskrit words sound “Bengali.”
2. **A vowel sign changes it:** কা kâ · কি ki · কী kī · কু ku · কে ke · কো ko. The *i*-signs ি / ী are written *before* the consonant but read *after* it. A *chandrabindu* ঁ nasalises the vowel.
3. **Standalone vowels have their own letters:** আ ā · অ ô · ই i · উ u · এ e · ও o — used when a word starts with a vowel.

What is special about Bengali sounds

- $s \rightarrow$ “sh”. স (and শ, ষ) is usually pronounced “sh”: আসি is *āshi*, not *āsi*.
- **No separate *v* or *w*.** Bengali has only ব *b*, so Sanskrit *vāda* $\rightarrow$ *bād*, *Vishnu* $\rightarrow$ *Bishnu*. This $v \rightarrow b$ shift is a Bengali signature.
- **Conjuncts.** A *hasanta* (্) strips a consonant’s vowel so it fuses with the next: স্ + ক $\rightarrow$ স্ক, হ্ + ছ $\rightarrow$ চ্ছ. Many conjuncts take special shapes learned as you meet them.

Bengali in the family

Bengali (*Bāṅlā*) is **Indo-Aryan** — from Sanskrit, like Hindi, Marathi, and Punjabi — and its script descends, with Devanagari, from the old Brahmi writing of India, which is why they share the hanging top line. Spoken across West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh by some 250 million people, it carries an immense literary tradition — Tagore’s poetry, and the national anthems of *two* countries, the only tongue that can say so. The lessons trace its Sanskrit roots and, where they reach, the wider Indo-European family that also shaped English.

Glossary

This glossary collects every word and phrase taught in the book. Pronunciation appears when it differs from the written form; chapter numbers show where each entry is introduced.

গুলো *-gulo*

the plural for things — the other half of the split, and the ending that finally lets a learner own more than one shirt

Introduced in Chapter 33.

কে *-ke*

the ending that marks the person something is done to — Bengali’s answer to a demand Spanish meets with a preposition

Introduced in Chapter 36.

-ও *-o*

also, too — a second word for “and” that is one vowel long and hangs off the end of whatever it joins

Introduced in Chapter 28.

রা *-rā*

the living plural — the ending that turns one brother into brothers, and that only living nouns are allowed to take

Introduced in Chapter 33.

টা *-ṭā*

the classifier — the suffix that does the work English gives to the word “the”, and that Bengali will not count a noun without

Introduced in Chapter 31.

আবার *ābār*

again

Introduced in Chapter 7.

আবার বলবেন *ābār bôlben*

please say it again — two words this book taught fourteen chapters apart, put together at last, on the polite ending মাফ করবেন already uses

Introduced in Chapter 30.

আবার দেখা হবে *ābār dækhā hôbe*

we’ll meet again (goodbye)

Introduced in Chapter 7.

আচ্ছা *āchchhā*

okay / alright / I see (*āchchhā*)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

আলাপ করে ভালো লাগলো *ālāp kore bhālo lāglo*

pleased to meet you (lit. “having made acquaintance, [it] felt good”)

Introduced in Chapter 3.

আমাদের *āmāder*

our — the possessive ending on a plural pronoun, which finishes a column that had been two-sixths full since chapter two

Introduced in Chapter 35.

আমাকে *āmāke*

me — the object form of আমি, and the word chapter nine’s dative frame has been waiting for

Introduced in Chapter 36.

আমার *āmār*

my

Introduced in Chapter 3.

আমার নাম ... *āmār nām ...*

my name is... (with no “is”)

Introduced in Chapter 3.

আমি *āmi*

I

Introduced in Chapter 5.

আমি বাংলা বলি *āmi bānglā bōli*

I speak Bengali

Introduced in Chapter 11.

আমরা *āmrā*

we — আমি carrying the very plural ending taught two chapters ago, because a pronoun is a living noun like any other

Introduced in Chapter 35.

আর *ār*

and — the word that lets two nouns stand in one sentence, absent from this book for twenty-seven chapters

Introduced in Chapter 28.

আরেকটা *ārektā*

another one — আর plus এক plus the classifier, and the second half of the pair Bengali uses to hand out one thing at a time

Introduced in Chapter 31.

আসা *āsā*

to come — the verb that never asks whether a man or a woman is speaking

Introduced in Chapter 13.

আসি *āshi*

goodbye, lit. “I’ll come [again]” (*āshi*)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

বা *bā*

or — the word that offers a choice, and the one a host needs before anything can be offered at all

Introduced in Chapter 28.

ভাবা *bhābā*

to think — and the machinery that made a “become” verb into a “think” verb

Introduced in Chapter 14.

ভাই *bhāi*

brother — not borrowed, not a cousin, but the same word as English “brother,” worn down by six thousand years and two different roads

Introduced in Chapter 18.

