CHAPTER 1
Writing Sanskrit

Sanskrit is written in a very precise manner. For every sound, there is one sign, and each sign always represents the same sound. In a way, Sanskrit is thus easier to read and write than English, where, for example, there are several different ways of pronouncing the same letters (think of thorough vs. through vs. tough), and several different ways of writing the same sound (as in meal, thief, see, receive). The script Sanskrit is now commonly written in is known as the devanāgarī.

The meaning of this name is not quite clear. nāgarī lipiḥ means ‘urban script’. (The macrons (the lines over ā and ī) indicate long vowels. The word lipiḥ is regularly omitted.) Several related scripts were known under the name nāgarī. The name devanāgarī (deva- = deity; divine) is used for this particular script, perhaps because of its role in writing down texts of religious importance. The name of the language itself is based on the Sanskrit word saṃskṛtaī composed, perfected; the name contrasts this language, used for religious and learned purposes, with the Prakrits, the everyday spoken languages (prakṛta- ‘natural, normal’).

Take a look at Table 1 on p. 11. It introduces you to four kinds of information: the individual devanāgarī characters; how they are transliterated, i.e. written with the alphabet used by, among other languages, English; how they are pronounced; and the order in which they are conventionally listed. (Note that that order diverges from that of the English alphabet; the system behind it is explained in Chapter 2.) This rather large amount of information is best approached in steps.

- Look over the table to get a first impression.
- Look at the pronunciation hints for each sound. Say them out loud.
- The list goes from left to right, top to bottom. A systematic explanation of labels such as ‘aspirated’ will be given in Chapter 2. A macron over a vowel (as in á rather than a) indicates a long vowel.
- Note that, unless indicated otherwise (see p. 12), the presence of the vowel a is assumed after any consonant.
- English does not make a conscious distinction between aspirated and unaspirated sounds. Native speakers of English thus often find it difficult to differentiate between e.g. तa and थtha. Try to add a noticeable puff of air to each aspirated sound, and let the pronunciation hints guide you.
– Also, English does not contain any true retroflex sounds. They are similar to ‘dental’ sounds such as \( t \) and \( d \), but the tongue touches the roof of the mouth further at the back. To pronounce them, curl your tongue back, then do the same as when you pronounce a \( t \) or a \( d \). (The result is a sound often perceived as creating a (stereo-) ‘typical’ accent in Indian speakers of English.)

– Many of the hints are approximations, and you will hear slightly different pronunciations from different speakers. Follow your teacher, but if you study on your own, remain close to these hints and consistent in your pronunciation, and you will be fine.

**STUDY THE SCRIPT**

– Look at the general remarks on how to write devanāgari characters (‘Writing single characters’, below). Try your hand at copying a few of them (maybe ten per session): write a line of \( a \)’s, a line of \( ka \)’s etc. Use the exercise sheets on pp. 366–72 of the book for your first attempts. http://www.avashy.com/hindiscripttutor.htm also helps.

– Make flash cards, one for each character, with the devanāgari on one side and the transliteration on the other. Look at the cards with the devanāgari side on top; pronounce each of the characters you see. Then turn all the flash cards over so that the ‘English’ side is on top. Take a piece of paper, write down the devanāgari equivalent of what you see, and turn over each card to check. As always when using flash cards, put all those cards that you have had difficulties with into a separate pile and then go specifically through that pile. If you prefer online flash cards, go to the Cambridge Introduction to Sanskrit website, www.cambridgensanskrit.org. And most importantly: do not worry if you find all of this difficult at first. You will be reading devanāgari a lot and will get used to it soon.

**WRITING SINGLE CHARACTERS**

When you look over the list of characters in Table 1, you will see that many contain a horizontal and/or a vertical line. In addition to these, there is a distinctive element that identifies the character. It is common practice to start writing a character on the left (which usually means starting with the distinctive element), then to add the vertical line – if there is one – and to add the top horizontal line last.

Finally, note that the devanāgari script does not have capital letters.

