

**17 Minute Languages:
Learn Bosnian Grammar**



The Bosnian alphabet

Bosnian is written in the **Latin alphabet**.

(If you want to start learning Bosnian later on, you will encounter a new script as Bosnian is also written in Cyrillic script.)

Before we set out to learn the Bosnian alphabet, let's sum up the basics:

Don't look for these letters!

First of all: The Bosnian alphabet leaves out some letters that the English alphabet uses. It's forlorn hope to search for **q, w, x** or **y**.

Discover new letters!

Second of all: You will discover new letters and you have to become acquainted to their pronunciation.

Your new letters are: **Č (č), Ć (ć), Đ (đ), Š (š) and Ž (ž)**.

Two letters make one!

In the Bosnian alphabet, we encounter combinations of two letters that are perceived as one letter: **Dž (dž), Lj (lj) and Nj (nj)**.

But now it's time to dive right in – and learn the Bosnian alphabet!

The following table gives you a perfect overview. We have highlighted the letters that are new to you to help you a little bit in learning.

The Bosnian alphabet		
Letter	Phonetic transcription	Example for English equivalent
A, a	[a]	rather
B, b	[b]	bed
C, c	[ts]	cats
Č, č	[tʃ]	cheese
Ć, ć	[tʃ]	chicken
D, d	[d]	dog
Dž, dž	[dʒ]	jungle
Đ, đ	[dʒ]	ginger
E, e	[ɛ]	bed
F, f	[f]	fish
G, g	[g]	goat
H, h	[x]	Loch Ness (UK pronunciation)
I, i	[ɪ]	submarine
J, j	[j]	like “y” in English: yes, yellow
K, k	[k]	king
L, l	[l]	lunch
Lj, lj	[lj]	like “ll” in English: billionaire
M, m	[m]	mouse

N, n	[n]	north
Nj, nj	[nj]	like “ny”/”ni” in English: Grand Canyon, onion
O, o	[o]	knot
P, p	[p]	pepper
R, r	[r]	trilled/rolled r – like “r” in Scottish or Irish variety
S, s	[s]	screw
Š, š	[ʃ]	like “sh” in English: shell, shake
T, t	[t]	tea
U, u	[ʊ]	commute
V, v	[v]	vacation
Z, z	[z]	zebra
Ž, ž	[ʒ]	like “s” in: measure

Bosnian Nouns

You should know first that there is no article in Bosnian.
 Every noun in Bosnian has its own grammatical gender though – there are male (m), female (f) and neuter (n) nouns.
 The last letter of a noun indicates the grammatical gender of the noun.

For example:

prijatelj (m) – friend

žena (f) – woman

more (n) – sea

Rules of thumb:

How will I recognize a Bosnian noun's gender?

- **Masculine** nouns often end in a **consonant**.

Ex.:

poljubac (m) – kiss

momak (m) – man

- **Feminine** nouns usually end in **-a**.

Ex.:

knjiga (f) – book

žena (f) – woman

- **Neuter** nouns normally end in **-e** or **-o**.

Ex.:

dijete (n) – child

meso (n) – meat

*Please note:

There are numerous exceptions to the above mentioned rules.

You will be on the safe side if you memorise the Bosnian noun's gender from the very beginning of your learning process.

Building the plural of Bosnian nouns

The following table shows you the general rules for building the plural forms of Bosnian nouns:

How to build the plural of Bosnian nouns:		
	Singular	Plural
masculine	Consonant student (student)	-i studenti (students)
feminine	-a karta (card/menu)	-e karte (cards/menus)
neuter	-e/-o pivo (beer)	-a piva (beers)

Nonetheless ...

You have to take a closer look at some exceptions:

Exceptions in building the plural form of masculine Bosnian nouns:

- (1) Please look out for masculine nouns ending in g, h or k: These consonants at the end of the word change when adding an -i for building the plural.
g → zi
For example:
suprug – supruzi
(husband – husbands)
h → si
For example:
tepih – tepisi
(carpet – carpets)
k → ci
For example:
putnik – putnici
(passenger – passengers)
- (2) Some male nouns form their plural with the ending: **-ovi**.
For example:
grad – gradovi
(city – cities)
- (3) Some nouns ending on a soft consonant form their plural with the ending: **-evi**.
For example:
čaj – čajevi
(tea – teas)

Exceptions in building the plural form of feminine Bosnian nouns:

As a rule we already know that most feminine Bosnian nouns end in **-a**. However, if you encounter a feminine noun ending in a consonant, you can treat it like a masculine noun and add an **-i** for building the plural.