ভালো *bhālo*

well, good — and the reply “আমি ভালো আছি”

Introduced in Chapter 5.

ভালো লাগা *bhālo lāgā*

to like — “good sticks to me” — and beside it ভালোবাসা, to love

Introduced in Chapter 15.

ভাত *bhāt*

cooked rice — the meal itself, and a Sanskrit root for “share” that will resurface two lessons from now in a very different word

Introduced in Chapter 16.

বোঝা *bojhā*

to understand — the third knowing, and the harmony that this time moves the spelling

Introduced in Chapter 14.

বলা *bôlā*

to speak, to say

Introduced in Chapter 11.

বোন *bon*

sister — not built on the root behind English “sister” at all, but on the very root that named this book’s rice two lessons ago

Introduced in Chapter 18.

বন্ধু *bôndhu*

friend — a word built openly on “to bind,” and the rare case where Bengali and English share both the word and the picture behind it

Introduced in Chapter 18.

চা *chā*

tea — a loanword that crossed from China into Bengali overland, and the drink this chapter’s polite offers run on

Introduced in Chapter 16.

চোখ *chokh*

eye — built on the same Sanskrit root as “to see,” worn down through three centuries of Bengali spelling before it looked like this
Introduced in Chapter 20.

চশমা *choshma*

glasses — built on the very Persian word the eye lesson once named as its only cousin
Introduced in Chapter 25.

চতুর্থ *choturthô*

fourth — a different Sanskrit ending, and the only ordinal so far that keeps two pieces of its number
Introduced in Chapter 38.

ধীরে *dhîre*

slowly — the second half of a beginner’s repair kit, and a word usually said twice
Introduced in Chapter 30.

ধন্যবাদ *dhônyobad*

thank you (dhônyobad)
Introduced in Chapter 1.

দ্বিতীয় *ditiyô*

second — the word chapter twelve promised you without naming it, and a cluster that is on the page but not in the mouth
Introduced in Chapter 38.

দয়া করে *doya kore*

please — literally “having done a kindness,” and the noun-plus-করা pattern’s third demonstration
Introduced in Chapter 22.

দুধ *dudh*

milk — a word whose spelling could ask for a trailing vowel but doesn’t, and a root whose one secure English cousin is not the word it looks like
Introduced in Chapter 16.

দুঃখিত *dukkhito*

sorry — built on a word two dictionaries explain two different ways, and a prefix with a real Greek cousin
Introduced in Chapter 22.

দেখা *dækhā*

to see, to look — and the vowel that changes while the spelling stands still
Introduced in Chapter 13.

দেখা হবে *dækhā hôbe*

(we) will meet (lit. “seeing will happen”)
Introduced in Chapter 7.

এই *ei*

this — the near half of the pair a learner needs before anything in the room can be referred to

Introduced in Chapter 32.

এই জামাটা *ei jāmāṭā*

this shirt, definitely — the demonstrator at the front and the classifier at the back, in the same phrase, which English will not let you do

Introduced in Chapter 32.

এক দুই তিন চার পাঁচ *ek dui tin chār pāch*

one to five — and the “two” that kept its Sanskrit vowel

Introduced in Chapter 12.

এখানে *ekhāne*

here — the near head again, this time on a frame that means place, so that something can at last be put somewhere

Introduced in Chapter 37.

একমত *ekmôt*

in agreement, of one mind — the word that lets a learner agree, and, with **নই**, disagree

Introduced in Chapter 29.

একটা *ekṭā*

a, one — the numeral **এক** passing through the classifier, which is the only way Bengali lets a number touch a noun

Introduced in Chapter 31.

এটা *eṭā*

this one, this thing — the pointer standing alone as a subject, which finally makes the commonest beginner sentence in any language sayable

Introduced in Chapter 32.

হওয়া *hōwā*

to be, to become — the second of Bengali’s two be-verbs, and the one that does what **আছে** cannot

Introduced in Chapter 13.

হৃদয় *hridoy*

heart — a word kept whole from Sanskrit, and the oldest, most secure English cousin this book has shown you

Introduced in Chapter 20.

হ্যাঁ / না *hyā / nā*

yes / no (hyā / nā)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

জামা *jama*

shirt — a second Persian loan for clothing, the same word behind Hindi’s own jaamaa

Introduced in Chapter 25.

জানা *jānā*

to know a fact — beside চেনা, the second knowing that English merged away
Introduced in Chapter 13.

যাওয়া *jāwā*

to go — and the verb ending that carries how much respect you are paying
Introduced in Chapter 13.

যে *je*

that — the one syllable that hangs a whole sentence off a verb, and the thing
standing between ভাবা and an opinion
Introduced in Chapter 30.

জীব আর জিনিস *jīb ār jinish*

living against not-living — the split that decides which plural a Bengali noun
takes and which classifier it counts with
Introduced in Chapter 33.