**Note:** The vowel signs in Table 1 are used only at the beginning of a word when no other consonant precedes. The signs for vowels in other positions are given in Table 2. Also note that the \( r \) and \( l \) sounds may function both as vowels and as consonants in Sanskrit. When they are used as vowels, they are written in transliteration as \( ṛ \) (long \( ṛ \)) and \( ḷ \). You will see the difference in usage when reading actual words in the coming chapters.
Table 1: The devanāgarī characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VOWELS</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>अ a</td>
<td>आ ā</td>
<td>इ i</td>
<td>ई ī</td>
<td>उ u</td>
<td>ऊ ū</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as in but</td>
<td>as in father</td>
<td>as in bee, but shorter</td>
<td>long vowel as in bee</td>
<td>as in par</td>
<td>as in fool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ऋ r̥</td>
<td>र̥ ṛ</td>
<td>ल̐ l̐</td>
<td>(ल̐ l̐ ’)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>short vocalic r, as in father (US pronunciation)</td>
<td>like r, but longer</td>
<td>short vocalic i, as in table</td>
<td>like l, but longer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ए e</td>
<td>ऐ ai</td>
<td>ओ o</td>
<td>औ ō</td>
<td>अ au</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>long vowel, similar to the first e in where</td>
<td>as in my</td>
<td>long vowel, as in more</td>
<td>as in loud</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| CONSONANTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| kinds of stops: |  |  |  |  |  |
| velar stops | क ka | ख kha | ग ga | घ gha | ङ ŋ |
| unvoiced unaspirated | aspirated k, as in ski | hard g, as in golf | aspirated g, as in egghead |  | 'velar' n, as in sing |
| palatal stops | च ca | छ cha | ज ja | झ jha | ङ ŋ |
| unvoiced palatal, as in charm | aspirated c, as in ranch house | as in jam | aspirated j (rare), as in sponge holder | like -n- before consonants, -ny- before vowels |
| retroflex stops | ट ta | ठ tha | ड da | ढ dha | ण na |
| retroflex t; see note above | retroflex aspirated t | retroflex d | retroflex aspirated d | retroflex n |
| dental stops | त ta | थ tha | द da | ध dha | न na |
| unvoiced t, as in still | aspirated t, as in horse-headed, not like English ch- | as in dance | aspirated d, as in maid house | as in name |
| labial stops | प pa | फ pha | ब ba | भ bha | म ma |
| unaspirated p, as in sports | aspirated p, as in upriver | as in but | aspirated b, as in clubhouse | as in mother |
| semi-vowels | य ya | र ra | ल la | व va |  |
| as in yes | as in rum | as in leave | as in water |  |
| sibilants and s | श sa | ष ṣa | ᵃ sa | ह ha |  |
| palatal s | retroflex s; further back in the mouth than ʃ; as in wash |
| dental s as in sing | as in house |

*This sound does not actually appear, but is conventionally listed in this place to complete/balance the system. It will not be discussed further in this book.*
Similar Characters
The following pairs of characters look very similar and may thus initially cause confusion:

भ bha and म ma
ब ba and व va
थ tha and य ya
ख kha and रव ra-vā

g hə and ḍh dha
प pa and ष ṣa
र ra and ड ḍa
उ u and ज ja

If you remember that each of these can be confused with another sign, it will be easier to notice any mistakes you may have made reading words that contain them (and an unknown thoga will turn out to be yoga, etc.)

Devanāgarī Mnemonics
As you have seen by now, the devanāgarī script consists of a large number of signs that to most learners are completely new. When memorising them, break them up into elements that you can recognise more easily. अ a, for example, is like the number 3 connected to a capital T. ए i consists of the top line, a small connector and a capital S with a squiggle at the bottom. उ u looks similar to a number 3 with a flat top line and a slight extension at the bottom. ग ga, in addition to the line at the top and the downward stroke shared by so many devanāgarī characters, has as its characteristic element something that looks like a golf club; this may also help you remember that ग ga always represents a hard g (as in e.g. golf), never a soft one (as in e.g. gin). Different mnemonics work for different people; come up with as many of them as you find useful.

You may now do Exercise 1.

