

Beyond Italics: Working with Non-English Words in English Text

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Definitions

- **transliteration:** conversion of a text from one script to another
- **transcription:** rendering the sounds of one language in the script of another
- **romanization:** conversion of a non-Latin script to a Latin script
- **loan words:** a word adopted into another language (e.g., café, tofu, yoga)
- **loan translations:** a word whose meaning has been literally translated from one language to another (e.g., paper tiger from Chinese, blue blood from Spanish)

Resources

Style guides

- Chicago Manual of Style, 17th edition, chapter 11: Languages Other than English
- Editing Canadian English, 3rd edition, chapter 11: Working with French in an English Text
- New Oxford Style Manual, chapter 12: Languages
- The Canadian Style, 6.01: [French and Foreign Words and Phrases](#)

Romanization standards

- Library of Congress: [romanization tables](#)
Used for bibliographic records, but very helpful as a guide for non-specialists in particular languages.
- International Organization for Standardization (ISO): [Standards Catalogue, 01.140.10 - Writing and transliteration](#)
Standards for romanization in many languages. These documents aren't free and they aren't cheap, but some organizations may call for using ISO standards.
- [U.S. Board on Geographic Names \(BGN\)](#)
Standards for spelling of place names used by all U.S. government departments.
- [United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names \(UNGEGN\)](#)
Extensive database of standardized place names used by UN organizations.

Articles

- Adam Taylor, *Business Insider*: [Is it time for the West to stop calling it 'Kiev' and start calling it 'Kyiv'?](#)
- Robert Basler, *Reuters*: [Kiev vs. Kyiv...](#)
- Brianna Goodman, *PEN America*: [Interrogating the status quo](#)
- Jennifer De Leon, *Ploughshares*: [The borderlands of language: Using italics for “foreign” words \(part I\)](#)
- Jennifer De Leon, *Ploughshares*: [To italicize or not to italicize? Authors speak up on the use of “foreign” words in prose \(part II\)](#)
- Daniel Kalder, *The Guardian*: [Say 'non' to phrasebook foreign language in fiction](#)

Diacritical marks

This is not an exhaustive list. A Unicode chart will show you more. Always check the text to make sure you have the accents right.

Mark	What it stands for	Some examples	How to make on a Mac	How to make in Word for Windows
ó (acute accent)	long or stressed or variant vowel; palatalized consonant; high or rising tone	French lancé ‘thrown’ vs lance ‘lance’ Icelandic háttur ‘mode, manner’ vs hattur ‘hat’ Polish późna ‘late’ vs pozna ‘will meet’ Chinese bá ‘pull out’ vs ba (suggestion marker)	Option e	Ctrl '
ò (grave accent)	stressed or variant vowel; low or falling tone	Italian però ‘but’ vs pero ‘pear tree’ French où ‘where’ vs ou ‘or’ Chinese lè ‘happy’ vs le (completion marker)	Option `	Ctrl `
õ (tilde)	nasalization of a vowel; different quality vowel; palatalization of n	Portuguese maçã ‘apple’ vs maca ‘stretcher’ Spanish año ‘year’ vs ano ‘anus’ Estonian kõrk ‘haughty’ vs kork ‘cork’	Option n	Ctrl ~
ö (umlaut or diaeresis)	change in vowel (usually fronting); pronunciation of vowel that would be silent	Swedish sätt ‘manners’ vs satt ‘short and wide’ German träumen [he/she] dreams’ vs Traumen ‘traumas’ Albanian fëjë ‘sin’ vs feje ‘nostrils’	Option u	Ctrl :
ő (double acute)	different quality and length of vowel	Hungarian kőr ‘heart’ vs kör ‘circle’ vs kór ‘disease’ vs kor ‘age’	Character menu	Character menu
ô (overdot)	different quality of vowel or consonant	Polish żądanie ‘request’ vs zadanie ‘task’	Character menu	Character menu
ọ (underdot)	different quality of vowel or consonant	Yoruba kọ ‘write’ vs ko ‘never’ Vietnamese mọi ‘every’ vs moi ‘drag out’	Character menu	Character menu
ō (macron)	long vowel	Latvian mālā ‘in the clay’ vs malā ‘on the shore’ Mandarin mā ‘mother’ vs ma (question particle)	Character menu	Character menu
ö (breve)	short or reduced vowel	Romanian măi ‘hey’ vs mai ‘more’	Character menu	Character menu
ř (caron)	different quality, e.g., palatalization of consonant	Czech řek ‘of the rivers’ vs rek ‘hero’ Mandarin mǎ ‘horse’ vs ma (question marker)	Character menu	Character menu
ô (circumflex)	different quality of vowel	French fûmes [‘we] were’ vs fumes [‘you] smoke’ Nakoda û ‘be’ vs u ‘come’	Option i	Ctrl ^
ą (ogonek, hook)	nasalization and shift	Polish małki ‘flours’ vs maki ‘poppies’	Character menu	Character menu
ç (cedilla)	different consonant sound	Portuguese maçã ‘apple’ vs maca ‘stretcher’ Albanian koçe ‘decorations’ vs koce ‘girl’ Latvian ziņa ‘message’ vs zina ‘knows’	Option c for ç; character menu for others	Ctrl , or character menu
ỏ (hoi)	different vowel quality	Vietnamese hỏi ‘ask’ vs hói ‘bald’	Character menu	Character menu
å (ring)	different vowel quality	Swedish får ‘sheep, fool’ vs far ‘father’ Czech krůty ‘turkeys’ vs kruty ‘torsions’	Option a	Ctrl @
ơ (horn)	different vowel quality	Vietnamese hơi ‘slightly’ or ‘gas’ vs hói ‘bald’	Character menu	Character menu

Special characters

This is not an exhaustive list. A Unicode chart will show you more. Always check the text to make sure you have the characters right.

