

# Penang Hokkien Basics

Lessons: [www.penang-traveltips.com/penang-hokkien.htm](http://www.penang-traveltips.com/penang-hokkien.htm)

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## Introduction

"Penang Hokkien Basics" provides you the foundation to speak and write Penang Hokkien, all within one. In this condensed lesson, you learn the romanization system, grammar, sentence construction, various parts of speech, basic words to make your own sentences, and basic phrases. This is sufficient for short-term visitors to Penang. If you want to progress to a more advanced level, follow the more detailed lessons at **Learn Penang Hokkien** on the web, where you also get to learn the history of Penang Hokkien. If you want to practise using Penang Hokkien with other learners, join the **Learn Penang Hokkien Facebook Group**.

You can download the latest free copies of "**Penang Hokkien Basics**" from the Penang Travel Tips website at:  
<http://www.penang-traveltips.com/pdf/penang-hokkien.pdf>

## Objective

The objective of Learn Penang Hokkien is to make Penang Hokkien easy for everybody to learn. Through Learn Penang Hokkien, you learn to speak, read and write the language using a simple romanized system.

## TJ Romanization System

The TJ Romanization System is the system created for you to write Penang Hokkien using a standard keyboard, without any additional characters.

## Spelling

Detailed lesson at: <http://www.penang-traveltips.com/hokkien/spelling.htm>

The spelling system is based on English and Malay. The system tries to capture as close as possible the way Penang Hokkien speakers spell words, while establishing a rule over how words are expected to be spelled.

## Pronunciation Guide

(a- initial letter, -a final letter, -a- initial/final letter)