WRITING WORDS
a) Combining Consonants and Vowels
There is one distinct difference between devanāgarī and the alphabet used by e.g. English: in English writing, all letters are equal, and written one after the other. Yet in devanāgarī, there is a difference between the representation of consonants and that of vowels: the ‘main’ signs represent consonants. The sign for the vowel following a consonant is then added to the right, to the left, above or below the consonant sign. There is no sign indicating the vowel a; given that this is the most frequent vowel in Sanskrit, it apparently seemed most economical to have its presence ‘assumed’ whenever no other vowel was explicitly indicated. The absence of a vowel after a consonant is indicated by the virāma (literally ‘stop, end’), a small diagonal stroke below the consonant sign: e.g. क k (vs. क ka from Table 1). For examples of vowels other than a, compare:

क k + ह i = कि ki
c k + r r = क r
Table 2: Combining consonants and vowels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>क</th>
<th>का</th>
<th>कि</th>
<th>की</th>
<th>कु</th>
<th>कू</th>
<th>कृ</th>
<th>कृ</th>
<th>कः</th>
<th>कं</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>क</td>
<td>का</td>
<td>कि</td>
<td>की</td>
<td>कु</td>
<td>कू</td>
<td>कृ</td>
<td>कृ</td>
<td>कः</td>
<td>कं</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice particularly the sign for short i, which is always added before the consonant after which it is pronounced:

\[ क k + ि i = कि ki \]

Table 2 presents an overview of all such vowel signs.

Generally, vowel signs look identical no matter which consonant they are combined with. Yet there are two noteworthy exceptions: the signs for u/ū and r/r̥ are usually attached to the bottom of the vertical line of the consonant sign. Yet, by convention, the vowels in hṛ and r̥u/r̥ū are placed within the consonant signs:

\[ ह्र hṛ \quad रु r̥u \]

The vowel signs just described (the ‘dependent’ vowel signs) may only be used when the vowel follows upon a consonant. When a vowel has no preceding consonant sign to attach to, as may be possible at the beginning of a word, we have to use the ‘independent’ or initial vowel signs (e.g. अ, आ etc.) listed at the top of Table 1.

You may now do Exercise 2.

b) Visarga and Anusvāra

Note the two signs in the bottom right-hand corner of Table 2. -h and -m do not appear at the beginning of words; hence there are no independent signs for them. -h, the visarga, is often pronounced similar to the -ch in German Bach or Scottish loch, but slightly weaker; you may also hear it pronounced like a standard -h-, with a weak repetition of the preceding vowel (making e.g. नरः narāḥ ‘man’ [narah]). -m, the anusvāra, is not a sound of its own, but nasalises the preceding vowel, making e.g. -am sound approximately like French grand.

The following words exemplify the aspects of the devanāgarī described so far:

महाराज: mahārājaḥ ‘great king’

Note that the short -a- in the first and fourth syllables is not explicitly indicated.
c) Combining Consonants

Finally, we need to look at **conjugated consonants**. In a word such as महाराजः *mahārājaḥ* 'great king', every consonant is followed by a vowel. But in a word such as मंडलः *maṇḍalaḥ* 'circle', the -न- is directly followed by a -d-. If we wrote this as ' मणडलः', it would spell 'maṇaḍalaḥ'.

One way of indicating that there is no vowel following upon a consonant is to employ the **virāma** (see above), yet, by convention, this is done almost exclusively at the end of words whose last sound is a consonant. Within words, however, the **signs for individual consonants are linked**. Usually, this is done by omitting the right-hand vertical element of the first sign:

\[
\text{ण्} = \text{णं}
\]

\[
\text{मण्डलः} = \text{मण्डल-}
\]

The same happens in the word अत्मा *ātmā* 'soul' :

\[
\text{त्} = \text{त्-}
\]

\[
\text{आत्मा} = \text{आत्म-}
\]

This also works in a combination of three or more consonants:

\[
\text{त्} + \text{म्} + \text{य्} = \text{म्-}
\]

As in महात्मयम् *māhātyam* 'magnanimity, generosity'