For example:

bolest – bolesti

(disease – diseases)

stvar – stvari

(thing – things)

Exceptions in building the plural form of neuter Bosnian nouns:

Some neuter Bosnian nouns consisting of two syllables, form their plural with **-na**.

For example:

ime – imena

(name – names)

7 cases of the Bosnian language:

If we want to master Bosnian, we have to deal with **seven** (that's right ... seven ...) **cases**.

Below we will give you an overview over those seven cases and their functions within a Bosnian sentence.

1st case: Nominative

The subject of every Bosnian sentence is in the nominative case.

If you are asking for the subject, you use the interrogative pronouns *Tko?* (who? – m/f) / *Što?* (what? – n).

For example:

Knjiga je čitana od studenta.

(The book is read by the student.)

2nd case: Genitive

The genitive in Bosnian describes relations – like ownership, temporal relations or spatial distances.

We also use the genitive in Bosnian when we talk about quantity and numbers of persons or things.

The genitive is used to describe the origin of persons or things.

Some Bosnian prepositions demand to be combined together with a genitive form. Also certain expressions of time only want to be seen and heard together with the genitive.

For example:

- bez (without)
- do (until)
- ispod (underneath)
- blizu (near to)
- kraj (next to)
- umjesto (instead of)
- zbog (because of)

If you are asking for a genitive form in a Bosnian sentence, you use the interrogative pronouns *Koga?* (whose? – m/f) or *Čega?* (whose? – n).

For example:

To je Adnanovo auto.

(This is Adnan's car. / This is the car of Adnan.)

Ona živi odvojeno od porodice.

(She lives separated from her family.)

3rd case: Dative

The function of the dative in a Bosnian sentence is to mark the indirect object. If you analyse a Bosnian sentence and you want find out where the dative form is located, you ask:

Komu? (whom?, when the noun in the dative is animated)

Čemu? (whom?, when the noun in the dative form is inanimated)

Some Bosnian verbs are always followed by the noun in the dative, e.g.:

- dati (to give)
- darovati (to gift)
- reći (to say)
- kupiti (to buy)
- napisati (to write down)
- poslati (to send)
- požaliti se (to regret)

Prepositions with dative:

- ka (to)
- nasuprot (in opposition to)
- prema (compared to)
- unatoč (in spite of)

You also need to get acquainted with Bosnian prepositions that ask for the usage of the dative:

- k/ ka (in direction to)
- nadomak (near to)
- nasuprot (opposite)
- prema (to sth./so.)
- protiv (against)
- uprkos (nevertheless)

For example:

Petar darova svojoj prijateljici Ani buket cveća.
(Petar gives flowers to his friend Ana.)

4th case: Accusative

The function of the accusative in a Bosnian sentence is to mark the direct object. If you are searching for the accusative in a Bosnian sentence, you ask:

Koga? (Who?)

Čega? (What?)

The accusative is often used together with verbs that signalize a movement, such as:

- (to throw)
- (to bring)
- (to hurry)
- voziti se (to drive)

Some Bosnian prepositions call for the use of the accusative, e.g.:

- kroz, (through)
- među, (in between)
- na, (on top of)
- nad, (above)
- niz, (out of)
- o, (of)
- po, (over sth.)
- pod, (under sth.)
- pred, (in front of)
- u, (in)
- za (for sth./so.)

For example:

Petar darova svojoj prijateljici Ani buket cveća.
(Petar gives flowers to his friend Ana.)

5th case: Locative

A Bosnian noun with a locative ending describes the whereabouts or the location of a person or an object.

If you try to track down a noun in the locative in a Bosnian sentence, you ask:

Gdje? (where?)

O čemu (where of?)

And please remember:

A noun in the locative always comes with a preposition!

It can come with the following:

- na, (on)
- o, (of)
- po, (over sth.)
- u pri (at)

For example:

Anino cveće stoji na stolu.