**-a-** is pronounced /a/, as in (Eng) father: ka1 (to cut), la3 (to stir), mak3 (mother)

**-ae, e-** is pronounced /ɛ/ as in (Eng) Essu, care: kae1 (family), em3pit3 (pencil), en1 (smoke)

**-ai, -ye** is pronounced /ai/, as in hai4 (sea), lai2 (to come), mai3 (don't want), chye3 (vege)

**b-** is pronounced /b/ as in (Eng) best: hong1 (to touch), bin3 (face), bang3 (net)

**c-** is pronounced /ts/ as in (Malay) cari: ca4 (early), near to (Eng) choose: cu4 (to cook)

**ch-** is pronounced /ts<sup>h</sup>/ as in char4 (to stir fry), cho3 (error), chor1 (rough)

**d-** only appears in loan words such as du3rian2 (durian)

**-e, -eh** and **-ay** are pronounced /e/ as in (Malay) enak: e2 (shoe) se1 (to comb), kay1 (chicken)

**f-** only appears in loan words such as (Cantonese) chee cheong fun

**g-** is pronounced /g/ as in (Eng) go: gong3 (stupid), gau2 (clever)

**h-** is pronounced /h/ as in (Eng) hot: ham1 (cockle), huat3 (to rise)

**-i-** is pronounced /i/ as in (Malay) itu, (Eng) sit: hin2 (dizzy), gin2 (silver)

**-ie-** is pronounced /iɛ/ as in tien3 (electricity), phien3 (to lie)

**j-** is pronounced /dz/ as in (Eng) jump: jip1 (go in), jit1 (sun)

**k-** is pronounced /k/ as in (Eng) king: kau1 (to hang), kuan4 (to control), kut (bone/to dig)

**kh-** is pronounced /k<sup>h</sup>/ as in khau1 (to scrape), khuan4 (behaviour), khut (cavity)

- k is pronounced /ʔ/ as in (Eng) uh-oh: bak<sub>3</sub> (meat), pak<sub>3</sub> (hundred), sak<sub>1</sub> (to boil)
- rk is pronounced /k/ as in (Eng) bark: bark<sub>1</sub> (ink), park<sub>1</sub> (to tie), sark<sub>3</sub> (to push)
- l- is pronounced /l/ as in (Eng) lamp: lu<sub>4</sub> (you), lim1 (to drink), luan<sub>3</sub> (to make noise)
- m- is pronounced /m/ as in (Eng) mother: ma<sub>1</sub>cai<sub>3</sub> (tomorrow), mm<sub>33</sub>thang<sub>1</sub> (don't)
- n- is pronounced /n/ as in (Eng) net: nui<sub>3</sub> (egg), nau<sub>4</sub> (brain)
- na- is pronounced /ã/ (nasal sound) as in tna<sub>4</sub> (guts), kna<sub>4</sub> (dare), pnua<sub>2</sub> (plate)
- ni- is pronounced /ĩ/ (nasal sound) as in pni<sub>4</sub> (flat), sni<sub>3</sub> (to sting), pnui<sub>3</sub> (rice)
- nae- is pronounced /ɛ̃/ (nasal sound) as in snaeh1 (to give birth), pnae<sub>1</sub> (to pry open)
- nua- is pronounced /uã/ as in pnua<sub>2</sub> (plate), knua<sub>2</sub> (to feel cold)
- nui- is pronounced /uĩ/ as in pnui<sub>3</sub> (rice), snui<sub>3</sub> (to count)
- ng is pronounced /ŋ/ as in (Eng) king: kong<sub>1</sub> (grandfather),
- ny- is pronounced /ɲ/ as in nya<sub>2</sub> (to win), Nyonya
- o-, -oh is pronounced /o/ as in (Eng) so: go<sub>2</sub> (goose), boh2 (don't have)
- or- is pronounced /ɔ/ as in (Eng) orange: or1 (black), kor1 (mushroom)
- ong is pronounced /ɔŋ/ as in (Eng) long: song<sub>4</sub> (enjoyable),
- ong is pronounced /oŋ/ only in loan words: a3pong<sub>1</sub> (pancake), ba3li1tong<sub>3</sub> (shellfish)
- p- is pronounced /p/ as in (Eng) pen: pau1 (to wrap), pit3 (to crack)
- ph- is pronounced /p<sup>h</sup>/ as in phau<sub>3</sub> (to stir drinks), phong<sub>3</sub> (bloated)
- r- appears mostly in loan words, as in ro3ti<sub>1</sub> (bread)
- r is added to -o to form /ɔ/ and to -k to form /k/ sounds
- s- is pronounced /s/ as in (Eng) sun: sua1 (sand), su<sub>1</sub> (defeated)
- t- is pronounced /t/ as in (Eng) tall: tim (to throw), bat (to know)
- th- is pronounced /t<sup>h</sup>/ as in tha<sub>1</sub>na<sub>1</sub> (now), thark<sub>1</sub> (to read)
- u-, -oo- is pronounced /u/ as in (Malay) sabun: ku<sub>4</sub> (long time), bu<sub>4</sub> (dance), hoon<sub>4</sub> (powder)
- ua is pronounced /ua/ as in kuan (bottle), suan<sub>4</sub> (to vote)
- w- is pronounced /w/ as in wah4 (I), wan4 (bowl), wan1 (to turn)
- y- is pronounced /j/ as in yau<sub>1</sub> (hungry), ya<sub>2</sub> (coconut)

### Voiced, Unaspirated & Aspirated Sounds

voiced	voiceless unaspirated	voiceless aspirated
<b>b</b> bang <sub>3</sub> = net, dream	<b>p</b> pang <sub>3</sub> = to release	<b>ph</b> phang <sub>3</sub> = slit
<b>j</b> jo <sub>3</sub>	<b>c</b> co <sub>3</sub> = to do	<b>ch</b> cho <sub>3</sub> = wrong
<b>g</b> gau <sub>3</sub> = clever (sandhi form)	<b>k</b> kau <sub>3</sub> = to arrive, enough	<b>kh</b> khau <sub>3</sub> = to deduct
<b>d</b> (only in loanwords)	<b>t</b> tau <sub>3</sub> = bean, to connect	<b>th</b> thau <sub>3</sub> = strong wind (kencang)

### Nasalized Sounds

/ã/	tna <sub>4</sub> = guts, kna <sub>4</sub> = dare, pnua <sub>2</sub> = plate, snua <sub>1</sub> = hill, knua <sub>2</sub> , wna <sub>4</sub> = bowl, wna <sub>3</sub> = to change
/ɛ̃/	pnae <sub>1</sub> = to pry, snaeh <sub>1</sub> = to give birth, snaeh <sub>3</sub> = surname; chnae <sub>1</sub> = green, cnae <sub>4</sub> = well
/ĩ/	pni <sub>1</sub> = side, kni <sub>2</sub> = edge, tnee <sub>1</sub> = sweet, enee <sub>2</sub> = round, cni <sub>4</sub> = young, chni <sub>1</sub> = fresh

