

Toki Pona Guide

This is intended to be a fairly complete guide to Toki Pona within a page, front and back.

Toki Pona was created by Sonja Lang aka jan Sonja in 2001, with the final product published in 2014 in “Toki Pona: The Language of Good”, and the first dictionary being released in 2021.

Intro

There are 14 letters in Toki Pona, the consonants j, k, l, m, n, p, s, t, and w, and the vowels a, e, i, o, and u. The pronunciation is always the same. Consonants are pronounced like in English, except for j making a y sound like in German, and the vowels are pronounced like in Spanish or Italian. All words except for proper names are lowercase. Stress is always on the first syllable of a word like in Finnish. Words describe a broad spectrum of ideas, so meaning often comes down to context, and in absence of context, clarification can be used. Additionally, tense and plurality aren’t generally specified.

Syllables

Each syllable has one vowel, must start with a consonant, unless it’s the first syllable of a word, and may optionally end in -n. ji, jin, ti, tin, wo, won, wu, and wun are forbidden, and consecutive syllables may not have an m- or n- following an -n.

Interjections

Interjections are simple words or phrases to point something out or make a statement. The particle a can be used to add emphasis or emotion.

toki! - Hello! / (communication is starting)
pipi a! - Bug! / (pointing out an insect)

Pronouns

There are three main pronouns in Toki Pona: the first person pronoun mi, the second person pronoun sina, and the third person pronoun ona. Information on gender, tense, case, and plurality is absent.

Sentence Structure

The particles li and e are used to form simple sentences. li separates a subject and predicate, and e comes before a direct object. If the subject is mi or sina, li is absent.

ona li moku. - They eat.
toki li pona. - Language is good.
mi olin e sina. - I love you.

Modification

Adjectives are placed after the word they’re modifying. Each additional modifying word adds additional clarification, so modifiers are grouped from left to right. To change this order, the particle pi can be used, roughly translating to “of”.

soweli sulì - big animal
tomo telo nasa - strange bathroom (strange water-house)
tomo pi telo nasa - bar (house of strange water)

Prepositions

Prepositions apply additional information relating to the rest of the sentence as a whole, and come at the end of the sentence. Multiple may be strung together, and prepositions don’t take direct objects. There are five, those being kepeken, lon, sama, tan, and tawa.

sina lape lon tomo sina. - You sleep in your house.
ona li sulì sama soweli. - He’s big like an animal.

Preverbs

Preverbs come at the beginning of a predicate, modifying it. There are seven, those being alasa, awen, kama, ken, lukin, sona, and wile.

mi wile tawa e tomo. - I want to go home.
waso li kama lili. - The bird became small.
sina ken pali e moku - You’re able to cook.

Questions

Yes or no questions replace the predicate (x) with “x ala x”, with the answer being “x” or “x ala”.

sina lete ala lete? - Are you cold?
lete - Yes, lete ala - No

For other questions, the word seme, translated to what, which, who, or how, replaces the word in a sentence that you want to know.

sina pilin seme? - How do you feel?

More informally, anu seme (or what) can be added to the end of the sentence.

ona li lape anu seme? - Is he asleep?

Context

To add specific context to a sentence, the particle la can be used after the context statement. Time statements using tenpo are specifically common.

ona li nasa la ona li pakala e ijo. - When he’s drunk, he breaks stuff.
tenpo ni la mi moku. - I’m eating now.

Names

Proper names are always capitalized and are considered modifiers. Names are traditionally changed to fit Toki Pona’s phonology, based on what they call themselves. For instance, Germany would be based on Deutschland, not Germany.

ona li jan Sonja. - She’s Sonja.
sina tan ala tan ma Tosi? - Are you from Germany?

Addressing

Addressing and commanding use the particle o. To address a person, you begin with their name, followed by o and a comma. To command or wish that a subject does something, you replace li with o. Without the subject, the command is directed at the listener.

o kute! - Listen!
jan Ken o, sina pona lukin. - Ken, you look good.
suno o lon. - Let there be light.