(Ana's flowers are on the table.)

6th case: Instrumental

With the instrumental case Bosnian describes the means or the device with what an action is executed.

With the help of these question words, you can identify Bosnian nouns with instrumental endings:

S kim? (with whom?)

S čime? (with what?)

Please, try to get acquainted with this new case ending.

The English language doesn't know a case like this.

These prepositions stand together with instrumental case endings:

- među (in between)
- nad (a) (above)
- pod (a) (under sth.)
- pred (in front of)
- s(a) (with)
- za (for sth. /so.)

For example:

Ana reže cveće nožem.

(Ana cuts the flowers with a knife.)

7th case: Vocative

We find vocative case endings in Bosnian whenever we want to address another person directly.

For example:

Ana, doneo sam ti cveće.

(Ana, I brought you flowers.)

To build correct sentences in Bosnian, you have to learn the case endings by heart.

To help you in learning all the case endings, we want to provide you with a system:

Bosnian nouns can be grouped in three types of declension: the “a declension”, the “e declension” and the “i declension”.

The following chapter will show you tables and tell you more about this system.

Three types of declension in Bosnian

1. a declension:

This group contains all masculine (m) and neuter (n) nouns which take the -a ending in the genitive singular.

The following table provides you with a synopsis:

Synopsis: Case endings of -a declension		
	Singular	Plural
Nom.	m: consonant / n: -e,-o	m: -i / n: -a
Gen.	-a	m: -a/ n: -i
Dat. / Loc.	-u	-ima
Acc.	m: consonant / -a / n: -e,-o	m: -e / n: -a
Instr.	-om,-em	-ima
Voc.	m: -u,-o / n: -e,-o	m: -i / n: -a

2. e declension

All feminine nouns ending in -e in the genitive singular, follow this declension pattern.

The following table provides you with a synopsis:

Synopsis: Case endings of -e declension		
	Singular	Plural
Nom.	-a	-e
Gen.	-e	-a
Dat. / Loc.	-i	-ama
Acc.	-u	-e
Instr.	-om	-ama
Voc.	-o	-e

3. i declension

All female nouns end in -i in the genitive singular.

Synopsis: Case endings of -i declension		
	Singular	Plural
Nom. / Acc.	consonant	-i
Gen. / Voc.	-i	-i
Dat. / Loc.	-i	-ima
Instr.	-i	-ima

Bosnian adjectives

Bosnian adjectives adapt to the noun they refer to. Doing this, they take the same gender (masculine, feminine or neuter), the same number (singular or plural) and the same case as the noun they refer to.

How can you recognise the grammatical gender of Bosnian adjectives?

- Masculine adjectives end in a consonant or -i.
For example:
velik strah (m)
(great fear)
- Feminine adjectives end in -a.
For example:
velika nada (f)
(great hope)
- Neuter adjectives end in -o.
For example:
veliko selo (n)
(large village)

There are two types of Bosnian adjectives:

- descriptive adjectives
- relative adjectives

What's good to know about descriptive adjectives in Bosnian?

The function of descriptive adjectives in Bosnian is to name the qualities and characteristics of animate and inanimate beings.

Descriptive adjectives in Bosnian are declined and can be compared.

- Firstly there are **definite** descriptive adjectives. They have the same case endings as Bosnian possessive pronouns. You find the definite form of a descriptive adjective if it answers to the following question:
Koji? (Which (one)?)
For example:
Koji je tvoj šal? Moj šal je onaj **zeleni**.
(Which scarf is yours? My scarf is the **green** one.)
- Secondly we have to distinguish **indefinite** descriptive adjectives. They have the same case endings as the Bosnian nouns. You find the indefinite form of a descriptive adjective if it answers to the question:
Kakav?“ (What (kind of)?)
For example:
Kakav je Sendvič? Sendvič je **ukusan**.
(What's the sandwich like? The sandwich is **delicious**.)

Regarding comparison:

When it comes to comparison of adjectives, the distinction of these two types plays no role any more. For both types of descriptive adjectives the same rules apply for building the comparative forms.