Mark	What it stands for	Examples	How to make on a Mac	How to make in Windows
' (opening single quote)	glottal stop; pharyngeal continuant	Arabic (transliterated) ' amal 'work' vs ' amal 'hope'	Option]	Alt 0145
' (closing apostrophe)	glottal stop; ejective consonant; palatalization	Czech sít 'net' vs sít 'sow'	Option }	Alt 0146
æ (æsc, ash)	"ah" or "ai" sound	Icelandic hætta 'stop' vs hátt 'go to bed'	Option '	Alt 0230, Alt 0198 (cap)
œ (oe ligature, ethel)	"ö" or "e" sound	French cour 'court' vs cœur 'heart'	Option q	Alt 0156, Alt 0140 (cap)
ð (eth)	voiced "th"	Icelandic hlýði '[I] obey' vs hlýddi '[I] obeyed'	Character menu	Alt 0240, Alt 0208 (cap)
đ (dyet)	"d" or voiced "th"	Vietnamese đang (present active marker) vs dang 'stretch out'	Character menu	Character menu
þ (thorn)	voiceless "th"	Icelandic þína 'your' vs pína 'torture'	Character menu	Alt 0254, Alt 0222 (cap)
ı (dotless i)	like unrounded "u" or like "i" much farther back	Turkish sık 'often' vs sik 'penis'	Character menu	Character menu
İ (dotted capital I)	capital of i, in contrast with ı	Turkish İsi 'The fume' vs Isi 'Heat'	Character menu	Character menu
ł (barred l)	"w" or similar	Polish ława 'bench' vs lawa 'lava'	Character menu	Character menu
ø (slashed o)	"ö"	Norwegian bør 'should' vs bor 'live'	Option o	Alt 0248, Alt 0216 (cap)
ħ (barred h)	pharyngeal continuant	Maltese ħu 'brother' vs hu 'he'	Character menu	Character menu
ß (eszett)	"s" (where an s would be said as "z"); often replaced with ss ; don't confuse with beta	German daß 'that' vs das 'the'; haßen 'hate' vs haben 'have'	Character menu	Alt 0223

Greek transliteration

Cap	Small	Usual Latin	Classical sound	Modern sound
Α	α	a	a	a
Β	β	b	b	v
Γ	γ	g	g	gh, y
Δ	δ	d	d	ð
Ε	ε	e	e	e
Ζ	ζ	z	zd	z
Η	η	e	e	i
Θ	θ	th	t ^h	th
Ι	ι	i	i	i
Κ	κ	k	k	k
Λ	λ	l	l	l
Μ	μ	m	m	m
Ν	ν	n	n	n
Ξ	ξ	x	x	x
Ο	ο	o	o	o
Π	π	p	p	p
Ρ	ρ	r	r	r
Σ	σ, ς	s	s	s
Τ	τ	t	t	t
Υ	υ	y	u, ü	i
Φ	φ	ph	p ^h	f
Χ	χ	ch	k ^h	kh
Ψ	ψ	ps	ps	ps
Ω	ω	o	o	o

Combination	Classical sound	Modern sound
αυ	au	av, af
αι	ai	e
ει	e	i
ευ	eu	ev, ef
ηυ	eu	iv, if
οι	oi	i
υι	ü	i
γγ	ng	ng
γκ	nk	g, nk
μπ	—	b, mb
ντ	—	d, nd
τζ	dz	dz

Russian

Source: Wikipedia

Cap	Small	ISO/R9:1968; GOST 1971(1); UNGEGN (1987)	GOST 1971(2)	GOST 2002(B)	BS 2979:1958	BGN/PCGN	Passport (1997)	Passport (2013), ICAO
А	а	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Б	б	b	b	b	b	b	b	b
В	в	v	v	v	v	v	v	v
Г	г	g	g	g	g	g	g	g
Д	д	d	d	d	d	d	d	d
Е	е	e	e	e	e	e (ye)	e (ye)	e
Ё	ё	ë	jo	yo	ë	ë (yë)	e (ye)	e
Ж	ж	ž	zh	zh	zh	zh	zh	zh
З	з	z	z	z	z	z	z	z
И	и	i	i	i	i	i	i	i
Й	й	j	j	j	ĭ	y	y	i
К	к	k	k	k	k	k	k	k
Л	л	l	l	l	l	l	l	l
М	м	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Н	н	n	n	n	n	n	n	n
О	о	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
П	п	p	p	p	p	p	p	p
Р	р	r	r	r	r	r	r	r
С	с	s	s	s	s	s	s	s
Т	т	t	t	t	t	t	t	t
У	у	u	u	u	u	u	u	u
Ф	ф	f	f	f	f	f	f	f
Х	х	h (ch)	kh	x	kh	kh	kh	kh
Ц	ц	c	c	cz (c)	ts	ts	ts	ts
Ч	ч	č	ch	ch	ch	ch	ch	ch
Ш	ш	š	sh	sh	sh	sh	sh	sh
Щ	щ	š̌ (šč)	shh	shh	shch	shch	shch	shch
Ъ	ъ	"	"	"	" (")	"	"	ie
Ы	ы	y	y	y'	ȳ (ui)	y	y	y
Ь	ь	'	'	'	' (')	'	-	-
Э	э	é (è)	eh	e'	é	e	e	e
Ю	ю	ju	ju	yu	yu	yu	yu	iu
Я	я	ja	ja	ya	ya	ya	ya	ia