Sometimes, a letter does not have a vertical element, or cannot be combined with the next letter for some other reason. In these cases, letters may be made smaller and stacked on top of one another. Some examples:

\[
\text{k} + \text{k} = \text{क्क}
\]

\[
\text{द्} + \text{म} = \text{द्म}
\]

\[
\text{द्} + \text{भ} = \text{द्भ}
\]

\[
\text{द्} + \text{श्र} = \text{द्म}
\]

\[
\text{द्} + \text{न} = \text{द्न}
\]

\[
\text{प्} + \text{त} = \text{प्त}
\]

Some conjunct consonant signs cannot be recognised on the basis of the regular forms of the single consonants and must thus be memorised. They are the following:

- **र** **before other consonants**: a small hook in the top right-hand corner of the following syllable sign (consonant + vowel): अर्जुनः *Arjunaḥ* (name); दुर्योधः *duryodhaḥ* 'crime'. Do not confuse this sign with the (identical-looking) hook on the sign for initial त, तः.
- **r after other consonants**: a small diagonal line in lower half of adjacent consonant: क्रोध krodhaḥ ‘anger’; भ्राता bhrātā ‘brother’; especially in combination with अत: अत्र atra ‘here’ (in some other fonts, this appears as ा).

- **ś before some other consonants**: a small loop in top left corner: अश्व aśvaḥ ‘horse’; पश्चात् paścāt ‘after’; श्री śri ‘beauty; happiness’

- कश कश as in कृत kṣetram ‘field’

- ज्ञ jñ as in ज्ञानम् jñānam ‘knowledge’

- tt त्त as in उत्तमं uttamah ‘highest’

- क्ष क्ष as in भक्ति bhaktiḥ ‘devotion’ (in other fonts, this appears as क्ष).

A list of all common conjunct consonants is given in larger print on pp. 385–6 in the Appendices. It may look daunting, but you will soon find that you hardly need it: the single elements of most conjuncts are easily recognisable. Only a handful of characters change their shape noticeably when combined with others; see the list above and in the Nutshell below. These are the only elements that need to be individually memorised (if you find flash cards helpful, make cards of these conjuncts). If you want to be particularly thorough, go through the list while covering the transliterations with your hand. Make your own list, or set of flash cards, of all the conjuncts you do not recognise. Go over that list again.

---

**THE NUTSHELL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To write words:</th>
<th>Conjunct consonants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Take a consonant sign.</td>
<td>– Consonant signs combine and change their form when two consonants stand directly next to each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Add a vowel sign before, after, above or below it.</td>
<td>– Often, consonant signs are combined by omission of the vertical stroke of the first consonant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– If a consonant follows instead of a vowel, combine the two signs to form a conjunct consonant.</td>
<td>– If that is not possible, one may be written on top of the other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– If a word begins with a vowel, use an independent vowel sign.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ल/त्र tra श्व श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वा श्वা...
REVIEW QUESTIONS

(If you cannot remember an answer, go back and find it in the text.)

1) How are the following four written in devanāgarī: ta, tu, ti, t?
2) What are conjunct consonant signs? When are they needed?
3) List all Sanskrit vowels.
4) Why are there two sets of vowel signs (independent and dependent) in devanāgarī?
5) What are virāma, visarga and anusvāra?

EXERCISES

1) Say out loud the following syllables and transliterate them into Roman (i.e. English) script.
   a) त क फ प ष अ म च थ न इ र
   b) स म श ऋ ऊ ज फ ब भ न त
   c) ष व ह ट ड ई भ घ घ ए ल झ स
   d) औ च ल त न थ य थ ब व श ष

2) Say out loud the following syllables and transliterate them into Roman script.
   a) ने य मा छ ल आ घ फ कि ढ फ
   b) गै थी डे या ठा टा छी मू ठ उ बी
   c) दा तू अ नो जा ल ह म ओ दौ ट ह छे
   d) का चू ड वृ ते ट र जी गे इ घ हु