### Pseudo-Fricative, Glottal Stops and Velar Stops

None/Pseudo-Fricative	Glottal Stop /ʔ/	Velar Stop /k/
bah <sub>2</sub> = numb	bak <sub>3</sub> = meat	bark <sub>1</sub> = ink
pa <sub>2</sub> = to slap	pak <sub>3</sub> = hundred	park <sub>1</sub> = to tie
sa <sub>1</sub> = to seize	sak <sub>3</sub> = to push	sark <sub>1</sub> = to boil

## Morphemes

A syllable that carries a meaning is called a *morpheme*. For example, ang2 (red) is both a morpheme and a word; ang3mor2 (Westerner) are two morphemes (ang2, red, and mor2, hair) but one word.

*Free morpheme* can stand on its own as a word, for example ang2 (red).

*Bound morpheme* has to attach to other morpheme(s) to form a word, for example tan1 in ang3mor3tan1.

All morphemes are syllables, but not all syllables are morpheme. A word may comprise one morpheme (ang2) or several morphemes (ang3mor2, ang3mor3 tau3iu2).

## Intonation

Detailed lesson at <http://www.penang-traveltips.com/hokkien/intonation.htm>

Every morpheme in Penang Hokkien can be uttered in four tones which are numbered 1, 2, 3 and 4. There four tones correspond to the four tones in Mandarin.

pa1, pa2, pa3, pa4  
pan1, pan2, pan3, pan4  
pang1, pang2, pang3, pang4

Wah1 beh1 chye3 = I buy vegetables.

Wah1 beh3 chye3 = I sell vegetables.

Cim2 lok3 chooi4 chim3-chim1. = The crab goes deep into the water.

Cim3 lok3 chooi4 chim3-chim1. = Dip it deeply into the water.

Ee1 ti1 thau3 thnia1. = She is (in the midst of) eavesdropping.

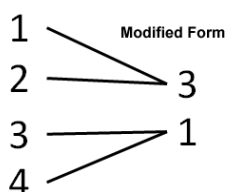
Ee1 ti1 thau2 thnia3. = She's having a headache.

## Tone Sandhi

Detailed lesson at <http://www.penang-traveltips.com/hokkien/tone-sandhi.htm>

When two or more morphemes are placed together, all morphemes except the last change their tone, from the basic to the modified form.

Basic Form



Morphemes change tone in compound nouns:

ang2 = red

ang3mor2 = red hair

ang3mor3tan1 = rambutan

ang3mor3tan3 cang2 = rambutan tree

ang3mor3tan3 cang3 kha1 = foot of the rambutan tree

Morphemes also change tones in sentences:

Wah4 = I

Wah1 boek3 = I want

Wah1 boek1 khee3 = I want to go

Wah1 boek1 khee1 co3 = I want to go to do

Wah1 boek1 khee1 co1 kang1 = I want to go to do work

Wah1 boek1 khee1 co1 kang1 liau4 = I want to go to work already

### Unsandiabile morpheme

In this romanization system, there is a small group of morpheme that do not change their tone, even when they are attached to other morphemes in compound nouns or placed in sentences. They are usually tone 3 morphemes. To help you identify them, they are listed in the dictionary with tone 33 rather than tone 3. For example, gor33 (five), tang33 (dark), ji33 (word), lau33 (old).

gor33 = five

gor33-cap1 = fifty

lau33 = old

lau33 lang2 = old man

When writing, it is optional to write the unsandiabile morpheme as gor33; you are free to write as gor3.

### Dictionary

Look up words in the free Penang Hokkien Online Dictionary:

<http://www.penang-traveltips.com/dictionary>

You can search in Penang Hokkien, English and Malay. Every search result includes audio, so you can hear how the words are pronounced in the citation form.

### Citation Form & Sandhi Forms of Words

Words are listed in the dictionary in the citation form. (For example, "fly" is the citation form of flies, flown, flew, etc.; "selidik" is the citation form of menyelidik, penyelidik, etc.)

