



# Sanskrit Pronunciation Guide for Common Yoga Terms

Sanskrit, the ancient language of yoga, offers a profound connection to the deeper dimensions of yoga practice. While its sounds may seem challenging at first, learning correct pronunciation enhances your understanding of yoga philosophy and enriches your practice experience. This guide provides you with essential tools for pronouncing common yoga terms with confidence and accuracy.

This resource is designed to support your progressive learning of Sanskrit pronunciation. Begin by familiarizing yourself with the basic pronunciation rules and diacritical marks explained in the following sections. These fundamentals will serve as building blocks for understanding the more specific term pronunciations provided later in the guide. As you encounter new terms in your practice or study, refer back to these principles to help you approach them with understanding.

Work with this guide gradually, perhaps focusing on a few terms each week. Practice speaking the sounds aloud, as Sanskrit is meant to be an oral tradition. Remember that learning Sanskrit pronunciation is itself a form of practice – approach it with patience and dedication, just as you would approach your asana practice.

## Contents

Basic Sanskrit Pronunciation Rules.....	2
Guide to Diacritical Marks .....	2
Pronunciation Key .....	3
Common Yoga Terms Guide.....	4
Common Pose Names .....	5
Philosophical Terms .....	7
Common Anatomical Terms.....	8
Common Action Words.....	9
Examples of term break-down.....	10



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## Basic Sanskrit Pronunciation Rules

Sanskrit follows precise rules of sound production, making it remarkably consistent once you understand its basic principles. Each Sanskrit sound has a specific point of origination in the mouth and a particular way of being produced. The language operates on several key principles:

Every letter has one and only one sound, unlike English where letters can have multiple sounds. For example, 'a' in Sanskrit is always pronounced as in 'along,' never as in 'ate.' Consonants are generally pronounced similarly to their English counterparts, but with greater precision and without the variations found in English.

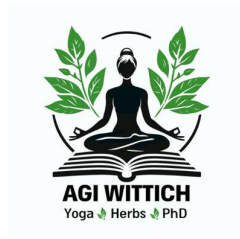
The length of vowels carries meaning in Sanskrit. Short vowels are held for one count, while long vowels (marked with a line above them) are held for two counts. This precise timing creates the language's characteristic rhythm and clarity.

## Guide to Diacritical Marks

Diacritical marks in Sanskrit texts serve as a precise notation system for pronunciation. These marks are not decorative but provide essential information about how to produce each sound correctly. The most common marks you'll encounter include:

The macron (ā, ī, ū) indicates a long vowel sound that should be held for two counts. For example, 'ā' is pronounced as in 'father,' held for twice as long as a short 'a.'

The dot under a letter (ṁ, ṇ, ṣ) indicates various forms of nasalization or modification of the basic sound. For example, ṁ represents a pure nasal sound, while ṇ indicates a retroflex 'n' produced with the tongue curled back.



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## Pronunciation Key

### Consonants

k (क) - like 'k' in 'kitchen'  
g (ग) - like 'g' in 'go'  
ch (च) - like 'ch' in 'chair'  
t (त) - like 't' in 'top'  
d (द) - like 'd' in 'dog'  
n (न) - like 'n' in 'no'  
p (प) - like 'p' in 'pat'  
b (ब) - like 'b' in 'bat'  
m (म) - like 'm' in 'mother'  
y (य) - like 'y' in 'yes'  
r (र) - like 'r' in 'run'  
l (ल) - like 'l' in 'light'  
v (व) - like 'v' in 'voice'  
s (स) - like 's' in 'sun'  
h (ह) - like 'h' in 'hot'

### Vowels

a (अ) - like 'u' in 'but'  
i (इ) - like 'i' in 'pin'  
u (उ) - like 'u' in 'put'  
ā (आ) - like 'a' in 'father'  
ī (ई) - like 'ee' in 'feet'  
ū (ऊ) - like 'oo' in 'boot'  
e (ए) - like 'ay' in 'way'  
o (औ) - like 'o' in 'go'



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## Common Yoga Terms Guide

While Sanskrit pronunciation may initially seem challenging, learning to articulate these terms correctly deepens our connection to the tradition and enhances our ability to share yoga knowledge accurately. Here are three fundamental terms—Yoga, Āsana, and Prāṇāyāma—exploring their pronunciation, common mistakes, and component meanings in detail. These examples establish patterns that will help you approach the pronunciation of additional Sanskrit terms, which are listed with clear pronunciation guides in the following sections.