3) Pronounce the following words and write them down transliterated into Roman script. If you do not recognise a consonant combination, look for it in the reference list (pp. 385–6).
   a) नर: अदिति: कर्म: देव: उषा: शिव: आयुर्वेद: एकाय सरस्वती नाम
      अवतार: भारह: नमस्ते अशि: प्रियी आत्मा राक्षस: भगवद्विता चक्राणि मनु:
   b) कृष्ण: देवी: गणेश: राम: कलिपुरागलक्ष्मी: मिलमु: मूनि: पूजा
      पुत्र: संसार: निर्वाणमु: पंडिता: आश्रम: ईश्वर्या: संस्कृतमु:
   c) सिंह: स्वामी: विष्णु: आचार्य: महायानमु: राम: वाक्शु: अहं: इत्यमु: अत्रमु:
4) **Transliterate the following words into devanāgari.**

- guruḥ     lit. ‘heavy’, i.e. important → ‘important one’ = ‘teacher’
- Rāmāyaṇam, Mahābhāratam      the two big Indian epics
- Rāmaḥ    hero of the Rāmāyaṇa (‘Rāma’s Journey’)
- Sītā     Rāma’s wife
- yogah    yoga
- Upaniṣad  name of a literary genre
- Aśokaḥ   great Indian emperor of the third century BC
- Rādhā    Kṛṣṇa’s beloved
- somaḥ    an intoxicating substance used in Vedic rituals
- Hastināpuram   a city in northern India
- svayamvarah ‘self-choice’, a ceremony at which a woman may choose her husband
- Kurukṣetram ‘the Kuru Field’, where the central battle of the Mahābhārata takes place
- Indraḥ   a god
- mātā     ‘mother’
- pramāṇam  ‘measure’
- mokṣah    ‘release, liberation’
- maitri    ‘friendship’
- nṛpatiḥ    ‘leader, king’
- saṃskṛtam  ‘Sanskrit’, lit. ‘put together, perfected’
- vyāghraḥ   ‘tiger’
- Kāmasūtram  ‘Love Guide’, a treatise on human interaction
- Saṃjayaḥ   the narrator of the Bhagavad-Gītā
- Kālidāsaḥ   a famous poet
- dharmaḥ    religious duty

5) **Some reading: the Mahābhārata** (by far the longer of the two great Indian epics) describes itself.

यत् इह अस्ति तत् अन्यत् यत् न इह अस्ति न तत् कऽचित्

what here is that elsewhere what not here is not that anywhere

‘What is here, that (may also be) elsewhere. What is not here, that (also is) not anywhere else.’

(Mahābhārata 1.56.34)

Combining the words according to the rules of sandhi (Chapters 11, 13 and 16), one arrives at the normally quoted form of this sentence:

यदिहु प्रपन्धपर्त्य यत्र्यध्यात्तिं न ततः कऽचित्
While you are still learning to write the devanāgarī characters, read through this chapter. It offers more details on pronunciation and introduces you to some technical terminology concerning the sounds of Sanskrit. Our focus is on studying the Sanskrit language itself, yet you will see throughout your study why it makes sense to not just know which sounds Sanskrit contains, but also what the relationships between these sounds are.

For example, the traditional order of the devanāgarī signs as laid down by the ancient Sanskrit grammarians is based on those relationships.

Table 3: Linguistic labels of the Sanskrit sounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONSONANTS</th>
<th>simple</th>
<th>complex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>velar</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>palatal</td>
<td>kh</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retroflex</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dental</td>
<td>gh</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>labial</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semivowels</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibilants</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Linguistic labels of the Sanskrit sounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONSONANTS</th>
<th>unvoiced unaspirated</th>
<th>unvoiced aspirated</th>
<th>voiced unaspirated</th>
<th>voiced aspirated</th>
<th>nasal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>velar</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>kh</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>gh</td>
<td>ṇ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>palatal</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>ch</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>jh</td>
<td>ñ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retroflex</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>th</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>dh</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dental</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>th</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>dh</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>labial</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>ph</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>bh</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semivowels</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibilants</td>
<td>ś</td>
<td>š</td>
<td>s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>h</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This order of Sanskrit sounds works along three principles: it goes from simple to complex; it goes from the back to the front of the mouth; and it groups similar sounds together.