That's the basic form, for example ang2, ang3mor2, ang3mor3tan1. This is the form before the word sandhis. All words sandhi their final syllable unless the final syllable is an unsandiabile morpheme. Note the underlined tones in the examples below:

ang2 (red) becomes ang3 sna1 (red shirt)

ang3mor2 (Westerner) becomes Ang3mor3 Tang3 Cek3 (Christmas)

ang3mor3tan1 (rambutan) becomes ang3mor3tan3 hnui2 (rambutan plantation)

However:

lau33 (old) remains lau33 peng3iu4 (old friend)

### Regular Forms & Emphatic Forms of Sentences

Regular: Wah1 ciak3 bak3, lu1 ciak3 chye3: I eat meat, you eat vegetables.

Emphatic: Wah4 ciak3 bak3, lu4 ciak3 chye3! I eat meat, you eat vegetables!

### Heterographs

This system uses heterographs (words of different meaning that sound the same, but are spelled differently) to ensure the written sentences are clear.

say4 = to wash

se3 = small

le1 boek1 say1 thau3keong1. = He wants to wash spoons.

le1 boek1 se1thau3keong1. = He wants a small spoon.

tu2 = cupboard

too1 = pig

Wah1-eh3 tu3knia3 uh3 see1-ki3 kha1. = My little cupboard has four legs.

Wah1-eh3 too3knia4 uh3 see1-ki3 kha1. = My piglet has four legs.

thnia1 = to listen

thniah1 = living room, hall

Ee1 ti1 thau3 thnia1. = She is (in the midst of) eavesdropping.

Ee1 ti1 thau3thniah1. = She's in the main hall.

### Pronouns

I = wah4 (sandhis to wah1)

you = lu4 (lu1)

he = ie1

she = ee1

it = i1

we = kita: wah1lang2, wang1 (slurred version), kami: lan4, lan4lang2

you = lu1lang2, luang1 (slurred version)

they = ie1lang2, iyang1 (male, general), ee1lang2, eyang1 (female), i1lang2 (animals, things)

### Question Words

what (apa) = ha1mik1

who (siapa) = cui33-cui33

where (mana) = ta1lok1

why (mengapa) = ha1mik1 su3, co1mik1 su3

when (bila) = ti3 si2

which (yang mana) = ta1lok1 cit3 leh2, tok1 cit3 leh2

Lu1 mia3 ha1mik1? What is your name?

Cui33-cui33 choay3 wah4? Who is looking for me?

Wah4-eh3 lui1 ti1 ta1lok1? Where is my money?

Ha1mik1 su3 lu4 boh3 lai2? Why didn't you come?

Ti3 si2 lu4 kho1 chaek3? When are you sitting for your exams?

Ta1lok1 cit3 leh2 si3 lu4-eh3 chia1? Which one is your car?

### Cardinal Numbers

1 = cit1	6 = lark1	11 = cap3-it1	20 = jee33-cap1	57 = gor33-cap3-chit3	139 = cit3-pak1-snar3-cap3-kau4
2 = nor33	7 = chit3	12 = cap3-jee33	21 = jee33-cap3-it3	61 = lark3-cap3-it3	251 = nor33-pak1-gor33-cap3-it3
3 = snar1	8 = pek3	13 = cap3-snar1	22 = jee33-cap3-jee33	75 = chit1-cap3-gor33	1000 = cit3-cheng1
4 = see3	9 = kau4	14 = cap3-see3	25 = jee33-cap3-gor3	100 = cit3-pak3	1,200 = cit3-cheng1, nor33-pak3
5 = gor33	10 = cap1	15 = cap3-gor33	30 = snar3-cap1	101 = pak1-it3	1200 = cheng3-jee33

### Ordinal Numbers

1st: it3	6th: lark1	the first: te3-it3	the sixth: te3-lark1
2nd: jee33	7th: chit3	the second: te3-jee33	the seventh: te3-chit3

3rd: snar1	8th: pek3	the third: te3-snar1	the eighth: te3-pek3
4th: see3	9th: kau4	the fourth: te3-see3	the ninth: te3-kau4
5th: gor33	10th: cap1	the fifth: te3-gor33	the tenth: te3-cap1