জিজ্ঞাসা করা *jijñāsā kôrā*

to ask — literally “to do a wanting-to-know,” and the door into a thousand verbs
Introduced in Chapter 15.

যখন *jôkhon*

when — the joiner that puts one event beside another in time, and half of a pair
Bengali insists on completing
Introduced in Chapter 30.

জল *jôl*

water — the word Chapter 13 already used to say “drink water,” now taught on
its own, beside the Bangladesh-register পানি
Introduced in Chapter 16.

কাজ করা *kāj kôrā*

to work (lit. “work-do”)
Introduced in Chapter 11.

কাল দেখা হবে *kāl dækhā hōbe*

see you tomorrow (and the কাল puzzle)
Introduced in Chapter 7.

কালো *kalo*

black — the same word Sanskrit uses for time, and for death
Introduced in Chapter 23.

কাপড় *kapor*

cloth, clothing — a word Sanskrit’s own dictionaries call homegrown, not
inherited, and the flapped letter returns
Introduced in Chapter 25.

কে *ke*

who? — the interrogative head on the pronoun frame, and a word that looks
exactly like the object ending it is not
Introduced in Chapter 36.

কেমন *kēmon*

how

Introduced in Chapter 5.

কেননা *kenonā*

because — a reason word built out of “why” and “not”, and the first way this book can explain anything

Introduced in Chapter 29.

খাওয়া *khāwā*

to eat — and, in everyday Bengali, to drink as well

Introduced in Chapter 13.

কি *ki*

what

Introduced in Chapter 3.

কিন্তু *kintu*

but — the first word in this book that can put two ideas against each other instead of side by side

Introduced in Chapter 29.

কোনো ব্যাপার না *kono bāpār nā*

it’s no matter / no problem / you’re welcome

Introduced in Chapter 5.

কোথায় *kothāy*

where? — the ninth cell of the grid, and the question an A1 candidate is asked in the first minute of a speaking test

Introduced in Chapter 37.

লাল *lal*

red — a jeweler’s word before it was a color word, and the identical Persian loan Hindi already teaches

Introduced in Chapter 23.

লাল জামা *lāl jāmā*

the adjective stands in front of its noun and never changes shape — a rule this book has used without once stating

Introduced in Chapter 33.

লেখা *lekhā*

to write — and the dictionary form that is quietly a noun

Introduced in Chapter 14.

মাফ করবেন *maf korben*

excuse me — the same Persian loan Hindi’s own “sorry” phrase uses, softened here by the future tense rather than a command

Introduced in Chapter 22.

মুখ *mukh*

mouth, face — a word so old that scholars still argue over which language family it belongs to

Introduced in Chapter 20.

না *nā*

not — the word you already own as “no”, doing the other half of its job, and it stands after the verb
Introduced in Chapter 27.

নাক *nāk*

nose — the direct cousin of English “nose,” worn down by Bengali’s own sound changes rather than Latin’s or English’s
Introduced in Chapter 20.

নাম *nām*

name
Introduced in Chapter 3.

নেই *nei*

there is not, I have not — a separate word for denying existence, and the first way this book can say a thing is missing
Introduced in Chapter 27.

নেওয়া *neowā*

to take — and the verb that finishes other verbs
Introduced in Chapter 15.

নীল *nil*

blue — Sanskrit’s word for indigo, one form for every noun it describes
Introduced in Chapter 23.

নমস্কার *nômoshkar*

hello / goodbye (nômoshkar)
Introduced in Chapter 1.

নয় *nôy*

is not — the denial of a sentence that never had a verb in it, and the one negative that changes shape for the person speaking
Introduced in Chapter 27.

ও *o*

him, her, the one standing there — the third job of a letter that has already been a joiner and a pointer
Introduced in Chapter 34.

ওই *oi*

that — the far half, and the letter ও doing a second job it has been quietly holding since chapter seventeen
Introduced in Chapter 32.

ওখানে *okhāne*

there — the far head on the place frame, and a word the reader can predict before being shown it
Introduced in Chapter 37.

পঞ্চম *ponchom*

fifth — the one place in the chapter where you can watch the two layers of number touch, and the moon-dot turn back into a letter
Introduced in Chapter 38.

পড়া *pôṛā*

to read — and the flapped letter Sanskrit never wrote
Introduced in Chapter 14.

পরিবার *pôribār*

family — literally “what surrounds you,” a second word Bengali kept whole from Sanskrit rather than wearing down
Introduced in Chapter 18.

প্রথম *prothom*

first — the one ordinal with no number in it at all, and Bengali did not do that to it
Introduced in Chapter 38.

সাহায্য করা *sāhājjo kôṛā*

to help — “to go together with,” and the word that finally shows you the inherent vowel
Introduced in Chapter 15.

সাদা *shada*

white — a tadbhava worn down from Sanskrit, and the one color where Bengali and Hindi genuinely parted ways
Introduced in Chapter 23.