### Yoga (योग)

#### Pronunciation

YO-ga

#### Break down

Equal emphasis on first two  
syllables

#### Common mistake

YOH-guh

### Āsana (आसन)

#### Pronunciation

AH-sa-na

#### Break down

Equal emphasis on first two  
syllables

#### Common mistake

uh-SAH-nuh

### Prāṇāyāma (प्राणायाम)

#### Pronunciation

PRAH-nah-YAH-ma

#### Break down

PRAH-na + AH-ya-ma

#### Common mistake

pra-nay-YAH-ma



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## Common Pose Names

Here is a curated selection of essential Sanskrit terminology commonly used in yoga practice and teaching. The collection is organized into four key categories:

1. Pose names (āsanas), which illustrate how Sanskrit describes the form and character of each posture
2. Philosophical terms, which provide insight into yoga's deeper principles and concepts
3. Anatomical terms, which identify different parts of the body with precision
4. Action words, which describe movements and alignments in practice.

While this compilation represents frequently used terms in modern yoga classes, it is important to note that it represents only a portion of yoga's rich Sanskrit vocabulary. These selected terms serve as a foundation for understanding and using Sanskrit in your practice, chosen for their relevance to contemporary yoga teaching while honoring the depth of the traditional language. Each term is presented with clear pronunciation guidance to support accurate verbal usage and deeper understanding of yoga's linguistic heritage.

### Standing Poses

Tāḍāsana (ताडासन) - TAH-dah-sa-na

Virabhadraśana (वीरभद्रासन) - VEE-ra-bha-DRAH-sa-na

Trikoṇāsana (त्रिकोणासन) - tri-ko-NAH-sa-na

Pārśvakoṇāsana (पार्श्वकोणासन) - PARSH-va-ko-NAH-sa-na (Side Angle Pose)

Ardha Chandrāsana (अर्धचन्द्रासन) - AR-dha chan-DRAH-sa-na (Half Moon Pose)

Utthita Hasta Pādāṅguṣṭhāsana (उत्थितहस्तपादाङ्गुष्ठासन) - UT-thi-ta HAS-ta pa-dan-gush-TAHS-ana



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### Seated Poses

Dandāsana (दण्डासन) - dan-DAH-sa-na

Baddhakoṇāsana (बद्धकोणासन) - bud-dha-ko-NAH-sa-na

Padmāsana (पद्मासन) - pad-MAH-sa-na

Virāsana (वीरासन) - VEE-rah-sa-na (Hero Pose)

Svastikāsana (स्वस्तिकासन) - svas-ti-KAH-sa-na (Auspicious Pose)

Siddhāsana (सिद्धासन) - sid-DHAHS-ana (Accomplished Pose)

### Forward Extensions

Paśchimottānāsana (पश्चिमोत्तानासन) - pash-chi-mo-tan-AHS-ana

Jānu Śīrṣāsana (जानुशीर्षासन) - JAH-nu sheer-SHAHS-ana

Upavishta Koṇāsana (उपविष्टकोणासन) - u-pa-VISH-ta ko-NAHS-ana

Marichyāsana (मरीच्यासन) - ma-ree-CHYAHS-ana

### Twists

Bharadvājāsana (भरद्वाजासन) - ba-rad-va-JAHS-ana

Ardha Matsyendrāsana (अर्धमत्स्येन्द्रासन) - AR-dha mat-syen-DRAHS-ana

Parivṛtta Trikoṇāsana (परिवृत्तत्रिकोणासन) - pa-ri-VRIT-ta tri-ko-NAHS-ana

### Inversions

Śīrṣāsana (शीर्षासन) - sheer-SHAHS-ana (Headstand)

Sarvāṅgāsana (सर्वाङ्गासन) - sar-van-GAHS-ana (Shoulderstand)

Halāsana (हलासन) - ha-LAHS-ana (Plow Pose)

Pinchā Mayūrāsana (पिञ्चमयूरासन) - pin-cha ma-yu-RAHS-ana (Feathered Peacock)



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### Philosophical Terms

Ahiṃsā (अहिंसा) - a-HIM-sah (Non-violence)

Satya (सत्य) - SAT-ya (Truthfulness)

Asteya (अस्तेय) - a-STAY-ya (Non-stealing)

Brahmacharya (ब्रह्मचर्य) - brah-ma-CHAR-ya (Right use of energy)

Aparigraha (अपरिग्रह) - a-pa-ri-GRA-ha (Non-possessiveness)

Śauca (शौच) - SHAU-cha (Cleanliness)

Santoṣa (सन्तोष) - san-TO-sha (Contentment)

Tapas (तपस्) - TA-pas (Discipline)

Svādhyāya (स्वाध्याय) - sva-DHYA-ya (Self-study)

Īśvara Praṇidhāna (ईश्वरप्रणिधान) - ISH-va-ra pra-ni-DHA-na (Surrender)

Dharma (धर्म) - DHAR-ma (Duty, natural law)

Karma (कर्म) - KAR-ma (Action)