Conjunction

Multiple subjects should be separated by the particle en. Similarly, multiple predicates can be separated by an additional li, even if the subject is mi or sina, and multiple direct objects can be separated by an additional e.

moku en telo li pona. - Food and water are good.
mi lukin li kute. - I look and listen.
soweli li moku e kili e pan. - The animal eats fruit and bread.

Introductory Words

At the start of a sentence, the words taso and kin can be used, followed by a comma, to add to another sentence. taso means however, and kin means also or additionally.

taso, telo li seli. - However, the water is warm.
kin, mi alasa e soweli. - Also, I hunt animals.

Nested Sentences

Sentences can’t be nested in Toki Pona, so they often may have to be split up into multiple parts. A common form is with the word ni, meaning this or that, which may be followed by a colon.

o lukin e jan. ona li pali e pan. - Look at the guy making bread.
mi wile ni: tomo li pimeja - I want the room to be dark.

Numbers

The basic number system uses wan, tu, and mute for 1, 2, and 3+. A more specific system can be used, with ala, wan, tu, luka, mute, and ale for 0, 1, 2, 5, 20, and 100. To add numbers up, you string the words together in decreasing order of size. You can use a smaller number before a larger one to multiply it. Ordinal numbers use nanpa followed by a number.

luka tu tu - 9
tu ale wan - 201
jan nanpa wan - the first person

Vocabulary

Non-pu words are in italics.

Particles

a	- emphasis, emotion, confirmation
e	- before or between direct objects
en	- between subjects
la	- between context and main phrases
li	- before or between predicates
o	- indicating vocative or imperative
pi	- changing modifier order

Pronouns

mi	- first person
sina	- second person
ona	- third person

Prepositions

kepeken	- using, with, by means of
lon	- on, in, located at
sama	- as, like
tan	- by, from, because of
tawa	- to, for, from the perspective of

Preverbs

alasa	- to try to (modern usage)
awen	- to continue to
kama	- to become
ken	- to be able to
lukin	- to try to (pu usage)
sona	- to know how to
wile	- to want to

Definitions

akesi	- reptile, amphibian, non-cute animal
ala	- no, zero; not
alasa	- hunt, forage, gather, seek
ale/ali	- all, everything, life, universe, 100; abundant
anpa	- bow down; downward, humble, dependent
ante	- alter, change; different, other
anu	- or, choose, decide
awen	- keep, protect, wait, stay; safe
<i>epiku</i>	- epic
esun	- market, shop, transaction
ijo	- thing, phenomenon, object, matter
ike	- bad, negative, irrelevant
ilo	- tool, machine, device; implement
insa	- center, inside, between, internal organ
jaki	- disgusting, obscene, toxic, unclean
jan	- human, person, somebody
<i>jasima</i>	- mirror; reflect, resound, be on the other end of
jelo	- yellow, yellowish
jo	- to have, contain, hold, carry
kala	- fish, marine animal, sea creature
kalama	- sound; produce a sound, recite, utter
kama	- future, then; arriving, coming
kasi	- plant, vegetation, herb, leaf, grass
ken	- can, may; possible
kepeken	- to use