শাড়ি *shari*

sari — a Sanskrit word for a strip of cloth that walked, almost unchanged, straight into English
Introduced in Chapter 25.

স্বাগতম *shbagotom*

welcome — “a good coming,” built on the same “hither” prefix already met, and a verb whose PIE root is unusually secure
Introduced in Chapter 22.

সে *she*

he, she — one word for both, and the first time in this book that anybody can be talked about rather than talked to
Introduced in Chapter 34.

সবুজ *shobuj*

green — a second Persian loan, and the chapter’s payoff on all five colors
Introduced in Chapter 23.

তার *tār*

his, her — সে wearing the same ending আমার and তোমার wear, which makes possession regular for the first time
Introduced in Chapter 34.

ভারা *tārā*

they — the last row of the pronoun grid, and the sixth person this book can finally talk about

Introduced in Chapter 35.

থাকা *thākā*

to live, to stay, to remain

Introduced in Chapter 11.

তিনি *tini*

he, she, respectfully — the third-person rung of the same ladder আপনি stands on, and not optional

Introduced in Chapter 34.

তোমাকে *tomāke*

you, as the one it happens to — the second object pronoun, and the last piece of a stem-plus-ending pattern with no exceptions in it

Introduced in Chapter 36.

তোমার নাম কি? *tomār nām ki?*

what's your name?

Introduced in Chapter 3.

তোমরা *tomrā*

you, more than one — and the respect ladder keeps its second rung in the plural, which English lost entirely

Introduced in Chapter 35.

তৃতীয় *tritiyô*

third — the second word to end in -তীয়, which is what makes the ending a shape rather than a coincidence

Introduced in Chapter 38.

তুমি / আপনি *tumi / āpni*

you (familiar / respectful; also তুই intimate)

Introduced in Chapter 3.

তুমি কেমন আছো? *tumi kēmon āchho?*

how are you? (familiar)

Introduced in Chapter 5.

Review Questions

Try these without looking ahead. Every prompt comes from the same canonical lesson data as its chapter. Answers begin in the next section.

Chapter 16

16.1 জল (*jôl*) — “water,” prised out of a phrase you already know
Type the Bengali word *jôl*, meaning ‘water’.

Chapter 38

38.1 দ্বিতীয় (*ditiyô*) — second, and the second layer it comes from
Which layer does *ditiyo* come from, and how can you tell by looking at it?

38.2 তৃতীয় (*tritiyô*) — third, and an ending that now has two members
Which ending do *ditiyo* and *treetiyo* share, and where did it come from?

38.3 চতুর্থ (*choturthô*) — fourth, on an ending of its own
Which two pieces of *chaar* can you still see in *choturtho*?

38.4 প্রথম (*prothom*) — first, and an irregularity Bengali inherited whole
Did Bengali make *prothom* unlike *ek*, or inherit it that way?

38.5 পঞ্চম (*ponchom*) — fifth, and the two layers touching
What stands in *paanch* where *poncho* has the letter *nya*?

38.6 First to fifth, in order at last
Say first to fifth, then say which one of the five you could have built yourself from a number you already had.

38.7 First to fifth, in order at last
How does *treetiyo* change when the noun it describes changes?

Chapter 39

39.1 ০ — the Bengali zero

What number is written here: ০

39.2 ২ — the Bengali two

Read this aloud, digit by digit: ২০

39.3 ৩ — the Bengali three

One of these is a number and one is a letter. Which is which: ৩ ৩

39.4 ১ — the Bengali one

Read this number: ১০৩

39.5 ৫ — the Bengali five

Read this number: ৫১০

39.6 ৬ — the Bengali six

Read this number: ৬১

39.7 ৮ — the Bengali eight

Read this number: ৮০

39.8 ৪ — the Bengali four

Read these two in order, and do not trust your eye: ৪ ৮

39.9 ৪ — the Bengali four

Read this number: ৪২

39.10 ৯ — the Bengali nine

Read these two in order: ৯ ৪

39.11 ৭ — the Bengali seven

Read these two in order: ৭ ৯

39.12 ৭ — the Bengali seven

Read this number: ৭৪

39.13 The two that lie, and the eight that do not

Name the only two Bengali digits whose shape belongs to a different Western digit, and say what each really means.

39.14 The two that lie, and the eight that do not

Read all ten in order: ০ ১ ২ ৩ ৪ ৫ ৬ ৭ ৮ ৯

39.15 Reading a number off a page

A shirt has a tag on it. The tag says ১৫০ and the label says জামা. What is on sale and for how much?

39.16 Reading a number off a page

Read this year: ২০২৬

39.17 Reading a number off a page

Read this page number without hesitating: ৪৭৮৯

Chapter 40

40.1 (*reading*) — *six words under one line*

Which word is water?