### Time

one o'clock: it1 tiam4	1:45 = it1 tiam4 kau1-leh3 ji33
two o'clock: jee33 tiam4	2:00 = jee33 tiam4
three o'clock: snar3 tiam4	2:10 = jee33 tiam4 nor33-leh3 ji33
eleven o'clock: cap3-it1 tiam4	2:30 = jee33 tiam1 pnua3
twelve o'clock: cap3-jee33 tiam4	4:50 = see1 tiam4 cap3-leh3 ji33
1:05 = it1 tiam4 cit3-leh3 ji33	5:25 = gor33 tiam4 gor33-leh3 ji33
1:10 = it1 tiam4 nor33-leh3 ji33	10:00 = cap3 tiam4
1:15 = it1 tiam4 snar3-leh3 ji33	11:55 = cap3-it1 tiam4 cap3-it1-leh3 ji33
1:30 = it1 tiam1 pnua3.	12:00 = cap3-jee33 tiam4
1:35 = it1 tiam4 chit1-leh3 ji33	12:30 = cap3-jee33 tiam1 pnua3

### Money

5 sen: gor33 lui1	RM1.00: cit3 khor1	RM3.50: snar3 khor3 pnua3
10 sen: cit3 puat1	RM1.20: khor3 jee33	RM11.00: cap3-it1 khor1
20 sen: nor33 puat1	RM1.25: khor1 jee33 gor33	RM11.15: cap3-it1 khor1 cap3-gor33
25 sen: jee33-cap3-gor33 lui1	RM1.50: khor3 pnua3	RM12.50: cap3-jee3 khor3 pnua1
50 sen: gor33 puat1	RM1.90: khor3 kau4	RM25.60: jee33-cap3-gor33 khor3 lark1

### Auxiliary Verbs

can (boleh, dapat): e33, e33sai4	cannot (tak boleh): be33, be33sai4, mm33thang1
want (mahu): ai3, boek3	don't want (tak mahu): mm33mai3, mai3
have (ada): uh3	don't have (tak ada): boh2

Ciau4 e33 poay1. Bird(s) can fly.

Wah3 e33sai1 lai2 boh2? Can (are allowed to) I come?

Wah1 ai1 ciak3 pnui3 liau4. I want to have my meal already.

Wah1 boek1 tnu14 liau4. I want to go home already.

le1 uh3 cit3-ciak1 niau1. He has a cat.

Wah1 be33 khoo3. I cannot sleep.

Lu1 be33sai1 jip1 lai2. You cannot (are not allowed to) come in.

Mm33thang3 thnia1 ie1-eh3 wa3. Don't listen to what he says.

Heh1-leh1 gin1na4 mm33mai1 ciak3 pnui3. The child does not want to eat.

Ee1 mai1 lai2. She doesn't want to come.

Wah1 boh3 lui1 liau4. I don't have money anymore.

### Classifiers (Penjodoh Bilangan)

-leh2: general classifier (buah)

-khien4, kheok3: classifier for people (orang)

-ki1, -tiau2: classifier for stick-like items (batang)

-liap1: classifier for lumped items (gugus, ketul, biji)

-keng1: classifier for houses and buildings

le1 beh4 cit1-leh3 tok1teng4 kah1 nor33-leh3 kau3ie4. He bought a table and two chairs.

Uh3 nor33-khien1 lang2 boek1 choay3 lu4. There are two men who want to see you.

Kui1-kheok1 lang2 tua1 cit1-keng3 chu3? How many people stay in this house?

le1 park1 heh1-leh1 gor33-ki3 cha2 yong3 cit3-tiau3 snua3. He tied the five sticks with a rope.

Cit3-liap3 nui3 kui1 lui1? How much for an egg?

## Prepositions (Postpositions)

at (di): ti1

le1 tua3 ti1 ta1lok1? (At) where does he stay? (Di manakah did tinggal?)

le1-eh3 mi3knia3 ti1 cit1-peng2. His thing is (at) here. (Bendanya di sini.)

front (depan): thau3ceng2

back (belakang): au3bin33

middle (tengah): teong3ng1

inside (di dalam): ti1 lai3bin33

outside (di luar): ti1 gua3bin33

Uh3 cit3-ciak1 gu2 ti1 heh1-leh1 chu3-eh3 thau3ceng2. There's a cow in front of the house.