Guru (गुरु) - GU-ru (Teacher)

Śakti (शक्ति) - SHAK-ti (Energy)

Prajñā (प्रज्ञा) - pra-GYA (Wisdom)

Viveka (विवेक) - vi-VE-ka (Discrimination)

Dhyāna (ध्यान) - DHYAH-na (Meditation)

Mantra (मन्त्र) - MUN-tra (Sacred sound)

Śānti (शान्ति) - SHAN-ti (Peace)

Citta (चित्त) - CHIT-ta (Consciousness)

Buddhi (बुद्धि) - BUD-dhi (Intelligence)

Manas (मनस्) - MA-nas (Mind)



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Sat (सत्) - SUT (Truth, existence)

Cit (चित्) - CHIT (Consciousness)

Ānanda (आनन्द) - AH-nan-da (Bliss)

Avidyā (अविद्या) - a-VID-ya (Ignorance)

Vidyā (विद्या) - VID-ya (Knowledge)

Mokṣa (मोक्ष) - MOK-sha (Liberation)

## Common Anatomical Terms

### Body Parts

Pāda (पाद) - PAH-da (Foot, a quarter or section, foundation or base)

Jānu (जानु) - JAH-nu (Knee)

Hasta (हस्त) - HAS-ta (Hand, measurement, skill, and control)

Śīrṣa (शीर्ष) - SHEER-sha (Head, peak, summit, or highest point)

Grīvā (ग्रीवा) - GREE-va (Neck)

Kaṭi (कटि) - KA-ti (Hip)

Jaṭhara (जठर) - JA-tha-ra (Belly)

### Directional Terms

Ūrdhva (ऊर्ध्व) - OORD-hva (Upward)

Adho (अधो) - A-dho (Downward)

Pārśva (पार्श्व) - PARSH-va (Side)

Parivṛtta (परिवृत्त) - pa-ri-VRIT-ta (Revolved, complete or total turning)

Uttānā (उत्तान) - ut-TAH-na (Extended, an opening or stretching out)





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## Common Action Words

Utthita (उत्थित) - UT-thi-ta (Extended, rising or extending upward)

Prasārita (प्रसारित) - pra-SAH-ri-ta (Spread)

Bandha (बन्ध) - BUN-dha (Lock, binding, connecting, fixing, and restraining)

Namaskāra (नमस्कार) - na-ma-SKAR-a (Salutation, reverence, greeting, and honoring)

Vinyāsa (विन्यास) - vin-YAH-sa (intentional placement or arrangement, progression, and sequencing)



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### Examples of term break-down

Each of these Sanskrit names demonstrates how yoga postures are named by combining descriptive elements with the foundational word "āsana," creating precise terminology that reflects the form, action, or quality of each pose. Let me break down five yoga postures into their Sanskrit components:

#### 1. Utthita Hasta Pādāṅguṣṭhāsana

It begins with "utthita" meaning extended or stretched, followed by "hasta" meaning hand, "pāda" meaning foot, "aṅguṣṭha" meaning big toe, and "āsana" meaning pose. Together, these components create the name for the extended hand-to-big-toe pose.

#### 2. Ardha Candrāsana

It combines "ardha" meaning half with "candra" meaning moon, and "āsana" meaning pose. The name reflects the curved shape of the body resembling a half moon in this standing balance pose.

#### 3. Paripūrṇa Nāvāsana

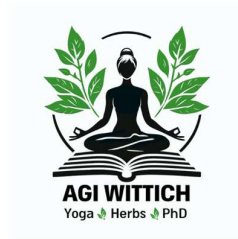
It joins "paripūrṇa" meaning complete or full with "nāva" meaning boat and "āsana" meaning pose. This describes the full expression of the boat pose where both legs and upper body are lifted.

#### 4. Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana

It begins with "sa" meaning with and "ālamba" meaning support, combined to form "sālamba" meaning supported. This is followed by "sarva" meaning all, "aṅga" meaning limbs, and "āsana" meaning pose, creating the name for the supported all-limbs pose, commonly known as shoulderstand.

#### 5. Eka Pāda Rāja Kapotāsana

It contains five distinct elements: "eka" meaning one, "pāda" meaning foot or leg, "rāja" meaning king, "kapota" meaning pigeon, and "āsana" meaning pose. These components combine to name the one-legged king pigeon pose, reflecting its royal status among pigeon pose variations.



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Dr. Agi Wittich combines two decades of yoga practice with scholarly expertise, holding a PhD focused on Iyengar Yoga and women's experiences. As the founder of Yoga Readers, she creates a unique space where academic understanding meets practical wisdom, guiding a global community in exploring yoga's rich philosophical traditions. Her approach makes ancient teachings accessible while honoring their depth and authenticity.



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