

TURKISH ALPHABET

by Seda Sürel

INTRODUCTION

Turkish uses a Latin-based alphabet with 29 letters. Each letter has one fixed pronunciation, which makes Turkish one of the most consistent and learner-friendly languages. Once you learn the sound of each letter, you can read almost any Turkish word correctly.

There are no silent letters, no unpredictable sound changes, and spelling follows pronunciation.

This guide gives you a clear and complete overview of all Turkish letters, their sounds, and how they behave in real words.

1. Vowels in Turkish (8 vowels)

Turkish vowels are grouped based on front/back positioning and lip rounding. These groups later determine vowel harmony, one of the core principles of Turkish grammar.

Vowels: A, E, I, ī, O, Ö, U, Ü

A → like "a" in car, short and open

E → "e" in pen

I (dotless) → central vowel, like the "e" in taken but shorter

İ (dotted) → "ee" in see

O → short "o" as in or

Ö → German "ö" / French "eu"

U → "oo" in food

Ü → German "ü" / French "u" in lune

Front vowels: E – İ – Ö – Ü

Back vowels: A – I – O – U

This distinction later becomes essential for suffixes.

2. Consonants in Turkish (21 consonants)

Most Turkish consonants resemble English ones, but several are unique:

C → "j" in jam

Ç → "ch" in chair

Ğ → soft g; lengthens or smooths the vowel

H → always pronounced

J → "zh" in pleasure

Ş → "sh" in she

K → always hard; never soft

R → lightly rolled / tapped

V → between English "v" and "w"

Y → "y" in yes

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3. Special Letter: Soft g (Ğ)

Soft g does not make a "g" sound.
Instead, it affects the vowel before or after it:

- Lengthens the preceding vowel: yağ (long "aa")
- Creates smooth transitions between vowels: soğuk (smooth "o-u")
- Softens the word's flow: öğrenci (öör-en-jee)

Ğ is one of the features that gives Turkish its smooth, musical sound.

4. Full Alphabet Table (Letter + Example Word + Meaning)

A – araba (car)
B – balık (fish)
C – cam (glass)
Ç – çiçek (flower)
D – deniz (sea)
E – ekmek (bread)
F – fare (mouse)
G – gül (rose)
Ğ – yağ (oil)
H – hava (air)
I – ışık (light)
İ – iyilik (goodness)
J – jilet (razor)
K – kitap (book)
L – limon (lemon)
M – masa (table)
N – nehir (river)
O – okul (school)
Ö – ördek (duck)
P – para (money)
R – renk (color)
S – su (water)
Ş – şeker (sugar)
T – tane (piece)
V – vapur (ferry)
Y – yemek (food)
Z – zaman (time)

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5. Minimal Pairs (Essential Sound Differences)

These pairs help learners avoid pronunciation mistakes:

I / İ

I → ıslak (wet)

İ → ilik (marrow)

O / Ö

O → oda (room)

Ö → ördek (duck)

U / Ü

U → uzun (long)

Ü → ülke (country)

C / Ç

C → cam (glass)

Ç → çam (pine tree)

S / Ş

S → sen (you)

Ş → şen (cheerful)

6. Common Pronunciation Mistakes (All Beginners Make These)

Mistake 1: Reading C like English "see".

Correct: C = "j" in jam.

Mistake 2: Pronouncing I like English "eye".

Correct: I = dotless central vowel (ı).

Mistake 3: Ignoring the dot on İ or adding one to I.

Correct: They are different letters.

Mistake 4: Saying Ğ as a hard "g".

Correct: Soft g lengthens or smooths vowels.

Mistake 5: Not rounding lips for Ö and Ü.

Correct: Both require rounded lips.

7. Reading Logic in Turkish

Because Turkish spelling is phonetic and consistent:

- You pronounce what you see
- You write what you hear
- No silent letters
- No surprises

This makes Turkish an ideal language for beginners.

TURKISH ALPHABET - COMPLETE GUIDE (A1)

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Examples:

Word: Türkiye
Pronunciation: Tur-kee-yeh
Meaning: Turkey

Word: Şehir
Pronunciation: Sheh-eer
Meaning: city

Word: Öğrenci
Pronunciation: Öö-ren-jee (with soft g)
Meaning: student

Word: Işık
Pronunciation: I-shik
Meaning: light

Word: Yıldız
Pronunciation: Yil-diz
Meaning: star

Notes

- Each letter always represents the same sound.
- Reading Turkish becomes natural once you internalize these 29 sounds.
- The dotted İ and dotless İ are essential distinctions in Turkish spelling.