40.2 (*reading*) — *six lines, and a bow nobody makes*

Which line is the polite request?

40.3 (*reading*) — *the first passage*

What colour is the shirt?

Answer Key

The first response is the canonical display answer. When a question accepts other authored forms, they appear underneath.

Chapter 16

16.1 জল (*jôl*) — “*water,*” *prised out of a phrase you already know*

Answer: জল

Also accepted: jôl; jol

Chapter 38

38.1 দ্বিতীয় (*ditiyô*) — *second, and the second layer it comes from*

Answer: the Sanskrit layer, borrowed back; you can tell because the dv- cluster is still written, and chapter twelve said that cluster survives only in re-borrowed words

Also accepted: the Sanskrit layer; the dv- is still written; borrowed back from Sanskrit, the cluster is on the page

38.2 তৃতীয় (*tritiyô*) — *third, and an ending that now has two members*

Answer: -tiyo, from the Sanskrit ending -teeya that both source words carried

Also accepted: -tiyo from Sanskrit -tiya; the -tiyo ending, out of Sanskrit

38.3 চতুর্থ (*choturthô*) — *fourth, on an ending of its own*

Answer: the cha and the ra

Also accepted: ch and r; চ and র

38.4 প্রথম (*prothom*) — *first, and an irregularity Bengali inherited whole*

Answer: inherited it that way; Sanskrit prathama was already unrelated to Sanskrit eka

Also accepted: inherited; it borrowed it already unrelated; Sanskrit had the gap first

38.5 পঞ্চম (*ponchom*) — *fifth, and the two layers touching*

Answer: the chandrabindu

Also accepted: the moon-dot; ঁ

38.6 *First to fifth, in order at last*

Answer: prothom ditiyo tritiyo choturtho ponchom — only ponchom, which is poncho plus -m

Also accepted: প্রথম দ্বিতীয় তৃতীয় চতুর্থ পঞ্চম; prothom ditiyo tritiyo choturtho ponchom only the fifth

38.7 *First to fifth, in order at last*

Answer: it does not change at all; like laal it stands in front and keeps one form

Also accepted: it does not change; no change, like laal

Chapter 39

39.1 ০ — *the Bengali zero*

Answer: zero

Also accepted: 0; none; shunyo

39.2 ২ — *the Bengali two*

Answer: two, zero — twenty

Also accepted: 20; dui shunyo; two zero

39.3 ৩ — *the Bengali three*

Answer: the first is the digit three; the second is the letter o

Also accepted: three, then o; digit then letter

39.4 ১ — *the Bengali one*

Answer: one zero three — a hundred and three

Also accepted: 103; 103.

39.5 ৫ — *the Bengali five*

Answer: five one zero — five hundred and ten

Also accepted: 510

39.6 ৬ — *the Bengali six*

Answer: six one — sixty-one

Also accepted: 61

39.7 ৮ — *the Bengali eight*

Answer: eight zero — eighty

Also accepted: 80

39.8 ৪ — *the Bengali four*

Answer: four, then eight

Also accepted: 4 8; 4, 8; four eight

39.9 ৪ — *the Bengali four*

Answer: four two — forty-two

Also accepted: 42

39.10 ৯ — *the Bengali nine*

Answer: nine, then four

Also accepted: 9 4; 9, 4; nine four

39.11 ৭ — *the Bengali seven*

Answer: seven, then nine

Also accepted: 7 9; 7, 9; seven nine

39.12 ৭ — *the Bengali seven*

Answer: seven four — seventy-four

Also accepted: 74

39.13 *The two that lie, and the eight that do not*

Answer: the 8-shape is four; the 9-shape is seven

Also accepted: four and seven; 4 looks like 8, 7 looks like 9

39.14 *The two that lie, and the eight that do not*

Answer: zero one two three four five six seven eight nine

Also accepted: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

39.15 *Reading a number off a page*

Answer: a shirt (jama), 150

Also accepted: shirt, 150; jama 150

39.16 *Reading a number off a page*

Answer: 2026

Also accepted: two zero two six; 2026.

39.17 *Reading a number off a page*

Answer: 4789

Also accepted: four seven eight nine

Chapter 40

40.1 (*reading*) — *six words under one line*

Answer: jol

Also accepted: জল; water

40.2 (*reading*) — *six lines, and a bow nobody makes*

Answer: doya kore

Also accepted: দয়া করে; please

40.3 (*reading*) — *the first passage*

Answer: red

Also accepted: লাল

Index

Look up an English meaning, a dedicated language topic, or a chapter topic. Each linked reference opens the chapter where the material is introduced; the focus labels name only explicitly typed lesson sections.

