
SRI GURUBHYO NAMAH

Sanskritam Pronunciation Guidelines

Why is correct pronunciation so important ?

- Samskritam = formally perfected , methodical, refined language
- According to our shastras, Samskritam alphabet emanated from God
- amantram aksharam naasti – each akshara is a mantra
- Our rishis found that not only the meaning, but the sound of a word itself is capable of causing transformation.
- Our scriptures have been handed down for thousands of years accurately only because of the care taken in pronouncing them in an error-free way.
- Chanting can be thought of as a soaring bird. The 2 wings are shadba and artha. Only when both wings are active, the bird called the soul can fly effectively and reach its ultimate goal.

Why is correct pronunciation so important ?

- When pronunciation changes, the meaning changes
 - E.g sakalam , shakalam , sakrit , shakrit , svajanam, shvajanam
kara, khara , cala,chala , paTa,paTha , dAma, dhAma
- There are different languages, dialects and consequent accents in different parts of India, but Samskritam sounds are expected to be pronounced the same way
- Samskritam is a phonetic language. Each letter is pronounced only one way
- Samskritam script is called devanagari or devalipi. Samskritam is called deva bhaasha
- Samskritam alphabet (varNa mAAlA) has 50 letters , also called mAtrika varNas (mother sounds), which are the 50 seats of jaganmAra (panchAshat Shakti peethas), through which Her glory emanates in the form of sounds.

How to pronounce ?

- व्याघ्री यथा हरेत्पुत्रान्दंष्ट्राभ्यां न च पीडयेत् । भीता पतनभेदाभ्यां तद्वद्वर्णान्प्रयोजयेत् ॥
 - Our Rishis say that letters must be pronounced firmly yet delicately, like a tiger carrying its cubs with its mouth.
- माधुर्यमक्षरव्यक्तिः पदच्छेदस्तु सुस्वरः । धैर्यं लयसमर्थं च षडेते पाठका गुणाः ॥
 - The qualities of a student who has learnt good pronunciation are melody , accurate reproduction of sounds, ability to break words correctly, right pitch, confidence in pronunciation and ability to follow the rhythm.
- गीती शीघ्री शिरःकम्पी तथा लिखितपाठकः । अनर्थज्ञोऽल्पकण्ठश्च षडेते पाठकाधमाः ॥
 - The qualities of a student who has not yet learnt good pronunciation are unnecessary elongation or contraction of letters, unnecessary movement of the head, constantly referring to the book, not knowing the meaning and pronouncing in a feeble voice.
- A properly pronounced word has the following six qualities which indicate the accuracy and purity of speech :

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Varna - Proper enunciation of letters• Swara - proper tone• Matra - proper duration | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Balam - proper pitch , effort• Sama - Evenness , smoothness• Santana - Proper compounding of letters |
|---|--|

How to pronounce ?