First come the vowels, then the consonants. Vowels are ‘simpler’ than consonants as they can easily be pronounced on their own, while consonants usually need the help of a vowel to be pronounced. Think of how you pronounce e and b: when you pronounce the vowel e, you just say e, whereas if you pronounce the consonant b, what you say will sound more like the word be, i.e. you add an e to the b-sound itself. That is why b is counted among the ‘consonants’, literally those that sound along, whose sound is accompanied by another. Among themselves, both the vowels and the consonants are ordered according to where in the mouth they are pronounced, going from back to front.

VOWELS
a is pronounced in the low back of the mouth, i is pronounced higher up, u then is pronounced with a rounding of your lips and thus, in a way, further to the front of the mouth. Next there are the vowel (or ‘vocalic’) forms of r and l, written in transliteration as ṛ and ḷ. Each sound is given first in its short, then in its long variant: a ā i ī u ū ṛ ṝ ḷ (̄). All these are known as the simple vowels.

They are followed by the complex vowels, e ai o au. At an earlier stage of the language, e and o actually were *ai and *au, and current ai and au once were *āi and *āu. Knowing that e ai o au were once *ai *āi *au *āu allows us to understand not only why all four of these are known as ‘complex’ vowels (all of them once actually were vowel combinations or ‘diphthongs’), but also to see that the pattern of ‘short vowel, then long vowel’ that we saw in a ā i ī etc. is maintained here, too. All four complex vowels count as long.

CONSONANTS
a) Stops
Among the consonants, we first get the stops. Their name derives from the fact that, in order to pronounce them, we stop and then release the flow of air at some point in our mouth. First come the velar stops or velars, formed by briefly stopping the air in the back of our throats (at the so-called velum). Then come the palatals (the tongue touches the hard palate, or roof of the mouth), the retroflex stops (tongue ‘retroflexed’, i.e. curled back and touching the roof of the mouth), the dentals (tongue touches teeth; dent- = Latin ‘tooth’), and the labials (lower and upper lips touch; labia = Latin ‘lip’). In each of these ‘places of articulation’ we find several different stops. They are traditionally listed in the order of unvoiced unaspirated – voiced unaspirated – unvoiced aspirated – voiced aspirated, thus in a way proceeding from ‘simple’ to ‘complex’. ‘Voiced’ means that the vocal cords vibrate
when the sound is pronounced: put a finger on your throat and say the letters \(d\) and \(t\). When you say \(d\), you will feel a vibration, which is absent when you say \(t\). This vibration is what we call voice. Sounds that have it are called ‘voiced’; those that do not, ‘unvoiced’.

Alternatively, as English never aspirates its voiced stops, you can try the following method: hold your hand flat in front of your mouth and say ‘\(t\)’ and ‘\(d\)’ (or ‘\(ka\)’ and ‘\(ga\)’, etc.). Whenever you feel a strong puff of air, you can know that a stop is unvoiced; where the puff of air is weak, the stop is voiced.

The difference between aspirated and unaspirated sounds is more difficult to explain because English does not consciously make this distinction. Basically, ‘aspirated’ means that a sound is accompanied by air. Hold your hand in front of your mouth and say the word \(pot\). The puff of air that you feel emerging when you pronounce the \(p\) is its aspiration. You find an almost unaspirated \(p\) in the word \(spot\): notice there is nearly no puff of air accompanying that \(p\). You should try to make this kind of distinction between all pairs of aspirated and unaspirated stops. If, like most native speakers of English, you find this difficult, pronounce Sanskrit \(p\) as you would the \(p\) in \(pot\), and then add a more noticeable aspiration to pronounce \(ph\), \(kh\) etc.

**Three things to note:** One, Sanskrit \(th\) must not be confused with the English \(th\) in words such as \(the\) or \(thanks\). Parallel to other aspirated stops, \(th\) is pronounced as a \(t\) with a puff of air accompanying it. Two, even though aspirated stops are transliterated into English with two letters (as \(kh\), \(gh\), \(ch\), etc.), they are one sound only. And finally, as English has no aspirated voiced stops (such as \(gh\), \(bh\)), don’t worry if you find them difficult to pronounce at first. Follow the pronunciation hints in Chapter 1, and you will soon be comfortable with them.