A

a, one — the numeral এক passing through the classifier, which is the only way Bengali lets a number touch a noun একটা (ekṭā)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 31, p. 227

A Sign Made of Two Signs

chapter topic; Chapter 6, p. 49

again আবার (ābār)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 7, p. 57

Agreeing, Differing, and Saying Why

chapter topic; Chapter 29, p. 215

All of Us

chapter topic; Chapter 35, p. 259

also, too — a second word for “and” that is one vowel long and hangs off the end of whatever it joins -ও (-o)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 28, p. 209

and — the word that lets two nouns stand in one sentence,

absent from this book for twenty-seven chapters আর (ār)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 28, p. 209

another one — আর plus এক plus the classifier, and the second half of the pair Bengali uses to hand out one thing at a

time আরেকটা (ārekṭā)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 31, p. 227

B

because — a reason word built out of “why” and “not”, and the first way this book can explain anything কেননা (kenonā)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 29, p. 215

black — the same word Sanskrit uses for time, and for death কালো (kalo)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 23, p. 169

blue — Sanskrit’s word for indigo, one form for every noun it describes নীল (nil)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 23, p. 169

brother — not borrowed, not a cousin, but the same word as English “brother,” worn down by six thousand years and two different roads ভাই (bhāi)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 18, p. 139

but — the first word in this book that can put two ideas against each other instead of side by side কিন্তু (kintu)

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C

cloth, clothing — a word Sanskrit’s own dictionaries call homegrown, not inherited, and the flapped letter

returns কাপড় (kapor)

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Cloth, Shirt, Sari, and Glasses

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cooked rice — the meal itself, and a Sanskrit root for “share” that will resurface two lessons from now in a very different word ভাত (bhāt)

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E

excuse me — the same Persian loan Hindi’s own “sorry” phrase uses, softened here by the future tense rather than a

command মাফ করবেন (maf korben)

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eye — built on the same Sanskrit root as “to see,” worn down through three centuries of Bengali spelling before it looked like this চোখ (chokh)

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Eye, Mouth, Nose, and Heart

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F**family** — literally “what surrounds you,” a second word Bengali kept whole from Sanskrit rather than wearing**down** পরিবার (pôribār)

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fifth — the one place in the chapter where you can watch the two layers of number touch, and the moon-dot turn back into a letter পঞ্চম (ponchom)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 38, p. 283

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fourth — a different Sanskrit ending, and the only ordinal so far that keeps two pieces of its number চতুর্থ (choturthô)

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friend — a word built openly on “to bind,” and the rare case where Bengali and English share both the word and the picture behind it বন্ধু (bôndhu)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 18, p. 139

Friend, Family, Brother, and Sister

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G**glasses** — built on the very Persian word the eye lesson once named as its only cousin চশমা (choshma)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 25, p. 185

goodbye, lit. “I’ll come [again]” (āshi) আসি (āshi)

explicit focus: script, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

green — a second Persian loan, and the chapter’s payoff on all five colors সবুজ (shobuj)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 23, p. 169

Greetings

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H**Hanging From the Head-Line, One Piece at a Time**

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he, she — one word for both, and the first time in this book that anybody can be talked about rather than talked to সে (she)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 34, p. 251

he, she, respectfully — the third-person rung of the same ladder আপনি stands on, and not optional তিনি (tini)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 34, p. 251

heart — a word kept whole from Sanskrit, and the oldest, most secure English cousin this book has shown you হৃদয় (hridoy)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 20, p. 149

hello / goodbye (nômoshkar) নমস্কার (nômoshkar)

explicit focus: script, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

here — the near head again, this time on a frame that means place, so that something can at last be put**somewhere** এখানে (ekhāne)

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I speak Bengali আমি বাংলা বলি (āmi bānglā bôli)

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in agreement, of one mind — the word that lets a learner agree,

and, with নই, disagree একমত (ekmôt)

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is not — the denial of a sentence that never had a verb in it, and

the one negative that changes shape for the person

speaking নয় (nôy)

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living against not-living — the split that decides which plural a

Bengali noun takes and which classifier it counts with জীব আর

জিনিস (jīb ār jinish)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 33, p. 243

M

me — the object form of আমি, and the word chapter nine's

dative frame has been waiting for আমাকে (āmāke)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 36, p. 267

milk — a word whose spelling could ask for a trailing vowel but

doesn't, and a root whose one secure English cousin is not the

word it looks like দুধ (dudh)

explicit focus: pronunciation, script, etymology; Chapter 16, p. 125

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mouth, face — a word so old that scholars still argue over which

language family it belongs to মুখ (mukh)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 20, p. 149

my আমার (āmār)

explicit focus: script, grammar, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 21

my name is... (with no “is”) আমার নাম ... (āmār nām ...)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 3, p. 21

N

name নাম (nām)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 21

nose — the direct cousin of English “nose,” worn down by Bengali’s own sound changes rather than Latin’s or English’s নাক (nāk)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 20, p. 149

not — the word you already own as “no”, doing the other half of its job, and it stands after the verb না (nā)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 27, p. 201

Numbers One to Five

chapter topic; Chapter 12, p. 93

O

okay / alright / I see (āchchhā) আচ্ছা (āchchhā)

explicit focus: script, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

one to five — and the “two” that kept its Sanskrit vowel এক দুই তিন চার পাঁচ (ek dui tin chār pāch)

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 12, p. 93

or — the word that offers a choice, and the one a host needs before anything can be offered at all বা (bā)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 28, p. 209

our — the possessive ending on a plural pronoun, which finishes a column that had been two-sixths full since chapter

two আমাদের (āmāder)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 35, p. 259

P

please — literally “having done a kindness,” and the noun-plus-করা pattern’s third demonstration দয়া করে (doya kore)

explicit focus: script, grammar, etymology; Chapter 22, p. 161

please say it again — two words this book taught fourteen chapters apart, put together at last, on the polite ending মাফ

করবেন already uses **আবার বলবেন** (ābār bôlben)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 30, p. 221

Please, Sorry, and Welcome

chapter topic; Chapter 22, p. 161

pleased to meet you (lit. “having made acquaintance, [it] felt good”) আলোপ করে ভালো লাগলো (ālāp kore bhālo lāglo)
explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 21

Pointing at Things

chapter topic; Chapter 32, p. 235

R

Reading — Words, Lines, and a First Passage

chapter topic; Chapter 40, p. 307

red — a jeweler’s word before it was a color word, and the identical Persian loan Hindi already teaches लाल (lal)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 23, p. 169

S

sari — a Sanskrit word for a strip of cloth that walked, almost unchanged, straight into English শাড়ি (shari)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 25, p. 185

second — the word chapter twelve promised you without naming it, and a cluster that is on the page but not in the mouth দ্বিতীয় (ditiyô)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 38, p. 283

see you tomorrow (and the কাল puzzle) কাল দেখা হবে (kāl dækhā hōbe)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 7, p. 57

shirt — a second Persian loan for clothing, the same word behind Hindi’s own jaamaa জামা (jama)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 25, p. 185

sister — not built on the root behind English “sister” at all, but on the very root that named this book’s rice two lessons ago বোন (bon)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 18, p. 139

slowly — the second half of a beginner’s repair kit, and a word usually said twice ধীরে (dhīre)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 30, p. 221

Somebody Else

chapter topic; Chapter 34, p. 251

sorry — built on a word two dictionaries explain two different ways, and a prefix with a real Greek cousin দুঃখিত (dukkhito)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 22, p. 161

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Taking, Asking, Helping, Liking

chapter topic; Chapter 15, p. 117

tea — a loanword that crossed from China into Bengali overland, and the drink this chapter’s polite offers run on চা (chā)

explicit focus: script, grammar, etymology; Chapter 16, p. 125

Tea, Water, Milk, and Rice

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Ten Shapes, and Two That Lie

chapter topic; Chapter 39, p. 293

thank you (dhônyobad) ধন্যবাদ (dhônyobad)

explicit focus: script, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

that — the far half, and the letter ও doing a second job it has been quietly holding since chapter seventeen ওই (oi)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 32, p. 235

that — the one syllable that hangs a whole sentence off a verb, and the thing standing between ভাবা and an opinion যে (je)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 30, p. 221

the adjective stands in front of its noun and never changes shape — a rule this book has used without once stating লাল জামা (lāl jāmā)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 33, p. 243

The Breath Is a Letter

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the classifier — the suffix that does the work English gives to the word “the”, and that Bengali will not count a noun**without টা (-ṭā)**

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 31, p. 227

The Core Verbs

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The Distant Band

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◌ — the dot below

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 10, p. 81

◌ — the e-sign, standing in front

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 6, p. 49

the ending that marks the person something is done to — Bengali’s answer to a demand Spanish meets with a preposition কে (-ke)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 36, p. 267

The Face on the Page

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The First Verbs

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ি — the i-sign, written before the consonant it is heard after

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 4, p. 29

The Last Sign, and Six Words Back

chapter topic; Chapter 24, p. 177

The Letter in the Way

chapter topic; Chapter 31, p. 227

the living plural — the ending that turns one brother into brothers, and that only living nouns are allowed to take রা (-rā)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 33, p. 243

্ — the mark that DELETES the inherent vowel and fuses two consonants

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 2, p. 9

The Mind and the Page

chapter topic; Chapter 14, p. 109

ঁ — the moon-and-dot

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 4, p. 29

ঌ — the o-sign, wrapped around its letter

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 6, p. 49

The One It Happens To

chapter topic; Chapter 36, p. 267

the plural for things — the other half of the split, and the ending that finally lets a learner own more than one shirt গুলো (-gulo)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 33, p. 243