Rules for comparison of Bosnian descriptive adjectives:

Comparative degree:

word stem of descriptive adjective + -iji (m); -ija (f); -ije (n)

For example:

star (old → elder):

m: →stariji

f: →starija

n: →starije

hladan (cold → colder):

m: →_hladniji

f: → hladnija

n: → hladnije

Superlative degree:

naj + comparative degree

For example:

star (old → eldest):

m: →stariji (elder) → najstariji (eldest)

f: →starija (elder) → najstarija (eldest)

n: → starije (elder) → najstarije (eldest)

Commonly used adjectives with irregular comparison:

good:

dobar → bolji → najbolji

bad:

loš → gori → najgori

big, tall:

velik → veći → najveći

small, short:

malı → manji → najmanji

What's good to know about relative adjectives in Bosnian?

Let's take a closer look at the second type of adjectives in Bosnian, the relative adjectives.

Relative adjectives describe the relations between animate/inanimate beings. The English language would tend to use several nouns to describe relations like this – but Bosnian is handling this job with the help of adjectives.

Relative adjectives can be derived from nouns by adding an ending (e.g.: -ski; -nji).

For example:

morski vazduh

(sea air)

gradski autobus

(city bus)

Kakav je bio tvoj studentski život?

(What was your student life like?)

The related adjectives occur only in the certain form, are declined, but they cannot be put in forms of comparison.

A subcategory of relative adjectives are possessive adjectives:

Possessive adjectives are formed from nouns.

There are male, female and substantive forms.

These have to be declined.

For example:

Harunova sestra

(Harun's sister)

Almina kuća

(Almina's house)

Semirov broj mobitela

(Semir's phone number)

Bosnian Adverbs

This chapter provides some good news for you. Bosnian adverbs are not distinguished by gender – they always and only have one form.
And: Bosnian adverbs are not declined.

The comparison of Bosnian adverbs follows the same rules as Bosnian adjectives.

For example:
Adrian **dobro** kuva.
(Adrian cooks well.)

Marijan kuva **bolje**.
(Marijan cooks better.)

Moj otac kuva **najbolje**.
(My dad cooks best.)

Bosnian verbs

The **infinitive** ending of all Bosnian verbs is either -ći or -ti. This is how you will encounter them when you look something up in your dictionary.

For example:
biti (to be)
pitati (to ask)

Finding the **infinitive stem** of a verb:

suffix on -ti:
delete this suffix to get the infinitive stem

ending on -sti / -ći:
infinitive stem form = present stem form

You need the infinitive stem form to build the past and the conditional tense. The four verb classes are named: a-/e-/je-/i-class.

Finding the present stem of Bosnian verbs:

1. pers. sentence in the present tense – present tense

The present tense form is needed to form the remaining times.

For Example:
Present tense: oni su (they are) → Past tense: oni su bili (they have been)

What is the 'aspect' of a Bosnian verb?

Let's tackle a brand new grammatical concept!
Maybe you already heard of this or read about it: Bosnian verbs also come with an 'aspect'.

Understanding what the grammatical concept of the aspect is, may decide over your success in learning Bosnian.
(So, maybe you'd like to read more about this. We would like to refer you to the corresponding entry in Wikipedia for further studying.)

The term 'aspect' refers to the **line of sight** that the narrator of a sentence has on the events.

The aspect of a verb helps to describe **how** (the manner/ the modality) the events take place.

Bosnian verbs distinguish a **imperfective** and a **perfective** aspect.
The following table shows the differences and will help you to pick the correct aspect type.

Synopsis: Verbal aspect

Imperfective verbal aspect:	Perfective verbal aspect:
keyword: time and time again ...	keyword: now!
focus is on the progression of the action	focus is on the result of the action
happens time and time again / recurring action	happens only one time
Marko prodaje automobile. (Marko sells cars.)	Marko je brzo prodao svoj stari auto (Marko quickly sold his old car.)