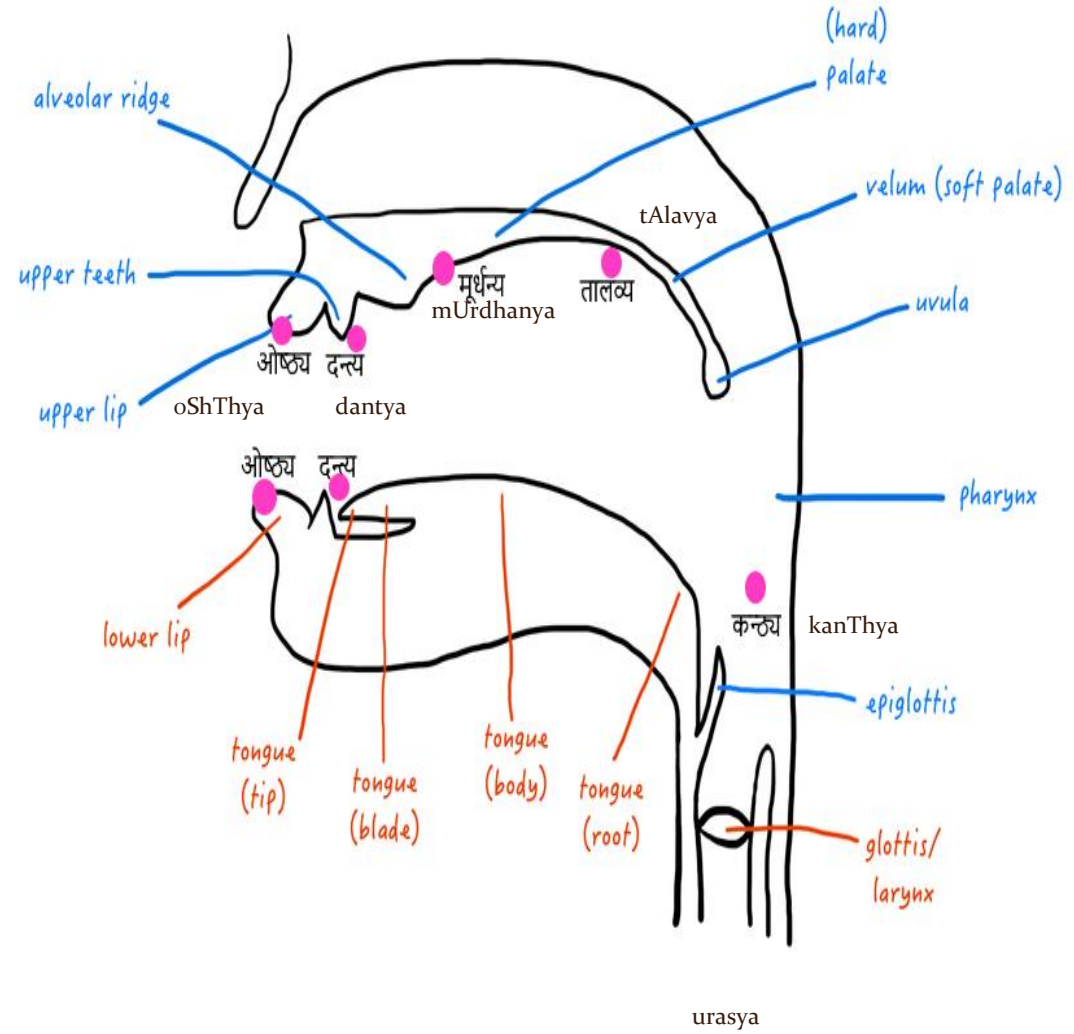
- Samskritam alphabet enumerates sounds in an ordered, patterned and scientific manner, according to the structure of the mouth. Therefore, it is important to use the correct mouth positions for pronouncing the letters and not merely approximate the sounds. The biggest contributing factor in pronouncing Samskritam words accurately is fully opening the mouth.
- Sound of Samskritam words is based on 4 aspects:
- sthAna – the location of pronunciation in uttering a sound (point of articulation)
- karaNa – the articulating organ (vocal chords, glottis, velum, tongue, lips)
- prayatna / Abhyantara prayatna – the effort made in enunciating the sound by combining sthAna and karaNa
- anupradAna / bAhya prayatna – secondary effort.
- By understanding the above 4 aspects well, one can understand correct pronunciation

How not to pronounce ?

- Mispronunciations mainly occur due to 3 reasons (disregarding structure of mouth issues and health issues)
- **Food habits** : By long term use of rajasic and tamasic food, one's ability to pronounce accurately would decrease. It is advisable to consume sattvik food.
- **Conditioning** : When people are conditioned by their regional languages and dialects, their Samskritam pronunciation also comes under the influence of their local languages and is hard to change. However, by practice and determination, one can chant Samskritam in its original form, free from the regional influence. Examples of common mistakes and corrections are given later in the document.
- **Inattentiveness** : The third reason mispronunciation occurs is due to not paying attention to how letters should be pronounced. This can be remedied by diligently learning how to accurately pronounce each letter and practicing repeatedly.
- By overcoming the above drawbacks, one can learn correct pronunciation

Sanskritam Alphabet (varNa mAIA)

- Sanskritam has
 - 13 vowels (a – au)
 - 25 stops (ka – ma)
 - 4 semi-vowels (ya , ra, la , va)
 - 4 sibilants (sha, Sha, sa , ha)
 - 1 anusvAra (◌̣)
 - 1 chandra bindu (◌̣̣)
 - 3 types of visarga (◌̣̣̣)
 - 1 avagraha (◌̣)
- The above varNas are divided into various categories based on their articulation differences.

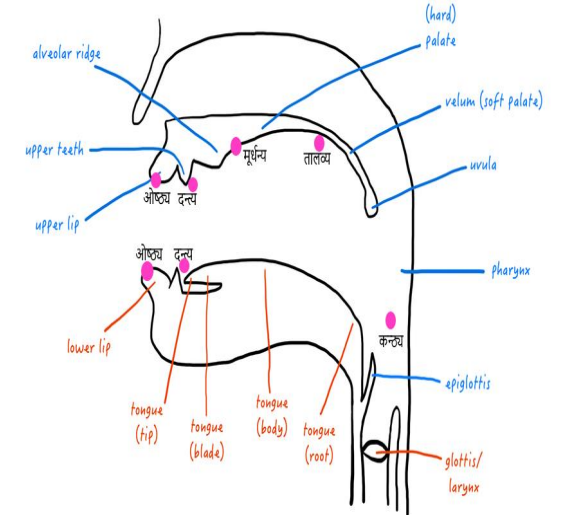


Definitions

- कण्ठ्य / kaNThya / Velar / Guttural – sounds emanating from the throat region (e.g – kha)
- तालव्य / tAlavya / Palatal – sounds emanating by placing the tongue against the hard palate (e.g – cha)
- मूर्धन्य / mUrdhanya / Retroflex / Cerebral / Lingual – Sounds articulated with the tip of the tongue curled upward and back against or near the juncture of the hard and soft palates. (e.g – Da/ ढ)
- दन्त्य / dantya/ Dental – Sounds articulated with the tip of the tongue touching the back of the upper front teeth, or, immediately above. (e.g – da / द)
- ओष्ठ्य / oShThya / labial – sounds emanating from one or both lips (e.g pa)
- anunāsika / Nasal – nasalized sound (e.g – ma)
- aghoṣa / unvoiced – sounds produced without a preparatory murmur (e.g ka)
- ghoṣa / Voiced – sounds produced with a preparatory murmur (e.g – ga)
- alpa-prāṇa – / un-aspirated – sounds produced without a puff of breath (e.g ka)
- mahāprāṇa / aspirated - sounds pronounced with a puff of breath (e.h kha)
- antastha / semi vowel – letters that neither require complete stoppage of sound in the mouth nor are pronounced freely with open mouth like vowels (e.g – ya)
- ūṣman / sibilant / fricative – “Heated” sounds – sounds that require “friction” of air (e.g – sha)

	svara Vowels (13)		vyañjana Consonants							
Prayatna / Primary Effort ->	asprṣṭa		sprṣṭa/ Stops					Īṣat-sprṣṭa	nema-sprṣṭa	
anupradAna / Secondary effort ->			īṣac-cvāsa	śvāsa	īṣan-nāda	nāda				
			ananunāsika Non-Nasal				anunāsika Nasal	antastha Semivowel	ūṣman Sibilant/heated	
			aghoṣa/karkasha Unvoiced/Surds/Hard		ghoṣa/mridu Voiced/Sonants/Soft			aghoṣa Unvoiced	ghoṣa Voiced	
	short	Long	alpa-prāṇa Un-aspirated	mahāprāṇa Aspirated	alpaprāṇa Unaspirated	mahāprāṇa Aspirated	alpaprāṇa Unaspirated	mahāprāṇa Aspirated		
Urasya Thoracic									ह ha	
kaṅṭhya Velar / Guttural	अ a	आ ā	क ka	ख kha	ग ga	घ gha	ङ ṅa)(
tālavya Palatal	इ i	ई ī	च ca	छ cha	ज ja	झ jha	ञ ña	य ya	श śa	
mūrdhanya Retroflex /Cerebral	ऋ ṛ	ॠ ṝ	ट ṭa	ठ ṭha	ड ḍa	ढ ḍha	ण ṇa	र ra	ष ṣa	
dantya Dental	लृ l̥		त ta	थ tha	द da	ध dha	न na	ल la	स sa	
oṣṭhya Labial	उ u	ऊ ū	प pa	फ pha	ब ba	भ bha	म ma	}{		
kaṅṭhatālavya Palato-Velar		ए, ऐ e, ai								
dantyoShTa Labio-dental									व va	
kaṅṭhoshthya Labio-Velar		ओ, औ o, au								

varNa mAlA



)(jihvAmUleeya is a guttural sibilant (a variant of the visarga – will be discussed later)

}{ upadhmaniya is a dento-labial sibilant (a variant of the visarga – will be discussed later)

Sanskritam Alphabet (varNa mAAlA)

varNa	Description	Devanagari / transliterated Symbol
Anusvara/nasikya /rakta/ranga	anusvAra is a type of a nasal sound denoted by a . above the letter	◌ं (detailed rules of anusvAra pronunciation will be discussed later)
Chandrabindu mukha – nAsika	Special anusvAra used in some situations	◌ँ (used for ya, la va – will be discussed later)
visarga	Visarga is a common aspirated suffix (a short echo) denoted by a : mark following a letter	◌ः (3 variants of the visarga – the visarjaneeya, the jihvAmUleeya and the upadhmaniya will be discussed later)
Special Compound Consonants / conjuncts	Since these 3 compounds are formed by combining other letters, these are not considered in the primary letters of the alphabet	क्ष / ksha , ज्ञ / jña, त्र / tra
Avagraha	Avagraha is the symbol to indicate the prodelision of the ॐ sound and is indicated by s	s / ‘
La	ळ only occurs in vedic Sanskritam and is not used in classical Sanskritam. ल is used instead	ळ / La

Pronunciation – Sibilants (ūṣman)

- These are three unvoiced hissing sounds, which in Samskritam are known as ūṣman, which means heat-producing
- श्र / śa - The śa is pronounced as a light sound with the tongue in front in the palate (there is a very slight contact of the tongue with the roof of the mouth), which requires attentive rehearsing
- ष / ṣa - pronounced like the sh in ship or wish, a heavy sound with the tongue pulled back in the far back cerebral (roof) position
- स्र / sa - sa (exactly like the English s) is pronounced as a pure hissing sound, like the s in seek or miss, in the dental position.
- There are no voiced sibilants in Samskritam. A voiced sibilant produces a z sound. So never say tazmai śri
- **Examples** : atra shUrA , draupadeyAshcha sarva eva, hR^iShIkshaH, parisamApyate

Pronunciation - AnusvAra

- In the Devanagari script, anusvAra is represented with a dot (bindu) above the letter (e.g. मं)
- Transliterated as ṁ (m with an underdot)
- Indicates a nasal stop having the same place of articulation as a following consonant (plosive).
- AnusvAra followed by any consonant results in the anunAsika sound of the varga the consonant belongs to. **We follow this rule.**

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| • anusvAra + k/kh/g/gh = ṅ | शङ्कर = शं - कर , kAryam karma , parAm gatim |
| • anusvAra + k/kh/g/gh = ṅ̃ | अञ्जन - अं - जन, param janma , mahatIm chamUm |
| • anusvAra + k/kh/g/gh = ṇ̇ | अण्डज - अं - डज, kanTha, panDita |
| • anusvAra + k/kh/g/gh = ṅ̤ | अन्तक - अं - तक, satyam damaH , yeShAm tvantagatam |
| • anusvAra + k/kh/g/gh = ṁ | परम्परा - परं-परा, puruSham puruSharShabha , balam bhImAbhirakShitam |

- Consonants without corresponding nasals
 - ra, sha, Sha, sa, ha
 - sam + rakshati = samrakshati
 - sam + shruNoti = samshruNoti
 - sam + ShTivati = samShTivati
 - sam + sAra = samsAra (not sansAra)
 - sam + harati = samharati

- When anusvAra is followed by ya/la/va, it can be optionally changed into a nasalized sound represented by a Chandra bindu ̣. **We follow this rule.**
- anusvAra + ya/la/va
 - Sam+yamanam = saYyamanam
 - Sam+labdham = saLlabdham
 - Sam+vahanam = saVvahnām

Pronunciation - Avagraha

- Avagraha – e.g : कोऽपि
- The Devanagari symbol for avagraha is s, and the Devanagari symbol for the double avagraha is ss. The word avagraha means - separation and indicates omission of a vowel. An avagraha is not pronounced. It is not an akshara - just a written mark. It is represented by an apostrophe in transliterated Samskritam.
- In Devanagari, the single avagraha, s, represents the omission of a, and the double avagraha, ss, represents the omission of aa.
- me 'cyuta = me + acyuta
- Ko 'pi = Kah/Ko + api