<i>kijetesantakalu</i>	- Procyonidae, Musteloidea
kili	- fruit, vegetable, mushroom
kin	- indeed, too, also, still
kipisi	- split, cut, slice
kiwen	- hard object, metal, rock, stone
ko	- clay, semi-solid, paste, powder
<i>kokosila</i>	- speak a non-Toki Pona language in a Toki Pona space
kon	- air, breath, essence, spirit, unseen agent, hidden reality
<i>ku</i>	- (to interact with) the Toki Pona dictionary
kule	- paint; colorful, painted, LGBT+
kulupu	- community, group, tribe
kute	- ear; hear, listen to, obey
<i>lanpan</i>	- take, seize, catch, receive, get
lape	- sleep, rest
laso	- blue, green
lawa	- head, mind; to control, lead, own
<i>leko</i>	- stairs, square, block, corner
len	- cloth, clothing, fabric, cover, layer of privacy
lete	- cold, cool, uncooked, raw
lili	- little, small, short, few, young
linja	- long flexible thing, rope, hair
lipu	- flat object, book, paper, website
loje	- red, reddish
lon	- reality; exist; real, true
luka	- arm, hand, five
lukin	- sight; to see, look at
lupa	- door, hole, orifice, window
ma	- earth, land, outdoors, territory, soil
mama	- parent, creator, caretaker
mani	- money, cash, wealth, large domesticated animal
meli	- woman, female, wife; feminine
<i>meso</i>	- middle; medium, mediocre
mi	- I, me, we, us; my, our
mije	- man, male, husband; masculine
<i>misikeke</i>	- medicine; cure
moku	- food; eat, drink, consume
moli	- die; dead, dying
monsi	- back, rear; behind
<i>monsuta</i>	- monster, fear
mu	- (animal noise or communication)
mun	- moon, night sky object, star
musi	- art; play; entertaining
mute	- quantity, 20; many, more, very
<i>n</i>	- (indicating thinking, recognition)
<i>namako</i>	- spice, something extra
nanpa	- number; -th (ordinal)
nasa	- unusual, strange, crazy, drunk
nasin	- way, method, custom, path, road
nen	- bump, button, hill, nose
ni	- this, that
nimi	- name, word
noka	- foot, leg, bottom, lower part
o	- hey!, oh!
<i>oko</i>	- eye
olin	- respect; to love, have compassion or affection for
ona	- he, she, it, they; his, her, its, their
open	- to begin, start, open, turn on
pakala	- broken, damaged, messed up
pali	- to do, work on, make, prepare
palisa	- long hard thing, branch, rod, stick
pan	- grain, carb, bread, pasta
pana	- to give, send, emit, put, release
pi	- of
pilin	- heart, feeling; feel, touch

pimeja	- black, dark, unlit
pini	- past; complete, end, finish; ago
pipi	- bug, insect, ant, spider
poka	- hip, side, vicinity; next to, nearby
poki	- container, bag, bowl, box, cupboard, drawer, vessel
pona	- good, positive, useful, simple; thanks
pu	- (to interact with) Toki Pona: The Language of Good
sama	- sibling, peer, each other; same, similar
seli	- fire, heat, chemical reaction
selo	- outer layer, bark, skin, boundary
seme	- what, which, who
sewi	- area above, highest part; divine, sacred, awe-inspiring
sijelo	- body, physical state, torso
sike	- round thing, ball, circle; of one year
sin	- new, another, more
sina	- you, y'all; your
sinpin	- face, front, wall; foremost
sitelen	- picture, symbol, mark, writing
soko	- fungus, fungi
sona	- knowledge; to know, to be skilled in
soweli	- animal, beast, land mammal
suli	- adult; big, heavy, tall, important
suno	- sun, light, light source; shine; bright
supa	- horizontal surface, thing to rest or place something on
suwi	- sweet, fragrant, cute, innocent, adorable
taso	- but, however; only
tawa	- going to, moving; toward
telo	- water, liquid, fluid, beverage; wet
tenpo	- time, duration, moment, occasion, period, situation
toki	- language; communicate, speak, say, think; hello
tomo	- indoor space, building, room, house
<i>tonsi</i>	- non-binary, transgender
tu	- two; split, cut, divide into two
unpa	- sex; have sexual or marital relations with; sexual
uta	- mouth, lips, oral cavity, jaw; kiss
utala	- to battle, challenge, compete against, struggle with
walo	- white, whitish, light-colored, pale
wan	- one; unite; unique, united
waso	- bird, flying creature, winged animal
wawa	- strong, powerful, confident, energetic, intense
weka	- leave, ignore; absent, away
wile	- wish, intention; want, need, should