Present tense of the important verb "biti" (to be):

Present tense of the verb biti (to be)	
I am	ja sam
you are	ti si
he, she, it is	o on, ona, ono je
we are	mi smo
you are	vi ste
they are	oni, one, ona su

Negation of "biti" (present tense)	
I am not	ja nisam
you are not	ti nisi
he, she, it is not	on, ona, ono nije
we are not	mi nismo
you are not	vi niste
they are not	oni, one, ona nisu

Present tense of the verb „htjeti“:

ja ću – I will
 ti ćeš – you will
 on, ona, ono će – he/she/it will
 mi ćemo – we will
 vi ćete – you will (plural or formal)
 oni će – you will (plural)
 hoće – they will

Building the perfect participle:

rule of thumb:
 infinitive stem form + ending

Endings for the past participle:

m: -o (sg.) -li (pl.)
 f: -la (sg.) -le (pl.)
 n: -lo (sg.) -la (pl.)

Building the past tense:

rule of thumb:
 (negated) present tense of the verb „biti“ + past participle

For example:

m: ja sam išao
 f: ja sam išla
 (I went)

m: ja nisam išao
 f: ja nisam išla
 (I did not go)

Past tense of the verb „biti“:

- ja sam bio (m) / bila (f)
(I have been)
- ti si bio (m) / bila (f)
(you have been)
- on(a) je bio (m) / bila (f)
(he / she has been)
- mi smo bili/bile
(we have been)
- vi ste bili/bile
(you have been)
- oni su bili/bile
(they have been)

Aorist tense of the verb “biti” (to be):

This chapter presents you another “new” tense that the Bosnian language features: the **aorist**.

It's important to know that **only perfective verbs** are able to build an aorist form. (Maybe you'd like to revise the chapter on the [aspect](#) in this context.)

As this verb form is only used in written Bosnian, we will leave it at presenting you the aorist form of the verb “biti” (to be) – as you will later need these to build the [conditional](#).

If you translate the Bosnian aorist into English, we advise you to use the imperfect.

Aorist tense of the verb “biti” (to be):

This chapter presents you the aorist forms of the verb “biti” (to be). You need these to build the [conditional](#).

bih – I was
bi – you were
bi – he was
bismo – we were
biste – you were
biše – they were



Building the past perfect in Bosnian:

If you really love reading Bosnian novels, you will encounter the past perfect. Today, this verb form is mostly vanished from spoken language and only found in literature.

So, you don't have to be actively able to build the tense – it's enough to recognise it when you read it in a text.

General rule for building the past perfect:

past tense of “biti” + past participle

For example:

ja sam bio išao (m) / ja sam bila išla (f)

(I had gone)

*If you want to look up the corresponding chapters, please visit the chapter on the [past tense form of “biti”](#) and the rules and explanations on building the [past participle](#) of Bosnian verbs.

Building the future tense in Bosnian:

Now, let's take a look into the future and learn to express everything we wish for in the future tense.

General rule for building the Bosnian future tense:

present tense of “htjeti” + infinitive of the verb

For example:

ja ću učiti

(I'm going to study)

Building the conditional:

General rule for building the conditional:

aorist form of “biti” + past participle

For example:

ja bih plakao (m) / plakala (f)

(I would cry)



Building the passive participle

You will need this verb form to build (or recognize) the passive voice in Bosnian.

General rule for building the passive participle:

infinitive stem + ending

m: sg.: -n / pl.: -ni
f: sg.: -na / pl.: -ne
n: sg.: -no / pl.: -na

For example:

Lijepo je biti **voljen**.
(It's nice to be loved.)

What you should know about pronouns in Bosnian:

Bosnian personal pronouns

Please keep in mind that there is a profound difference between English and Bosnian when it comes to using personal pronouns:
Personal pronouns are much less frequently used in Bosnian.

The average Bosnian sentence doesn't usually mention the personal pronouns, because the verb form already shows who is meant.

But, whenever the pronoun is to be emphasised, the personal pronoun is mentioned.

Synopsis: Bosnian personal pronouns (nominative form)

Singular:

ja (I)
ti (you)
on (he)
ona (she)
ono (it)

Plural:

mi (we)
vi, Vi (you – informal, you – formal)
oni (they – m)
one (they – f)
ona (they – n)

Personal pronouns are declined and there are two types: **stressed** and **unstressed**.

The stressed, long form can be found at the beginning of a sentence and after prepositions like a / i / ni.

For example:

Njemu je pomogao učitelj, meni nije.
(The teacher helped **him** – not **me**.)

The unstressed, short forms count as [clitics](#).

For example:

Iznenadila ih je.
(She surprised **her**.)