Pronunciation - Visarga

- Regular visarga
 - Also called a visarjaneeya – pronounced as a slight echo of the preceding vowel after the aspiration
 - rAmaH , hariH , guruH , muneH, indriyaiH, hetoH, gauH
- Visarga followed by sibilants (sha, Sha, sa) – changes into the respective sibilant
 - bahavaH shUrAH = bahavash - shUrAH
 - shuklaH ShaNmAsAH = shuklaSh- ShaNmAsAH
 - bhavantaH sarva eva hi = bhavantas - sarva eva hi
- Visarga followed by ksha – is fully pronounced with a slight pause
 - samaduHkhasukhaHa kShamI
 - smR^itirmedhA dhR^itiHi kShamA
- Visarga followed by k, kh
 - It is called jihvAmUllyā visarga – to be produced from the base of the tongue (guttural)
 - shItoShNasukhaduHkhadAH , vAyuH khaM mano buddhireva cha
- Visarga followed by p , ph
 - It is called an upadhmAnlyā visarga – to be produced as a dento-labial sibilant (sounds like an f)
 - kuruvR^iddhaF pitAmahaH , kR^ipaNAf phalahetavaH

Common mistakes to avoid

	Accurate	Inaccurate	Description
a,ai,au	Hare , Chaitanya, gaurava	Hore, choitanya, gourava	Do not interchange a with o, ai with oi, au with ou
Hrasva - Deerga			Do not interchange hrasva and deergha sounds
Ghosha - aghosha	ka,ca,Ta,ta,pa	Using ga,ja,Da,da,ba in place of ka,ca,Ta,ta,pa	Shoka not shoga, pUJa not bUJa
va	varNa	barNa	Do not interchange va with ba
Ya	yamuna	jamuna	Do not interchange ya with ja
alpa prANa, mahA prANa	alpa prana sounds and maha prana sounds pronounced distinctly	Interchanging alpa prana sounds and maha prana sounds	kara, khara , cala,chala , paTa,paTha , dAma, dhAma
ph	Phalam	Falam	Do not f instead of ph
th,dh	Ratham, Katham, dAshaRathi	Radham, Kadham, dAshaRadhi	Do not use dh instead of th
r	karma	kaRma	No rolling / Hypercorrection
R	Amrta	Amrita,hridaya, Amruta,hrudaya	Between I and u
ai	Saraswatyai (NI)	Saraswatyai (SI)	Don't elongate the last vowel
sha	Like cha		Shiva,shankara ,rashana, shyAma, Shakti, shanti
Sha	Like Ta		uShas, viShNu, bheeShma, sriShTi
sa	Like ta	No z sound No sh sound (e.g tulashi)	sundaram, salilam, samskritam, samsAra ,tulasi
visarga	Kavihi v kavihi'		
halanta	Rama,janma	Ram,janm	Do not cut off the ending vowel
Jna	Yagnya, gnyanam (palatalized gna)	Yegna, gnanam, gyana, dnyAna	The root is gn, not dn or gy
dy	Vidya	Vijya	Do not substitute dya with jya
ty	Atyanta	Achyanta	Do not substitute tya with cya
Na , na	sarvANi bhUtAni	sarvAni bhUtAni	Do not interchange na and Na
kSha		Do not eliminate either sh or k	kShatriya not kkhatriya or cchatriya
hm, hn	Can pronounce as brahma or bramha. vahni or vanhi	bramma , vanni	Do not eliminate the pronunciation of h

Factors that help improve pronunciation

visarga	Learn to pronounce 4 types of visarga accurately
Anusvara	Learn to pronounce various combinations of anusvara correctly
Chandra bindu	Learn to pronounce 3 types of Chandra bindu correctly
Alpa prana ,maha prana	Learn to clearly and distinctly enunciate the difference between alpa prana and maha prana sounds
Ushmans	Learn to clearly and distinctly enunciate the 3 Ushman sounds
La / la	Learn to replace any La sounds you may have been used to with la
Attentiveness	Pay close attention to the right pronunciation when learning
Regional influence	Try to minimize the influence of regional language pronunciation
Speed	Avoid chanting too slow / too fast / without uniformity
Meter	Learn to follow the meter / rhythm when chanting
Attitude	Chant with focus, sincerity , confidence and devotion
Posture	Sit in the right , erect posture
Meaning	Understanding the meaning will help in memorization