**b) Nasals**

After each series of stops there are the respective nasals, so called because the pathway from the oral to the nasal cavity at the back of our mouth is open when they are pronounced. Other than that, they are parallel to their corresponding stops: the velar nasal is pronounced in the same place as the velar stops, the palatal nasal as the palatal stops, and so on.

**c) Semivowels/Glides**

Next come the remaining consonants, once again ordered according to where in the mouth they are pronounced. First, there are the sounds that have vowel equivalents: \(-y-, \ -r-, \ -l-\) and \(-v-\). They correspond to the vowels \(-i-/i-, \ -r-/r-, \ -l-\) and \(-u-/u-\): whenever these vowels come to stand before a vowel other than themselves, they change into their consonantal forms (thus, \(i\) changes into \(y\) (e.g. \(i + a \rightarrow ya\)), \(u\) into \(v\), \(r\) into \(r\), and \(l\) into \(h\), you will see numerous examples
of this from Chapter 7 onwards). These sounds are called glides, liquids or semivowels (literally 'half-vowels').

d) Sibilants and h
Next come the three kinds of sibilant, or s-sound: the palatal ś, the retroflex ṣ, and the dental s.
(Note that they are listed in the same order as the corresponding stops.) Finally, there is h, which
is pronounced more or less as h is in English. The sound is voiced (unlike in English, where h is
unvoiced), yet an unvoiced pronunciation is predominant now.

Note: Do not confuse the h with visarga (ḥ), in spite of how similarly they are transliterated into
English.

USE OF THIS CHAPTER FOR REFERENCE
At this point, the information in this chapter may seem superfluous; yet later on it will be very use-
ful to understand the systematics just outlined. Understanding the traditional order of the sounds/
letters makes memorising it easier (and you will need to know this order when you use a diction-
ary or word list). Yet more importantly, it will help you understand the relations between various
words and word forms: in Sanskrit, numerous words are formed from the same base. For example,
based on भज् bhaj (a verbal root, thus marked with the root symbol √ and properly introduced in
Chapter 3) meaning 'to allot, give to; to honour, worship', we find words such as -भाज्- bhāj- 'wor-
shipping', भाग- bhāga- 'portion, allotment', भक्ति- bhakti- 'giving out; worship', and many others.
In these related forms, we see that a palatal consonant appears as its velar counterpart (bhāj- vs.
bhāga-), and a voiced consonant appears as its voiceless counterpart (bhāga- vs. bhakti-) before
another voiceless sound. Both of these correspondences occur very frequently. Also, knowing
about the relationship between the vowels u/ū and their consonantal counterpart v, we shall see
how the -ū- in the verbal root भू- bhū- 'to be' and its semivocalic equivalent, -v-, in the verb form
भवति bhavati 'he/she/it is' correspond (→ Chapter 7 for more details on this). When we are familiar
with the links between simple and complex vowels, we understand how words such as the root
वौर- cora- 'thief' and वौर्य- caurya- 'robbery' can be formed from the root चोर cur 'to take, steal'. In
short, we gain a better understanding, rather than just knowledge, of the Sanskrit language. We also
greatly decrease the amount of vocabulary we shall have to memorise.

More detailed discussion of the ways in which sounds correspond to each other can be
found in Chapters 7 (vowel gradation), 11, 13 and 16 (sandhi), and 17 (noun formation,
especially vrddhi derivatives).
REVIEW QUESTIONS

1) What is the systematic difference between consonants and vowels?
2) Why are all of e ai o au called 'complex vowels'?
3) What are 'stops'?
4) In the order of Sanskrit sounds as given in Table 3, what do the stops standing in the same line have in common? What do those standing in the same column have in common?
5) What is the palatal counterpart of k?
6) What is the voiceless counterpart of d?
7) How do you pronounce Sanskrit th and ph?
8) List all velar stops.