The Roof, the Teeth, and the Grid Closed

chapter topic; Chapter 9, p. 71

ী — the second i-sign

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 24, p. 177

The two that lie, and the eight that do not

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 39, p. 293

ূ — the u-sign, hanging below the line

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 4, p. 29

া — the vowel sign that replaces the inherent vowel

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 2, p. 9

ৗ — the vowel that used to be an r

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 21, p. 155

there is not, I have not — a separate word for denying existence, and the first way this book can say a thing is missing নেই (nei)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 27, p. 201

there — the far head on the place frame, and a word the reader can predict before being shown it ওখানে (okhāne)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 37, p. 275

they — the last row of the pronoun grid, and the sixth person

this book can finally talk about তারা (tārā)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 35, p. 259

third — the second word to end in -তীয়, which is what makes the ending a shape rather than a coincidence তৃতীয় (tritiyô)

Chapter 38, p. 283

this one, this thing — the pointer standing alone as a subject, which finally makes the commonest beginner sentence in any language sayable এটা (eṭā)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 32, p. 235

this shirt, definitely — the demonstrator at the front and the classifier at the back, in the same phrase, which English will not let you do এই জামাটা (ei jāmāṭā)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 32, p. 235

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Three Words Free, and One Dot

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to come — the verb that never asks whether a man or a woman is speaking আসা (āsā)

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 13, p. 97

to eat — and, in everyday Bengali, to drink as well খাওয়া (khāwā)

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to go — and the verb ending that carries how much respect you are paying যাওয়া (jāwā)

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to help — “to go together with,” and the word that finally shows you the inherent vowel সাহায্য করা (sāhājjo kôrā)

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welcome — “a good coming,” built on the same “hither” prefix already met, and a verb whose PIE root is unusually

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explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 41

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explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 21

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explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 3, p. 21

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white — a tadbhava worn down from Sanskrit, and the one color where Bengali and Hindi genuinely parted ways সাদা (shada)

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গ — the throat row, closed

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 8, p. 63

চা — tea, read

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 17, p. 133

চ — the consonant cha

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 9, p. 71

চোখ — eye, read

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 21, p. 155

ছ — the breathy one on the roof

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 9, p. 71

জ — the consonant ja, and the grid closed

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 9, p. 71

জল — water, read

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 17, p. 133

ঞ — the nasal of the ঞ row

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 38, p. 283

ট — the fourth corner

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 31, p. 227

ড — the tongue curled back

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 17, p. 133

ত — the consonant ta, the dental one

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 4, p. 29

তিন — three, read

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 24, p. 177

তুমি — the familiar you, read

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 4, p. 29

তুমি ভালো? — a question with nothing added

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 27, p. 201

থ — the breathy dental

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 37, p. 275

দ — the consonant da

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 9, p. 71

দুধ — milk, and the three words this chapter gave back

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 17, p. 133

ধ — the consonant dha

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 9, p. 71

ন — copy it twice, and join the bar

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 2, p. 9

ন — the consonant na

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 2, p. 9

ন — the letter from the sound

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 2, p. 9

ন — trace it, with the bar last

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 2, p. 9

ন — write it with the model covered

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 2, p. 9

না ... না ... — neither, nor

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 28, p. 209

নাক — nose, read

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 21, p. 155

নাম — a whole word, read, with nothing new in it

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 4, p. 29

নমস্কার — seven pieces, all of them already yours

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 2, p. 9

নীল — blue, read

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 24, p. 177

প — the consonant pa

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 9, p. 71

পড়া — to read, read

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 17, p. 133

পরিবার — family, read

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 19, p. 145

ব — the consonant ba

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 8, p. 63

ভ — the consonant bha, the breathy twin

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 8, p. 63

ভাই — brother, read

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 19, p. 145

ভালো — good, read

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 8, p. 63

ম — the consonant ma

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 2, p. 9

মুখ — mouth, read

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 21, p. 155

য — the letter that is written *y* and said *j*

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 4, p. 29

র — the last consonant of the greeting

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 2, p. 9

ল — the consonant la

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 6, p. 49

লাল — red, and the day-word that runs both ways

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 24, p. 177

স — the consonant that is written *s* and said *sh*

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 2, p. 9

সাদা — white, read

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 24, p. 177

হ — the consonant ha

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 2, p. 9

হওয়া — to be, read whole

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 10, p. 81

হৃদয় — heart, and the face read whole

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 21, p. 155

হ্যাঁ — yes, read whole

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 4, p. 29

০ — the Bengali zero

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 39, p. 293

১ — the Bengali one

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 39, p. 293

২ — the Bengali two

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 39, p. 293

৩ — the Bengali three

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 39, p. 293

৪ — the Bengali four

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 39, p. 293

৫ — the Bengali five

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 39, p. 293

৬ — the Bengali six

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 39, p. 293

৭ — the Bengali seven

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 39, p. 293

৮ — the Bengali eight

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 39, p. 293

৯ — the Bengali nine

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 39, p. 293