Cui3cui3 knia3 ti1 lu4-eh3 au3bin33? Who is standing behind you?

Lu1 hien3tiok3 ha1mik1 ti1 teong3ng1? What do you see in the middle?

Wah1-eh3 Pa3 Pa1 ti1 lai3bin33 chu3. My father is inside the house.

Lu1 co1 ha1mik1 ti1 gua3bin33? What are you doing outside?

## Conjunctions

and: kah1 (dan)

with: ka1 (dengan)

because: eng3goay3 (kerana, sebab)

that: kong4 (bahawa)

Jack kah1 Jill khee1 paek1 snua1. Jack and Jill went to climb a hill.

Jack khee1 paek1 snua1 ka1 Jill. Jack went to climb a hill with Jill.

le1 boh3 ti3 eng3goay3 ie1 khee1 paek1 snua1. He's not in because he went to climb a hill.

le1 kong4 kong4 ie1 khee1 paek1 snua1. He says that he is going to climb a hill.

## Particles

For full list of particles, go to <http://www.penang-traveltips.com/hokkien/particles.htm>

eh2: possessive particle; that (punya, yang)

liau4: already (sudah)

le1-eh3 chia1 cin3 tua3 teng4. His car is very big.

Heh1-leh1 lau33lang2-eh3 tong3kat3 phang1kni3: The old man's walking stick is lost.

Heh1-leh1 chia1-eh3 sek3 chien4 khee3 liau4. The colour of the car has faded.

Heh1-leh1 lang2 kong1 wa3 ka1 wah4 eh2 si3 cit3-khien1 sin3snaeh1.

The man who talked to me is a teacher. (Orang yang bercakap dengan saya seorang guru.)

le1 chio3 wah4 eh2. He laughed at me. (He's the one who laughed at me.)

Boh3 lui1 eh3 lang2 be33sai1 gau3 keng4. People who are poor cannot be choosy.

Wah1 ciak3 pa4 liau4: I have eaten already. (Saya sudah makan.)

le1lang2 lai2 liau4. They have come (already). (Mereka sudah datang.)

## Conversational Phrases for Tourists

1. Welcome to Penang: Huan3ging2 lai3 Penang (or Pin3 Sniah2, or Pi3nang3 Su3)
2. Thank you: Kam1siah3
3. Where do you come from? Lu4 ta1lok1 lai2 eh2?
4. I come from Singapore: Wah4 Sing3ka1po1 lai2 eh2.
5. How long do you come here? Lu4 lai2 cor3 ku4?
6. I come for 4 days. Wah1 lai2 see1 jit1.
7. When do you go home? Ti3 si2 lu1 tnui4?
8. I go home tomorrow. Wah1 ma1cai3 tnui4.
9. What time did you arrive? Lu1 kui1 tiam4 kau3?
10. I arrived at 10:00 pm. Wah4 cap3 tiam4 kau3.
11. How did you come? Lu1 ceh3 ha1mik1 lai2?
11. I come by plane/bus/train/ship. Wah1 ceh3 poay3ki1/bas1/hoay1chia1/cun2 lai2
12. Where do you stay in Penang? Ti1 Penang lu1 tua3 ta1lok1?
13. I stay at E & O Hotel. Wah1 tua1 ti1 E & O Hotel.
14. Do you like Penang? Yes/No. Lu1 su3ka3 Penang boh2? Su3ka3/Boh3 su3ka3.
15. Is Penang nice? Yes/No. Penang song4 boh2? Uh3/Boh2.
16. What is this called? Cit1-leh1 kio3 co1 ha1mik1?
17. This is called durian, rambutan, ... Cit1-leh1 kio3 co1 du3rian2, ang3mor3tan1, ...
18. How much is it? Kui1 lui1?
19. RM10 per kilo. Cap3 khor1 cit3-kilo.
20. Oh, it's too expensive. Wah3, thai1 kui3!
21. Give me one kilo. Hor3 wah4 cit3-kilo.
22. Thank you very much. Kam1siah3 ce3-ce3.
23. Come again. Au3koay3 kokh1 lai2.