READING EXERCISES

1) Identify and transliterate the following conjunct consonants. Example: स्तू sta
   a) ग्ज्य ल प भू प य स भम च
   b) भ्य ण्ठ य्य त्य स्य न्य र्य ज्य
   c) त्य ि त प प्द न्द यद छ द स्त
   d) क्त ड ट न्द प्र म्य श्य ण्ठ
   e) व्य स्ल त्य ल्य च्य श्य क्ष्य
   f) न्य श्य ध्य न्त त्य च्य
   g) व्य ग्य ध्य न्त त्य च्य
   h) च्य च्य ध्य ध्य न्द न्द च्य
   i) श्य क्ष ध्य ण्ठ च्य ध्य त्य
   j) ह्य च्य च्य च्य ब्य ब्य च्य

2) Transliterate the following words:
   a) ग्ध्यति ततः: गृहम् क्षति: नानम् विलम्बति युतम् तिलम् पुनर्विलम्बति
   b) तुप्तति द्रवति राजी कृत्मि चन्द्रः विचुर्ति गृहम् सुहाति श्रुति अद्य
   c) क्रोडः: अशः प्रसङ्कोल वृणाति दृष्टि गहाति विश्रब्य अश्रोऽयुता
   d) बन्धु: बुद्धि: शालुः दृष्टि: अश्रुः कीर्तिः: नानम् अन्तरिक्षां: हृद्यथ: पृष्ठिवी
   e) जितेन्द्रिय अनन्तरक्ष्र्प्तमव बलहक्ष्ण्डविभक्तवर्ग: लालालक्ष्ण्ऽक्ष्ण्ऽपिदमोऽभ

(The long words in e) are compound nouns (→ Chapter 14) and taken from a work by the poet Kālidāsa.)
3) Transliterate the following words into devanāgarī.
   a) 
kumāraḥ ('young man, prince')
   b) 
avatarati ('he descends')
   c) 
hasti ('elephant')
   chāyā ('shade, shadow')
   uvāca ('he said')
   anya ('other')
   amara ('immortal')
   aśā ('hope')
   darśanam ('sight')
   puraṃ ('city')
   sakhi ('female friend')
   svalpa ('small')
   paurāḥ ('citizen, city-dweller')
   pitarau ('parents')
   śīghra ('fast')

4) Read and transliterate the following.
   a) 
   (The) Blessed Lord said:
   असंशयम् महाबाहो मनः दुर्निर्ग्रहाम् चलम्।
   doubtlessly o great-armed (strong) one (the) mind hard-to-restrain moving
   अप्रासेन तु कौटेय वैराग्येन च गृहुतेऽ॥
   through practice but o Kunti-son through indifference and it is restrained
   Restraining it [lit. ‘the restraining of it], I think, is like restraining [lit. ‘the restraining of’]
   the wind: very difficult to do.” – The Blessed Lord [Kṛṣṇa] said: “Doubtlessly, o strong
   one [Arjuna], the mind is hard to restrain and moving/unsteady. But through practice, o
   son of Kunti, and by indifference (to worldly matters) it is/can be restrained.”

   (Bhagavad-Gītā 6.34–5)
b) यददत् आचरति श्रेष्ठः ततदत् एव इतरः जनः।
च स यत् प्रमाणम् कुर्वते लोकः तत् अनुवर्त्ति॥

whatever does the best (person) that(ever) also another person
he what measure makes the world that follows

'Whatever the best person does, that another person does (or: other people do), too.
What standard he sets, that the world follows.'

(\textit{Bhagavad-Gītā} 3.21)

c) \textit{वैरुपयम् च न ते देहे कामपरः तथा}।
\textit{भविष्यसि रणे अरीणाम् विजेता च न संशयः}॥

ugliness and no your in the body desired-form-holding thus
you will be in battle of enemies conqueror and no doubt

'And there [will be] no ugliness in your body; also, you will possess any form you wish
[lit. 'you will be desired-form-holding'], and you will conquer [your] enemies in battle.
[There is] no doubt [about this].'

(Brahmā making a promise to Rāvaṇa,
\textit{Mahābhārata} 3.259.24)