Bosnian possessive pronouns:

Just like English, Bosnian uses **possessive pronouns** to mark possession.

Bosnian possessive pronouns behave like adjectives – they adjust to the word they refer to in gender, number and case ending.

For example:

moj tata (my father)
moja kuća (my house)
moje selo (my village)

The demonstrative pronouns in Bosnian:

These pronouns have the task to show something or to refer to something. Demonstrative pronouns are declined according to the pattern of the short form of adjectives.

Overview:

m:	ovaj – this one	taj – this one	onaj – this one
f:	ova – this one	ta – this one	ona – this one
n:	ovo – that one	to – that one	ono – that one

Interrogative pronouns in Bosnian:

Most interrogative pronouns in Bosnian have to be declined.

We will show you an overview of the most common interrogative pronouns in nominative form as a starting point for further studying.

Tko? – Who?

Šta? – What?

Kakav? – What kind?

Kad?, Kada? – When?

Zašto? – Why?

Gdje? – Where?

Koliko? – How much?

Building Bosnian sentences

Basic structure of Bosnian sentences:

Let's take a look at the basic structure behind Bosnian sentences:

Subject (N) – predicate – indirect object (D) – direct object (A).

A subject (in the nominative form) is followed by the verb/ the predicate. After this we find a indirect object (in the dative form) and last but not least the direct object (with an accusative case ending).

For example:

Ana (subject) piše (predicate) svome ocu (indirect object) pismo (direct object).

(Ana writes a letter to her father.)

Negation in Bosnian sentences:

To negate a Bosnian sentence, we use the tiny word “ne”. You place “ne” in front of the verb.

For example:

Mobitel **ne** radi.

(The mobile does **not** work.)

If a Bosnian sentence contains an auxiliary verb (e.g.: biti – to be), “ne” merges with the auxiliary verb.

For example:

Zlatko **nema** novca.

(Zlatko has no money. / Zlatko does not have money.)

The Clitic (support words) in Bosnian:

The clitics are monosyllabic “supporting words” that have a fixed place in the sentence structure.

The correct placement of clitics is the true mastery of the Bosnian language.

Clitics always appear in the following order:

1. first comes the question particles “li”
2. followed by the verbal particles
sam, si, je, smo, ste, su
(short for “biti” in the present tense)
ću, ćeš, će, ćemo, ćete
(short for “htjeti”)
bih, bi, bismo, biste
(aorist forms of “biti”)
3. in third place are the pronominal particles
(first in the dative, then in the accusative)
4. in the fourth place follows the unstressed form of the reflexive pronoun „se“

For example:

Dobro **će** (2) **ti** (3) stajati.

(That will look good on you.)

Rado **bih** (2) **ti** (3/Dat.) **ga** (3/Acc.) uskoro predstavila.

(I would like to introduce him to you soon.)

Bosnian numbers

1 – 20			
nula	0		
jedan	1	jedanaest	11
dva	2	dvanaest	12
tri	3	trinaest	13
četiri	4	čet <u>r</u> naest	14
pet	5	petnaest	15
šest	6	šes <u>n</u> aest	16
sedam	7	sedamnaest	17
osam	8	osamnaest	18
devet	9	devetnaest	19
deset	10	dvadeset	20

21 – 1.500	
dvadeset (i) jedan	21
dvadeset (i) dva	22
trideset	23
trideset jedan	24
trideset dva	30
četrdeset	31
četrdeset jedan	32
četrdeset dva	40
pedeset	500
šezdeset	60
sedamdeset	70
osamdeset	80
devedeset	90
sto	100
tisuća	150
dvadeset (i) jedan	200
dvadeset (i) dva	500
trideset	1.000
trideset jedan	1.500

Days of the week	
Days of the week	
ponedjeljak	Monday
utorak	Tuesday
srijda	Wednesday
četvrtak	Thursday
petak	Friday
subota	Saturday
nedjelja	Sunday

For example:

U subotu idem u bioskop.

(On Saturday, I will go to the cinema.)

Subotom i nedjeljom ne moramo raditi.

(We don't have to work on Saturdays and Sundays.)

And here's a toast to you for your great job in learning Bosnian grammar!

Notes:

