HU

LANGUAGE COURSE

Hungarian Grammar 3

Tenses and moods: the past, future, conditional, imperative and subjunctive, with indefinite and definite forms

10 Chapters

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HUNGARIAN GRAMMAR 3

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🗺️ The Hungarian Verb — Az ige

Hungarian Grammar 1 gave you the present tense in two conjugations, and Hungarian Grammar 2 gave you the nouns and their cases. This course completes the verb: the past, the future, the conditional, the imperative and the subjunctive. Before the first new paradigm, this chapter lays out how a Hungarian verb form is built and draws one map of every form to come, so that each later chapter has a place to sit.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

A Hungarian verb form is a **stem** plus an optional **tense or mood marker** plus a **person ending**: *olvas* + *t* + *am* → *olvastam* (I read). Which set of person endings you get depends on the **conjugation**: the *definite* set when the object is definite, the *indefinite* set otherwise. There is a single past tense and no separate continuous tenses; the future, the conditional and the polite or formal moods are built from the same pieces.

1. The parts of a verb form

Take the verb *olvas* (read) and watch the pieces change. Each row is one form; the highlighted part is the marker that tells you the tense or mood.

STEM	MARKER	PERSON ENDING	WHOLE FORM	MEANING
olvas	none (present)	ok	olvasok	I read (a book)
olvas	none (present)	om	olvasom	I read (the book)
olvas	t (past)	am	olvastam	I read / I was reading / I have read
olvas	n (conditional)	ék	olvasnék	I would read
olvas	s (imperative)	(none)	olvass	read! (you, singular)
olvas	s (subjunctive)	ak	olvassak	(that) I read / may I read

The markers are only a first look; Chapters 2 to 9 explain each one with its full paradigm and its harmony variants. What matters now is the pattern: **the stem stays, the marker sits in the middle, the person ending closes the word**, and the future is a separate helper word.

> **One past tense, not three**
>
> English has *I read, I was reading, I have read, I had read.* Hungarian's basic past tense is a single form, **olvastam**, and context, time words and verb prefixes decide the shade of meaning. Chapter 9 shows the one compound past, built with *volt*.

2. The infinitive and the stem

The **infinitive** ends in **-ni** and means "to ...": **olvasni** (to read), **látni** (to see), **kérni** (to ask for). It is the form that follows helper verbs such as *akar, tud, kell* and *fog* (Chapter 5). After some consonants a linking vowel appears before *-ni*: **mondani** (to say), **hallani** (to hear).

The **stem** is what the endings attach to. For most verbs it is the form of the 3rd person singular in the present, and it is usually the infinitive without *-ni*.

INFINITIVE	3RD SG PRESENT	STEM	ENGLISH
olvasni	olvas	olvas-	to read
látni	lát	lát-	to see
nézni	néz	néz-	to look
mondani	mond	mond-	to say
dolgozni	dolgozik	dolgoz-	to work (an *-ik* verb)
enni	eszik	esz-	to eat (the infinitive is not the stem)
menni	megy	megy- / men-	to go (irregular)

> **Watch out: the infinitive is not always the stem**

> For regular verbs, infinitive minus *-ni* gives the stem (*olvasni* → *olvas-*). For irregular verbs it does not: **enni** goes with **esz-** in the present and **ev-** in the past, and **menni** goes with **megy-** and **ment-**. Learn the infinitive and the 3rd person singular present together, as a pair. Dictionaries list the verb under the 3rd person singular, so look under *eszik* and *megy*, not under *enni* and *menni*.

3. The verb classes

Four groups of verbs behave differently in several of the forms ahead.

CLASS	WHAT MARKS IT	EXAMPLES
Regular	stem used as is, with the standard endings	**lát** · **kér** · **vár** · **ír**
Stems in *-s, -sz, -z*	special 3rd person and 1st plural in the definite conjugation (Hungarian Grammar 1, chapter 7); the *j* of the imperative assimilates	**olvas** · **néz** · **főz** (cook)
-ik verbs	3rd singular ends in *-ik*; a few present forms differ	**eszik** · **iszik** · **alszik** · **dolgozik** · **lakik**
Irregular	the stem itself changes between tenses	**van** · **megy** · **jön** · **tesz** · **vesz** · **visz** · **hisz** · **lesz**

Chapter 4 treats the irregulars in the past; Chapters 7 and 8 meet them again in the imperative and the subjunctive.

4. The two conjugations, revisited

Hungarian Grammar 1, chapters 6 to 8, taught that the present tense has two sets of endings, chosen by whether the object is definite. Every tense and mood in this course repeats that choice, so here is the present in both sets as a reference.

PERSON	INDEFINITE OLVAS	DEFINITE OLVAS	INDEFINITE NÉZ	DEFINITE NÉZ
I	**olvasok**	**olvasom**	**nézek**	**nézem**
you (sg)	**olvasol**	**olvasod**	**nézel**	**nézed**

PERSON	INDEFINITE OLVAS	DEFINITE OLVAS	INDEFINITE NÉZ	DEFINITE NÉZ
he, she	**olvas**	**olvassa**	**néz**	**nézi**
we	**olvasunk**	**olvassuk**	**nézünk**	**nézzük**
you (pl)	**olvastok**	**olvassátok**	**néztek**	**nézitek**
they	**olvasnak**	**olvassák**	**néznek**	**nézik**

The *-ik* verbs have their own present, where the 1st person singular takes the *-m* ending: **eszem, eszel, eszik, eszünk, esztek, esznek** (I eat, you eat…), **iszom, iszol, iszik, iszunk, isztok, isznak**. In everyday speech many people use *-ok/-ek* in the 1st person instead (**eszek**); the *-m* forms are the careful standard. Chapters 2 and 3 show how the *-ik* verbs behave in the past.

Remember also the special pair "I … you": **látlak** (I see you), **szeretlek** (I love you). It exists in the past too: **láttalak** (Chapter 3).

5. The map of the course

Here is every tense and mood ahead, with the 1st-person and 3rd-person forms of *olvas* in both conjugations. Use this table as the table of contents for the verb; each row is explained in the chapter named in the last column.

TENSE OR MOOD	INDEFINITE	DEFINITE	MEANING	CHAPTER
Present	**olvasok · olvas**	**olvasom · olvassa**	I read · he/she reads	Hungarian Grammar 1
Past	**olvastam · olvasott**	**olvastam · olvasta**	I read · he/she read	2, 3, 4
Future	**fogok olvasni**	**fogom olvasni**	I will read	5
Conditional	**olvasnék · olvasna**	**olvasnám · olvasná**	I would read · he/she would read	6

TENSE OR MOOD	INDEFINITE	DEFINITE	MEANING	CHAPTER
Imperative	**olvass!**	**olvasd!**	read! · read it!	7
Subjunctive	**hogy olvassak**	**hogy olvassam**	that I read · that I read it	8
Past conditional	**olvastam volna**	**olvastam volna**	I would have read	9
Past perfect	**olvastam volt**	**olvastam volt**	I had read	9

Two things stand out in this table. The **1st person singular of the past is the same** in both conjugations (*olvastam*), though the 3rd person differs (*olvasott* against *olvasta*). And the **future uses the helper *fog*** followed by the infinitive, so it is a two-word form.

6. Three questions for every verb form

Whenever you meet or build a Hungarian verb form, ask these three questions in order. The rest of the course fills in the answers.

QUESTION	WHAT IT DECIDES	WHERE IT IS ANSWERED
1. Which tense or mood?	the marker (or helper word)	Chapters 2 to 9
2. Is the object definite?	indefinite or definite person endings	Hungarian Grammar 1, chapters 6 to 8; Hungarian Grammar 2, chapter 8
3. Which stem and class?	vowel harmony, linking vowels, irregular stems	Hungarian Grammar 1, chapters 2 to 5; Chapters 2 and 4

7. Time words and tense

A time word usually accompanies the tense. Learn the pairing as a signpost.

TIME WORD	TENSE	EXAMPLE
most (now) · **ma** (today)	present	**Most olvasok.** · I'm reading now.
tegnap (yesterday) · **múlt héten** (last week)	past	**Tegnap olvastam.** · I read yesterday.
holnap (tomorrow) · **jövő héten** (next week)	future, or present for a fixed plan	**Holnap fogok olvasni.** · I'll read tomorrow.

🗣️ In Use — Használatban

The forms on the map, heard once each. Do not worry about the details; the later chapters explain them.

① Three tenses

A:

Mit csinálsz most?

What are you doing now?

B:

Olvasok. Tegnap is olvastam, holnap is fogok olvasni.

Reading. I read yesterday too, and I'll read tomorrow as well.

② The definite object

A:

Olvasod a könyvet?

Are you reading the book?

B:

Igen, olvasom. Tegnap Péter is olvasta.

Yes, I am. Peter read it yesterday too.

③ A request

A:

Mit kérsz?

What would you like?

B:

Kérnék egy kávét.

I'd like a coffee.

A:

Jó, hozom.

Fine, I'll bring it.

📋 Quick Reference — Gyorstábla

IDEA	RULE	EXAMPLE
Form of a verb	stem + marker + person ending	**olvastam**
Infinitive	stem + -ni (sometimes with a linking vowel)	**olvasni** · **mondani**
Dictionary entry	3rd person singular present	**eszik** (for *enni*) · **megy** (for *menni*)
Conjugation	definite object → definite endings; otherwise indefinite	**olvasom a könyvet** · **olvasok egy könyvet**
Past	one tense	**olvastam**
Future	fog + infinitive	**fogok olvasni**
Conditional	marker -na/-ne (1st person -nék)	**olvasnék**
Imperative, subjunctive	marker -j- (assimilated after -s)	**olvass** · **hogy olvassak**

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Gyakorlás

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Which tense or mood is *olvastam*?

▼ Show answer

The past (1st person singular). The marker is *-t-*.

2. Which tense or mood is *olvasnék*?

▼ Show answer

The conditional, 1st person singular ("I would read").

3. Which tense or mood is *olvass!*?

▼ Show answer

The imperative, 2nd person singular ("read!").

4. Which tense or mood is *fogok olvasni*?

▼ Show answer

The future, 1st person singular ("I will read"), made with *fog* plus the infinitive.

5. Give the infinitive of *lát* (see).

▼ Show answer

látni.

6. What is the stem of *eszik*, and what is its infinitive?

▼ Show answer

Stem **esz-**, infinitive **enni**. The infinitive is not the stem plus *-ni*.

7. "I read a book." Which present form: *olvasok* or *olvasom*?

▼ Show answer

Olvasok egy könyvet. The object is indefinite.

8. "I read the book." Which present form?

▼ Show answer

Olvasom a könyvet. The object is definite.

9. Say "he read a book" and "he read the book" in the past.

▼ Show answer

Olvasott egy könyvet. and **Olvasta a könyvet.** The 3rd person differs between the conjugations.

10. Under which headword would you look up the verb "to go" in a dictionary?

▼ Show answer

megy, the 3rd person singular present, not *menni*.

Coming up in Chapter 2: The Past: Indefinite. The marker *-t / -tt* and its linking vowels, the full paradigm in back, front and rounded versions, the *-ik* verbs and the past of *van*.

⏪ The Indefinite Past — A múlt idő, határozatlan ragozás

*Hungarian has one basic past tense, and it comes in the two conjugations you already know. This chapter covers the **indefinite** one: the past of verbs with no object, with an indefinite object (a book, two cars), or with a question word like mit?. The definite past, for definite objects, is Chapter 3 and works from the same pieces. The past marker is **-t-**; the chapter shows where it goes, how the 3rd person singular behaves, and which verbs change their stems.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

The indefinite past is **stem + -t- + ending**: *-tam / -tem, -tál / -tél*, a **3rd person singular of its own** (*-ott / -ett / -ött* or just *-t*), then *-tunk / -tünk, -tatok / -tetek, -tak / -tek*. Only the 3rd person singular varies from verb to verb, so learn it with each new verb.

1. The endings

PERSON	BACK	FRONT
I	**-tam**	**-tem**
you (sg)	**-tál**	**-tél**
he, she	**-ott** or **-t**	**-ett / -ött** or **-t**
we	**-tunk**	**-tünk**
you (pl)	**-tatok**	**-tetek**
they	**-tak**	**-tek**

Back, front and rounded stems follow the harmony of *Hungarian Grammar 1, chapters 2 and 3*. Rounded front stems take the front endings, and only the 3rd person singular shows the rounded vowel: **főzött**.

Full paradigms

PERSON	VÁR (WAIT)	OLVAS (READ)	NÉZ (LOOK)	FŐZ (COOK)	KÉR (ASK FOR)
I	vár**tam**	olvas**tam**	néz**tem**	főz**tem**	kér**tem**
you (sg)	vár**tál**	olvas**tál**	néz**tél**	főz**tél**	kér**tél**
he, she	vár**t**	olvas**ott**	néz**ett**	főz**ött**	kér**t**
we	vár**tunk**	olvas**tunk**	néz**tünk**	főz**tünk**	kér**tünk**
you (pl)	vár**tatok**	olvas**tatok**	néz**tetek**	főz**tetek**	kér**tetek**
they	vár**tak**	olvas**tak**	néz**tek**	főz**tek**	kér**tek**

> **The 3rd person singular is the only one that varies**
>
> Compare **vár → várt** with **olvas → olvasott**. Both are regular verbs, but the first takes a bare *-t* and the second takes *-ott*. Every other person uses *-t-* plus the same endings for both verbs (*vártam, olvastam*). So the safe habit is to learn the 3rd person singular past together with each verb, as you learn the infinitive.

2. The 3rd person singular: -t or -ott / -ett / -ött?

There is no single rule that covers every verb, but the final sound of the stem predicts most of them. Treat the table as a strong guide and check unfamiliar verbs.

THE STEM ENDS IN…	3RD SG PAST	EXAMPLES
A single *l, r, n, j* after a vowel	bare **-t**	vár → várt · kér → kért · ír → írt · tanul → tanult · él → élt · ül → ült · fáj → fájt · köszön → köszönt
A sibilant: *s, sz, z, zs*	**-ott / -ett / -ött**	olvas → olvasott · néz → nézett · főz → főzött · dolgozik → dolgozott · úszik → úszott

THE STEM ENDS IN…	3RD SG PAST	EXAMPLES
k, p, b, g, h, v, m, t, d in short stems	**-ott / -ett / -ött**	**kap → kapott · lakik → lakott · lát → látott · ad → adott · tud → tudott · szeret → szeretett**
Two consonants	**-ott / -ett** in most	**tart → tartott · fest → festett · mond → mondott · küld → küldött**

There are exceptions even within these groups: **marad → maradt** and **szalad → szaladt** (longer stems ending in *-d* take the bare *-t*), and **hall → hallott** (a doubled *l* takes *-ott*). This is why the 3rd person singular is learned with the verb.

When the marker doubles

After a stem ending in *t* the past marker makes *tt* (**láttam**). After *d* it sits next to the *d* (**adtam, mondtam, tudtam**). A few verbs ending in a vowel double the marker too: **lő → lőttem** (I shot), **nő → nőttem** (I grew).

PERSON	LÁT (SEE)	AD (GIVE)	TUD (KNOW)	NŐ (GROW)
I	**láttam**	**adtam**	**tudtam**	**nőttem**
you (sg)	**láttál**	**adtál**	**tudtál**	**nőttél**
he, she	**látott**	**adott**	**tudott**	**nőtt**
we	**láttunk**	**adtunk**	**tudtunk**	**nőttünk**
you (pl)	**láttatok**	**adtatok**	**tudtatok**	**nőttetek**
they	**láttak**	**adtak**	**tudtak**	**nőttek**

3. The -ik verbs

The *-ik* verbs form the past on their stem and lose the *-ik*. Most are regular: **dolgozik → dolgoztam, dolgoztál, dolgozott**. The very common ones *eszik*, *iszik* and *alszik* change their stems.

PERSON	ESZIK (EAT)	ISZIK (DRINK)	ALSZIK (SLEEP)	DOLGOZIK (WORK)
I	**ettem**	**ittam**	**aludtam**	**dolgoztam**
you (sg)	**ettél**	**ittál**	**aludtál**	**dolgoztál**
he, she	**evett**	**ivott**	**aludt**	**dolgozott**
we	**ettünk**	**ittunk**	**aludtunk**	**dolgoztunk**
you (pl)	**ettetek**	**ittatok**	**aludtatok**	**dolgoztatok**
they	**ettek**	**ittak**	**aludtak**	**dolgoztak**

Notice that *eszik* and *iszik* use *et- / it-* everywhere except the 3rd person singular, where the stem is *ev- / iv-* (**evett, ivott**). Other common *-ik* verbs form the past regularly: **lakik → laktam, lakott** (live), **költözik → költöztem, költözött** (move house), **úszik → úsztam, úszott** (swim).

4. The past of van

The verb *van* (is, are) has its own past stem, *volt-*. In the 3rd person singular it is just **volt**, and it is the same in both numbers when it means "there was / were".

PERSON	PAST OF VAN	EXAMPLE
I	**voltam**	**Tegnap otthon voltam.** · I was at home yesterday.
you (sg)	**voltál**	**Hol voltál?** · Where were you?
he, she, it	**volt**	**A film jó volt.** · The film was good.
we	**voltunk**	**Szegeden voltunk.** · We were in Szeged.
you (pl)	**voltatok**	**Ott voltatok?** · Were you there?
they	**voltak**	**A gyerekek itt voltak.** · The children were here.

With a possessor (*Hungarian Grammar 2, chapter 8*) the past of *van* says "had": **Volt egy házam** (I had a house). The negative is **nem volt**: **Nem volt időm** (I had no time).

5. Negation and questions

To negate the past, put **nem** before the verb. A yes/no question keeps the same form and relies on intonation, or on a question word.

STATEMENT	NEGATIVE	QUESTION
Olvastam. I read.	**Nem olvastam.** I didn't read.	**Olvastál?** Did you read?
Péter dolgozott. Peter worked.	**Péter nem dolgozott.** Peter didn't work.	**Mit olvastál?** What did you read?
Otthon voltam. I was at home.	**Nem voltam otthon.** I wasn't at home.	**Hol voltál?** Where were you?

6. Time words for the past

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
tegnap · **tegnapelőtt**	yesterday · the day before yesterday
múlt héten · **múlt hónapban**	last week · last month
tavaly	last year
két napja · **két éve**	two days ago · two years ago
régen · **korábban**	long ago · earlier
már	already

The same past form covers what English splits into *I read, I was reading* and *I have read*. Time words and context choose the sense: **Tegnap olvastam** (I read yesterday) and **Már**

olvastam (I have already read).

🗣️ In Use — Használatban

The indefinite past in short exchanges.

① Where were you?

A:

Hol voltál tegnap?

Where were you yesterday?

B:

A barátomnál voltam. Ott aludtam is.

At my friend's. I slept there too.

A:

Mit ettetek?

What did you eat?

B:

Levest ettünk, és sört ittunk.

We had soup, and we drank beer.

② The weekend

A:

Mit csináltál a hétvégén?

What did you do at the weekend?

B:

Szombaton dolgoztam, vasárnap pihentem.

I worked on Saturday and rested on Sunday.

A:

Én úsztam egyet.

I had a swim.

③ Where did you live?

A:

Hol laktál régen?

Where did you live long ago?

B:

Szegeden laktam, aztán Skóciába költöztem.

In Szeged, and then I moved to Scotland.

A:

Mikor?

When?

B:

Két éve.

Two years ago.

📋 Quick Reference — Gyorstábla

PERSON	BACK / FRONT	EXAMPLE (VÁR / NÉZ)
I	-tam / -tem	**vártam · néztem**
you (sg)	-tál / -tél	**vártál · néztél**
he, she	-ott / -ett / -ött or -t	**várt · nézett**
we	-tunk / -tünk	**vártunk · néztünk**
you (pl)	-tatok / -tetek	**vártatok · néztetek**
they	-tak / -tek	**vártak · néztek**
van	voltam, voltál, volt, voltunk, voltatok, voltak	**Otthon voltam.**
Negative	nem + past	**Nem olvastam.**

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Gyakorlás

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. "I waited": *vár*, past.

▼ Show answer

vártam.

2. "You (sg) asked for": *kér*, past.

▼ Show answer

kértél.

3. "She looked": *néz*, past.

▼ Show answer

nézett.

4. "We read": *olvas*, past.

▼ Show answer

olvastunk.

5. "I saw": *lát*, past.

▼ Show answer

láttam. The *t* of the stem doubles.

6. "I slept": *alszik*, past.

▼ Show answer

aludtam.

7. "He ate": *eszik*, past.

▼ Show answer

evett. The 3rd person singular uses *ev-*.

8. "You (sg) were": *van*, past.

▼ Show answer

voltál.

9. Translate: "I wasn't at home yesterday."

▼ Show answer

Tegnap nem voltam otthon.

10. Fix the sentence: *Péter nézt egy filmet* (Peter watched a film).

▼ Show answer

Péter nézett egy filmet. The 3rd person singular of a sibilant stem takes *-ett*.

Coming up in Chapter 3: The Past: Definite. The endings *-tam, -tad, -ta, -tuk, -tátok, -ták* for definite objects, and the past "I … you" form, *-talak / -telek*.

⏮ The Definite Past — A múlt idő, határozott ragozás

*Hungarian Grammar 1 taught that the present tense has two sets of endings, chosen by the object. The past works the same way. When the object is **definite** (the book, my friend, this film), the past uses the **definite endings**: Olvastam a könyvet, Olvasta a könyvet. This chapter gives those endings in full, shows the verbs that need a little extra care, and teaches the past "I … you" form.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

The definite past is **stem + -t- + definite ending**: *-tam, -tad, -ta, -tuk, -tátok, -ták* (back) and *-tem, -ted, -te, -tük, -tétek, -ték* (front). It is used when the object is definite, and it differs from the indefinite past in every person except the **1st person singular**, where both are *-tam / -tem*.

1. The definite endings

PERSON	BACK	FRONT (INCL. ROUNDED)
I	**-tam**	**-tem**
you (sg)	**-tad**	**-ted**
he, she	**-ta**	**-te**
we	**-tuk**	**-tük**
you (pl)	**-tátok**	**-tétek**
they	**-ták**	**-ték**

Choose between the back and front columns by the vowel harmony of the stem (*Hungarian Grammar 1, chapters 2 and 3*). Rounded front stems such as *főz* take the front endings.

Full paradigms

PERSON	OLVAS (READ)	NÉZ (LOOK)	FŐZ (COOK)	KÉR (ASK FOR)
I	olvas**tam**	néz**tem**	főz**tem**	kér**tem**
you (sg)	olvas**tad**	néz**ted**	főz**ted**	kér**ted**
he, she	olvas**ta**	néz**te**	főz**te**	kér**te**
we	olvas**tuk**	néz**tük**	főz**tük**	kér**tük**
you (pl)	olvas**tátok**	néz**tétek**	főz**tétek**	kér**tétek**
they	olvas**ták**	néz**ték**	főz**ték**	kér**ték**

Note that stems in *-s, -sz, -z* do **not** change in the past: the present definite *olvassa* and *nézzük* have a doubled consonant, but the past is simply **olvasta** and **néztük**. The assimilation of Hungarian Grammar 1, chapter 7, belongs to the present only.

2. Stems that need a closer look

Stems ending in t or d

When the stem ends in *-t*, the past marker doubles it (*-tt-*). After *-d* the marker is just *-t* next to the *d*, and it is written *-dt-*.

PERSON	LÁT (SEE)	MOND (SAY)	AD (GIVE)
I	lát**tam**	mon**dtam**	ad**tam**
you (sg)	lát**tad**	mon**dtad**	ad**tad**
he, she	lát**ta**	mon**dta**	ad**ta**
we	lát**tuk**	mon**dtuk**	ad**tuk**
you (pl)	lát**tátok**	mon**dtátok**	ad**tátok**
they	lát**ták**	mon**dták**	ad**ták**

Verbs with -ott- or -ett- in every person

A small group puts *-ott- / -ett- / -ött-* before the endings in the whole paradigm. The common ones are *hall* (hear) and the verbs in *-ít* such as *tanít* (teach) and *segít* (help). These are learned with the verb.

PERSON	HALL (HEAR)	TANÍT (TEACH)	SEGÍT (HELP)
I	**hallottam**	**tanítottam**	**segítettem**
you (sg)	**hallottad**	**tanítottad**	**segítetted**
he, she	**hallotta**	**tanította**	**segítette**
we	**hallottuk**	**tanítottuk**	**segítettük**
you (pl)	**hallottátok**	**tanítottátok**	**segítettétek**
they	**hallották**	**tanították**	**segítették**

The -ik verbs

The *-ik* verbs that can take an object form the definite past in the usual way, but their stems change.

PERSON	ESZIK (EAT)	ISZIK (DRINK)
I	**ettem**	**ittam**
you (sg)	**etted**	**ittad**
he, she	**ette**	**itta**
we	**ettük**	**ittuk**
you (pl)	**ettétek**	**ittátok**
they	**ették**	**itták**

3. Definite or indefinite: the minimal pairs

The 1st person singular does not tell you which conjugation you are in, because *-tam / -tem* serves both. Every other person does.

PERSON	INDEFINITE (A BOOK)	DEFINITE (THE BOOK)
I	Olvastam egy könyvet.	Olvastam a könyvet.
you (sg)	Olvastál egy könyvet.	Olvastad a könyvet.
he, she	Olvasott egy könyvet.	Olvasta a könyvet.
we	Olvastunk egy könyvet.	Olvastuk a könyvet.
you (pl)	Olvastatok egy könyvet.	Olvastátok a könyvet.
they	Olvastak egy könyvet.	Olvasták a könyvet.

Watch out: a long vowel marks the definite plural

In the 2nd person plural the two conjugations differ only by a vowel's length: **olvastatok** (indefinite) against **olvastátok** (definite), and **néztetek** against **néztétek**. Listen for the long *á / é*. In writing, the accent is all you have.

What counts as a definite object

The same triggers as in the present apply (*Hungarian Grammar 1, chapter 8*): nouns with *a / az*, proper names, nouns with a possessive ending (*Hungarian Grammar 2, chapter 8*), *ez / az* (this, that), and a following clause. **Tudta, hogy késem** (He knew that I was late) uses the definite form because the object is a *hogy* clause; **Tudott magyarul** (He could speak Hungarian) uses the indefinite form.

4. The past "I ... you": -talak / -telek

The special pair of Hungarian Grammar 1, chapter 9, exists in the past too: when the subject is **I** and the object is **you** (singular or plural), the verb takes **-talak / -telek** after the stem.

PRESENT	PAST	ENGLISH
látlak	láttalak	I saw you
hallak	hallottalak	I heard you
hívlak	hívtalak	I called you
kereslek	kerestelek	I looked for you
kérdezlek	kérdeztelek	I asked you

🗣️ In Use — Használatban

The definite past in short exchanges. Notice the verb ending change between the two answers in the second exchange.

① The film

A:

Láttad a filmet?

Did you see the film?

B:

Igen, tegnap láttam. Péter is látta.

Yes, I saw it yesterday. Peter saw it too.

A:

És hallottad a zenét?

And did you hear the music?

B:

Hallottam, nagyon tetszett.

I did, I liked it a lot.

② Who did you call?

A:

Kit hívtál tegnap?

Who did you call yesterday?

B:

A barátomat hívtam.

I called my friend.

A:

És ő mit mondott?

And what did he say?

B:

Azt mondta, hogy késik.

He said that he's running late.

③ I called you

A:

Hívtalak tegnap!

I called you yesterday!

B:

Bocsánat, nem hallottalak.

Sorry, I didn't hear you.

📋 Quick Reference — Gyorstábla

PERSON	INDEFINITE (BACK / FRONT)	DEFINITE (BACK / FRONT)
I	-tam / -tem	-tam / -tem
you (sg)	-tál / -tél	-tad / -ted
he, she	-ott / -ett / -ött or -t	-ta / -te
we	-tunk / -tünk	-tuk / -tük
you (pl)	-tatok / -tetek	-tátok / -tétek
they	-tak / -tek	-ták / -ték
I ... you	-talak / -telek	

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Gyakorlás

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. "You (sg) read it": *olvas*, definite past.

▼ Show answer

olvastad.

2. "He looked at it": *néz*, definite past.

▼ Show answer

nézte.

3. "We asked for it": *kér*, definite past.

▼ Show answer

kértük.

4. "You (pl) waited for it": *vár*, definite past.

▼ Show answer

vártátok. The definite plural has a long *á*.

5. "They wrote it": *ír*, definite past.

▼ Show answer

írták.

6. "I saw the house": *lát*, definite past.

▼ Show answer

Láttam a házat. The *t* of the stem doubles.

7. "He read the book" and "He read a book".

▼ Show answer

Olvasta a könyvet. and **Olvasott egy könyvet.**

8. "She ate the soup" (*leves*, soup): *eszik*, definite past.

▼ Show answer

Ette a levest.

9. "I heard you."

▼ Show answer

Hallottalak. The past "I … you" form.

10. Fix the sentence: *Láttad egy filmet* (You saw a film).

▼ Show answer

Láttál egy filmet. An indefinite object takes the indefinite ending.

Coming up in Chapter 4: Irregular and Changing Pasts. *megy → mentem*, *jön → jöttem*, *tesz → tettem* and the other stems that change before *-t*, with a table of the most-used irregulars.

🔀 Stems That Change — A szabálytalan igék

Chapters 2 and 3 gave you the regular past. Some of the most frequent verbs do not follow it, because their stem changes before the past marker: megy becomes ment-, tesz becomes tett-, jön becomes jött-. They are only a few dozen verbs, but you will use them every day. This chapter sorts them into groups so that each group is one pattern to learn, not a list of surprises.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

The irregular verbs still take the same past endings as the regular ones (*-m, -l, nothing, -nk, -tok, -k* after the marker), in both conjugations. What changes is the **stem plus marker**: *megy → ment-, tesz → tett-, vesz → vett-, visz → vitt-, jön → jött-, lesz → lett-*. Learn the 1st-person and 3rd-person singular together; the other persons follow.

1. The sz-verbs: tesz, vesz, visz, hisz, lesz

Seven common verbs have an unstable root with *sz* in the present. Five of them turn the *sz* into *tt* in the past: *tesz* (put), *vesz* (take, buy), *visz* (carry), *hisz* (believe) and *lesz* (become, will be). The other two, *eszik* and *iszik*, you met in Chapter 2.

PERSON	TESZ (PUT)	VESZ (TAKE, BUY)	VISZ (CARRY)	LESZ (BECOME)
I	**tettem**	**vettem**	**vittem**	**lettem**
you (sg)	**tettél**	**vettél**	**vittél**	**lettél**
he, she	**tett**	**vett**	**vitt**	**lett**
we	**tettünk**	**vettünk**	**vittünk**	**lettünk**
you (pl)	**tettetek**	**vettetek**	**vittetek**	**lettetek**
they	**tettek**	**vettek**	**vittek**	**lettek**

The definite past of the first three is the usual set, built on the same stem: **tettem, tetted, tette, tettük, tettétek, tették**; **vettem, vetted, vette, vettük, vettétek, vették**; **vittem, vitted, vitte, vittük, vittétek, vitték**. *Lesz* and *hisz* take a dative or a noun, not a direct object, so they use the indefinite set.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH	CONJUGATION
Vettem egy telefont.	I bought a phone.	indefinite object
Vettem a telefont.	I bought the phone.	definite object (same form in the 1st person)
A telefont az asztalra tettem.	I put the phone on the table.	definite
A kulcsot a táskába tetted?	Did you put the key in the bag?	definite, 2nd person: *tetted*
Vittem egy könyvet.	I took (carried) a book.	indefinite object
Nem hittem neki.	I didn't believe him/her.	dative, so indefinite
Orvos lett.	He/she became a doctor.	no object

> **Watch out: vett and vitt, tett and hitt**
>
> **vett** (bought, took) and **vitt** (carried) differ by one vowel, and so do **lett** (became) and **tett** (put). Learn them with a verb you remember: *vesz* → *vett* (e), *visz* → *vitt* (i). The infinitives show the vowels too: **venni** (to take, buy), **vinni** (to carry), **tenni** (to put), **lenni** (to be, to become).

> **lenni is the infinitive of both van and lesz**
>
> *van* (is) and *lesz* (will be, becomes) share the infinitive *lenni*, but their pasts differ: **volt** for "was" and **lett** for "became". Compare **Hideg volt** (It was cold) with **Hideg lett** (It got cold) and **Mi lett belőle?** (What became of it?).

2. megy and jön

Two basic verbs of motion change their stems completely. *Megy* uses *ment-* in the past and *jön* uses *jött-*, and neither takes an object, so only the indefinite set exists.

PERSON	MEGY (GO)	JÖN (COME)
I	**mentem**	**jöttem**
you (sg)	**mentél**	**jöttél**
he, she	**ment**	**jött**
we	**mentünk**	**jöttünk**
you (pl)	**mentetek**	**jöttetek**
they	**mentek**	**jöttek**

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
Tegnap moziba mentem.	I went to the cinema yesterday.
Honnan jöttél?	Where did you come from?
Jött egy levél.	A letter came.
Busszal mentek.	They went by bus.

> **Watch out: mentek means two things**
>
> **mentek** is both the 3rd person plural past ("they went") and the 2nd person plural present ("you (pl) go"). The context and any time word tell you which: **Tegnap mentek** (they went yesterday) against **Ti hova mentek?** (Where are you going?).

3. fekszik, alszik and esik

Three *-ik* verbs with *sz* in the present change it in the past. *Alszik* (sleep) becomes *aludt-* (Chapter 2); *fekszik* (lie) becomes *feküdt-*; *esik* (fall, rain) takes *est-* before the endings and *esett* in the 3rd person singular.

PERSON	FEKSZIK (LIE)	ESIK (FALL; RAIN)
I	**feküdtem**	**estem**
you (sg)	**feküdtél**	**estél**
he, she, it	**feküdt**	**esett**
we	**feküdtünk**	**estünk**
you (pl)	**feküdtetek**	**estetek**
they	**feküdtek**	**estek**

The 3rd person of *esik* is the one you hear most: **Tegnap esett az eső** (It rained yesterday). Another common *-ik* verb, **tetszik** (be pleasing), is regular in the past: **A film tetszett nekem** (I liked the film).

4. Vowel stems

A few short verbs end in a long vowel and double the marker: **lő** (shoot), **nő** (grow), **fő** (boil). They behave as in Chapter 2.

PERSON	LŐ	NŐ
I	**lőttem**	**nőttem**
he, she	**lőtt**	**nőtt**
they	**lőttek**	**nőttek**

5. Verbs with -ott- or -ett- in every person

Some regular-looking verbs insert *-ott- / -ett- / -ött-* in the whole paradigm, not only in the 3rd person. Chapter 3 introduced *hall* and the *-ít* verbs. The group also includes several short verbs.

VERB	I	HE, SHE	ENGLISH
hall	hallottam	hallott	hear
fut	futottam	futott	run
süt	sütöttem	sütött	bake; shine
nyit	nyitottam	nyitott	open
tanít	tanítottam	tanított	teach
segít	segítettem	segített	help

6. Modal verbs in the past

The verbs of wanting, being able and having to are among the most frequent in the past. *Akar* and *tud* follow the regular pattern; *kell* and *lehet* exist only in the 3rd person and take *-ett*, and *szabad* forms its past with *volt*. Chapter 5 returns to these with the infinitive.

PRESENT	PAST	EXAMPLE
akar	akartam · akart	**Nem akartam menni.** · I didn't want to go.
tud	tudtam · tudott	**Nem tudtam jönni.** · I couldn't come.
kell	kellett	**Dolgozni kellett.** · I/we/he had to work.
lehet	lehetett	**Lehetett parkolni?** · Was it possible to park?
szabad	szabad volt	**Szabad volt bemenni.** · We were allowed to go in.

7. The most-used irregular verbs at a glance

Use this table as a reference: each row gives the dictionary entry, the infinitive, the 1st and 3rd person singular indefinite past, and the 3rd person singular definite past where the verb can take an object.

VERB	INFINITIVE	I	HE, SHE	HE, SHE (DEFINITE)	ENGLISH
van	lenni	voltam	volt	—	be
lesz	lenni	lettem	lett	—	become
megy	menni	mentem	ment	—	go
jön	jönni	jöttem	jött	—	come
tesz	tenni	tettem	tett	tette	put
vesz	venni	vettem	vett	vette	take, buy
visz	vinni	vittem	vitt	vitte	carry
hisz	hinni	hittem	hitt	—	believe
eszik	enni	ettem	evett	ette	eat
iszik	inni	ittam	ivott	itta	drink
alszik	aludni	aludtam	aludt	—	sleep
fekszik	feküdni	feküdtem	feküdt	—	lie
esik	esni	estem	esett	—	fall; rain
lát	látni	láttam	látott	látta	see
mond	mondani	mondtam	mondott	mondta	say
ad	adni	adtam	adott	adta	give
tud	tudni	tudtam	tudott	tudta	know; can
hall	hallani	hallottam	hallott	hallotta	hear
fut	futni	futottam	futott	—	run
áll	állni	álltam	állt	—	stand

VERB	INFINITIVE	I	HE, SHE	HE, SHE (DEFINITE)	ENGLISH
lő	lőni	lőttem	lőtt	lőtte	shoot
nő	nőni	nőttem	nőtt	—	grow

🗣️ In Use — Használatban

The irregular pasts in short exchanges.

① Shopping

A:

Hova mentél tegnap?

Where did you go yesterday?

B:

A boltba mentem, és vettem egy telefont.

I went to the shop and bought a phone.

A:

Mit vettél még?

What else did you buy?

B:

Vettem kenyeret is, és hoztam kávét.

I bought bread too, and I brought coffee.

② Where did you put it?

A:

Hová tetted a kulcsot?

Where did you put the key?

B:

A táskámba tettem.

I put it in my bag.

③ What became of him?

A:

Mi lett belőle?

What became of him?

B:

Orvos lett.

He became a doctor.

A:

Én nem hittem, hogy sikerül neki.

I didn't believe he'd manage it.

B:

Én hittem benne.

I believed in him.

📋 Quick Reference — Gyorstábla

GROUP	PATTERN	EXAMPLES
sz-verbs	sz → tt	**tesz → tett-** · **vesz → vett-** · **visz → vitt-** · **hisz → hitt-** · **lesz → lett-**
eszik, iszik	et- / it- and ev- / iv- in the 3rd sg	**ettem, evett** · **ittam, ivott**
Motion	new stem	**megy → ment-** · **jön → jött-**
-szik / -ik verbs	sz → d, or est-	**alszik → aludt-** · **fekszik → feküdt-** · **esik → est-, esett**
Vowel stems	marker doubles	**lő → lőtt-** · **nő → nőtt-**
-ott- throughout	learn with the verb	**hallottam** · **futottam** · **tanítottam**
Modals	kell, lehet only 3rd person	**kellett** · **lehetett** · **szabad volt**

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Gyakorlás

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. "I went": *megy*, past.

▼ Show answer

mentem.

2. "He came": *jön*, past.

▼ Show answer

jött.

3. "You (sg) put": *tesz*, past.

▼ Show answer

tettél.

4. "We bought": *vesz*, past.

▼ Show answer

vettünk.

5. "They carried": *visz*, past.

▼ Show answer

vittek.

6. "I became": *lesz*, past.

▼ Show answer

lettem.

7. "I lay down": *fekszik*, past.

▼ Show answer

feküdtem.

8. Translate: "I put the phone on the table."

▼ Show answer

A telefont az asztalra tettem.

9. Translate: "She became a doctor."

▼ Show answer

Orvos lett.

10. Fix the sentence: *Tegnap jöttam* (I came yesterday).

▼ Show answer

Tegnap jöttem. The stem *jött-* is front, so the ending is *-em*.

Coming up in Chapter 5: The Future and Helper Verbs. *fog* + the infinitive, the present with a time word, the helper verbs *akar, tud, szeretne, kell, lehet, szabad*, and the personal infinitive (*mennem kell*).

⏩ The Future — A jövő idő

*Hungarian has no future ending. It has three ways to talk about what will happen: a helper verb **fog** plus the infinitive, the plain present with a time word, and **lesz** for "will be". The same infinitive that follows fog also follows a family of helper verbs (akar, tud, kell, lehet, szabad), and kell and its relatives have a special form, the **personal infinitive** (mennem kell, "I have to go"). This chapter puts all of that together.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

The future is **fog + infinitive** (*fogok olvasni*, I will read). The helper verbs also take the infinitive: *akarok menni* (I want to go). For *have to*, *may* and *be allowed*, the infinitive takes **personal endings** that show who has to act: *mennem kell* (I have to go), *menned kell* (you have to go), *mennie kell* (he or she has to go).

1. The future with fog

The helper *fog* carries the person ending. It has two sets, as every verb does: the **indefinite** set when there is no object or an indefinite one, and the **definite** set when the object is definite. The main verb stays in the infinitive.

PERSON	INDEFINITE FOG	DEFINITE FOG
I	**fogok**	**fogom**
you (sg)	**fogsz**	**fogod**
he, she	**fog**	**fogja**
we	**fogunk**	**fogjuk**
you (pl)	**fogtok**	**fogjátok**
they	**fognak**	**fogják**

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Fogok olvasni.	I will read.	no object
Fogok olvasni egy könyvet.	I will read a book.	indefinite object
Fogom olvasni a könyvet.	I will read the book.	definite object: *fogom*
Nem fogsz jönni?	Won't you come?	negative question
Mit fogtok csinálni?	What will you (pl) do?	question word

The word order is flexible. *Fog* usually comes first in a neutral sentence (**Fogok olvasni**), and the infinitive can come first when it carries the emphasis (**Olvasni fogok**, I will READ). Negation stands before *fog*: **Nem fogok olvasni**. Word order and focus have a course of their own later.

> **Watch out: fog also means "hold"**
>
> *Fog* is also an ordinary verb meaning "hold, catch": **Fogom a kezét** means "I am holding his/her hand". With an infinitive it is the future: **Fogom olvasni a könyvet** (I will read the book). If there is no infinitive, it is "hold".

2. Other ways to talk about the future

The present with a time word

For a fixed plan, Hungarian often uses the plain present and a time word: **Holnap megyek moziba** (Tomorrow I'm going to the cinema). The time word does the work that *fog* does elsewhere. Verbs with a prefix such as *meg-* or *el-* often have a future meaning in the present form; that belongs to the course on prefixes and aspect.

TIME WORD	MEANING	EXAMPLE
holnap · holnapután	tomorrow · the day after tomorrow	**Holnap dolgozom.**
jövő héten · jövőre	next week · next year	**Jövőre Szegedre költözöm.**

TIME WORD	MEANING	EXAMPLE
hamarosan · nemsokára	soon · before long	**Hamarosan jövök.**
majd	later, then (a loose future)	**Majd hívlak.**

lesz: will be

The future of *van* is **lesz**, and it is a full verb, not a helper: **leszek, leszel, lesz, leszünk, lesztek, lesznek**.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
Holnap otthon leszek.	Tomorrow I'll be at home.
Orvos leszek.	I'll be a doctor.
Lesz időm.	I'll have time.
Mi lesz?	What will happen?

3. Helper verbs with the infinitive

These verbs take an infinitive and are conjugated for the person. They use the indefinite set when the verb has no object and the definite set when the object is definite.

VERB	MEANING	EXAMPLE
akar	want	**Akarok menni.** · I want to go.
tud	can, know how to	**Tudok úszni.** · I can swim.
szeret	like to	**Szeretek olvasni.** · I like reading.
kezd	begin to	**Kezdek tanulni.** · I'm beginning to learn.
próbál	try to	**Próbálok aludni.** · I'm trying to sleep.
fog	will	**Fogok jönni.** · I will come.

The present of *akar* and *tud* is regular: **akarok, akarsz, akar, akarunk, akartok, akarnak** and **tudok, tudsz, tud, tudunk, tudtok, tudnak**. With a definite object the definite set appears: **Akarom a könyvet** (I want the book). For the past of these verbs, see Chapter 4.

4. kell, lehet, szabad and the personal infinitive

Three words say what you **must**, **may** and are **allowed** to do. They never change for person: the person is shown by putting the **infinitive in a personal form**.

WORD	MEANING	IMPERSONAL (GENERAL)	PERSONAL
kell	must, have to	**Menni kell.** · One has to go.	**Mennem kell.** · I have to go.
lehet	it is possible, may	**Lehet kérdezni?** · May one ask?	**Lehet kérdeznem?** · May I ask?
szabad	be allowed	**Szabad ülni.** · One may sit.	**Szabad kérdeznem?** · May I ask?

The personal infinitive

Take the infinitive and add a personal ending after *-ni*: *-nom, -nod, -nia, -nunk, -notok, -niuk* (back) or *-nem, -ned, -nie, -nünk, -netek, -niük* (front). The endings look like the possessive endings of Hungarian Grammar 2 8.

PERSON	MENNI (FRONT)	OLVASNI (BACK)	DOLGOZNI (BACK)	ENNI (FRONT)
I	**mennem**	**olvasnom**	**dolgoznom**	**ennem**
you (sg)	**menned**	**olvasnod**	**dolgoznod**	**enned**
he, she	**mennie**	**olvasnia**	**dolgoznia**	**ennie**
we	**mennünk**	**olvasnunk**	**dolgoznunk**	**ennünk**
you (pl)	**mennetek**	**olvasnotok**	**dolgoznotok**	**ennetek**

PERSON	MENNI (FRONT)	OLVASNI (BACK)	DOLGOZNI (BACK)	ENNI (FRONT)
they	menniük	olvasniuk	dolgozniuk	enniük

The person who must act is often named in the dative (Hungarian Grammar 2 3), but it can be left out because the personal infinitive already says who.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
(Nekem) mennem kell.	I have to go.
(Neked) dolgoznod kell.	You have to work.
(Neki) olvasnia kell.	He/she has to read.
(Nekünk) várnunk kell.	We have to wait.
Mennem kellett.	I had to go.
Nem kell mennem.	I don't have to go.
Nem szabad menned.	You mustn't go.

Watch out: "don't have to" and "mustn't" are different words

Nem kell means "need not": **Nem kell mennem** (I don't have to go). **Nem szabad** means "must not, not allowed": **Nem szabad dohányoznod** (You mustn't smoke). English "must not" uses *szabad*, not *kell*.

kell has a second job: "need"

With a noun and the dative, *kell* means "need": **Nekem kell egy telefon** (I need a phone, Hungarian Grammar 2 3). With an infinitive it means "have to". The structure tells you which.

🗣️ In Use — Használatban

The future and the helper verbs in short exchanges.

① Tomorrow

A:

Mit fogsz csinálni holnap?

What will you do tomorrow?

B:

Dolgozni fogok, de este moziba megyek.

I'll be working, but in the evening I'm going to the cinema.

A:

Én is moziba megyek. Majd hívlak.

I'm going to the cinema too. I'll call you.

② Have to

A:

Mehetünk?

Can we go?

B:

Sajnos még dolgoznom kell.

Unfortunately I still have to work.

A:

Mennyi ideig kell még dolgoznod?

How much longer do you have to work?

B:

Egy órát.

An hour.

③ Can you swim?

A:

Tudsz úszni?

Can you swim?

B:

Igen, szeretek úszni. Holnap is fogok úszni.

Yes, I like swimming. I'll swim tomorrow too.

A:

Hol leszel szombaton?

Where will you be on Saturday?

B:

Szegeden leszek, a szüleimnél.

In Szeged, at my parents'.

📋 Quick Reference — Gyorstábla

IDEA	FORM	EXAMPLE
Future	fog + infinitive	**Fogok olvasni. · Fogom olvasni a könyvet.**
fog (indefinite)	fogok, fogsz, fog, fogunk, fogtok, fognak	
fog (definite)	fogom, fogod, fogja, fogjuk, fogjátok, fogják	
Future of van	lesz: leszek, leszel, lesz, leszünk, lesztek, lesznek	**Otthon leszek.**
Helper verbs	akar, tud, szeret, kezd, próbál + infinitive	**Tudok úszni.**
Must, may, allowed	kell, lehet, szabad + personal infinitive	**Mennem kell.**
Personal infinitive	-ni + -m, -d, -a/-e, -unk/-ünk, -otok/-etek, -uk/-ük	**mennem · olvasnod · dolgoznia**
Don't have to · mustn't	nem kell · nem szabad	**Nem kell mennem. · Nem szabad menned.**

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Gyakorlás

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. "I will read": *olvasni*.

▼ Show answer

Fogok olvasni.

2. "You (sg) will go": *menni*.

▼ Show answer

Fogsz menni.

3. "We will work": *dolgozni*.

▼ Show answer

Fogunk dolgozni.

4. "I will read the book" (definite object).

▼ Show answer

Fogom olvasni a könyvet. The definite object calls for *fogom*.

5. "Tomorrow I'll be at home."

▼ Show answer

Holnap otthon leszek.

6. "I have to go."

▼ Show answer

Mennem kell.

7. "You (sg) have to work."

▼ Show answer

Dolgoznod kell.

8. "He/she has to read."

▼ Show answer

Olvasnia kell.

9. "You (sg) mustn't go."

▼ Show answer

Nem szabad menned.

10. Fix the sentence: *Fogok olvasom a könyvet* (I will read the book).

▼ Show answer

Fogom olvasni a könyvet. The helper takes the definite ending, and the main verb stays in the infinitive.

Coming up in Chapter 6: The Conditional. The marker *-na / -ne* and the first person *-nék*, indefinite and definite paradigms, polite requests such as *szeretnék* and *kérnék*, *ha … -na* clauses and the past conditional.

🌤️ "Would" — A feltételes mód

*The conditional says what would happen, and it is also the polite way to ask for things. It has one marker, **-na / -ne**, added to the verb stem, followed by its own set of personal endings. You have already met two conditionals as set phrases: szeretnék (I would like) and kérnék (I would ask for). This chapter explains them and the rest of the system.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Stem + -na/-ne + ending. Back vowels take -na, front vowels -ne: *olvasnék* (I would read), *mennék* (I would go). The first person singular is **-nék**, the second **-nál / -nél**. The past conditional is the past tense plus the fixed word **volna**: *olvastam volna* (I would have read).

1. The indefinite conditional

Use this set when there is no object or an indefinite one. The marker comes straight after the stem, and the endings are shown in the table.

PERSON	OLVAS (BACK)	MEGY (FRONT)	ENDING
I	**olvasnék**	**mennék**	-nék
you (sg)	**olvasnál**	**mennél**	-nál / -nél
he, she	**olvasna**	**menne**	-na / -ne
we	**olvasnánk**	**mennénk**	-nánk / -nénk
you (pl)	**olvasnátok**	**mennétek**	-nátok / -nétek
they	**olvasnának**	**mennének**	-nának / -nének

The stem used is the one you already know from the present: *megy* becomes *menn-* (from the infinitive *menni*), and *van* becomes *lenn-* (*lennék, lennél, lenne, lennénk, lennétek, lennének*). The *-ik* verbs take the same endings: *ennék, ennél, enne, ennénk, ennétek, ennének* (from *enni*) and *innék* (from *inni*).

> **Spelling: the doubled -nn-**
> Verbs whose infinitive is *-enni* or *-nni* (*menni, lenni, enni, tenni, venni*) show a doubled *-nn-* in the conditional: *mennék, lennék, ennék, tennék, vennék*. The infinitive helps: swap the final *-i* for the personal ending, as in *menn-i → menn-ék*.

2. The definite conditional

With a definite object (*a könyvet, őt, azt*) the endings change, as in every other tense. Only the singular forms and the third plural differ from the indefinite set.

PERSON	INDEFINITE	DEFINITE
I	**olvasnék**	**olvasnám**
you (sg)	**olvasnál**	**olvasnád**
he, she	**olvasna**	**olvasná**
we	**olvasnánk**	**olvasnánk**
you (pl)	**olvasnátok**	**olvasnátok**
they	**olvasnának**	**olvasnák**

Front-vowel verbs mirror this with *-ném, -néd, -né, -nék*: **vennék** (I would buy, indefinite) against **venném** (definite).

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
Olvasnék egy könyvet.	I would read a book.
Olvasnám a könyvet.	I would read the book.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
Venné ezt a kabátot?	Would he/she buy this coat?
Mit csinálnál?	What would you do?

3. Polite requests and wishes

In Hungarian, as in English, the conditional softens a request. The commonest forms are fixed phrases worth learning whole.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Szeretnék egy kávét.	I would like a coffee.	indefinite object
Szeretném a kávét.	I would like the coffee.	definite object
Szeretnék menni.	I would like to go.	+ infinitive (Chapter 5)
Kérnék egy sört.	I would like a beer. (lit. I would ask for)	ordering
Tudnál segíteni?	Could you help?	polite request
Hoznál egy kávét?	Would you bring a coffee?	polite request
Lehetne egy pohár víz?	Could I have a glass of water?	*lehet* in the conditional

> **Watch out: szeretek against szeretnék**
>
> **Szeretek úszni** means "I like swimming" (Chapter 5). **Szeretnék úszni** means "I would like to swim". One letter changes "a habit" into "a wish".

4. "If … would": ha clauses

An unreal or unlikely condition uses **ha** (if) with the conditional in *both* clauses, unlike English, which puts "would" only in the result: **Ha lenne időm, olvasnék.** (If I had time, I would read. Literally: if I would-be time, I would-read.)

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
Ha gazdag lennék, utaznék.	If I were rich, I would travel.
Ha tudnád, mit mondott, nevetnél.	If you knew what he said, you would laugh.
Ha esne az eső, otthon maradnánk.	If it were raining, we would stay at home.

For a *real* condition ("if it rains tomorrow, I'll stay home") Hungarian uses **ha** with the plain present or future: **Ha holnap esik, otthon maradok.** The conditional is for the "what if" cases.

5. The past conditional

"Would have" is the **past tense plus volna**. The past verb carries the person (Chapters 2–4), and *volna* never changes.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
Olvastam volna.	I would have read.
Elmentünk volna.	We would have gone.
Megvettem volna a kabátot.	I would have bought the coat.
Ha tudtam volna, szóltam volna.	If I had known, I would have told you.
Ha otthon lettél volna, találkoztunk volna.	If you had been at home, we would have met.

Both clauses of an unreal past condition take *volna*. Negation stands before the past verb: **Nem olvastam volna.** The map from Chapter 1 gives the whole family in one view: the present conditional (*olvasnék*), the past conditional (*olvastam volna*) and, as you will see in Chapter 9, the rarer compound forms.

🗣️ In Use — Használatban

The conditional in a café, in a daydream, and in a regret.

① In the café

A:

Jó napot! Mit szeretne?

Good day! What would you like?

B:

Kérnék egy kávét és egy pogácsát.

I would like a coffee and a scone.

A:

Szeretné a kávét tejjel?

Would you like the coffee with milk?

B:

Igen, kérem.

Yes, please.

② A daydream

A:

Mit csinálnál, ha sok pénzed lenne?

What would you do if you had a lot of money?

B:

Utaznék, és egy kis házat vennék Magyarországon.

I would travel, and I would buy a small house in Hungary.

A:

Én is. A család is velünk jönne.

Me too. The family would come with us as well.

③ A regret

A:

Miért nem jöttél tegnap?

Why didn't you come yesterday?

B:

Ha tudtam volna, eljöttem volna.

If I had known, I would have come.

A:

Majd legközelebb!

Next time, then!

📋 Quick Reference — Gyorstábla

IDEA	FORM	EXAMPLE
Indefinite endings	-nék, -nál, -na, -nánk, -nátok, -nának (front: -nék, -nél, -ne, -nénk, -nétek, -nének)	**olvasnék · mennél**
Definite endings	-nám, -nád, -ná, -nánk, -nátok, -nák (front: -ném, -néd, -né, -nénk, -nétek, -nék)	**olvasnám · venném**
"Would like"	szeretnék (indef.) · szeretném (def.)	**Szeretnék egy kávét.**
Polite request	conditional	**Tudnál segíteni?**
Unreal "if"	ha + conditional, conditional	**Ha lenne időm, olvasnék.**
Past conditional	past tense + volna	**Olvastam volna.**
Unreal past "if"	ha + past + volna, past + volna	**Ha tudtam volna, szóltam volna.**

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Gyakorlás

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. "I would read": *olvas*.

▼ Show answer

Olvasnék.

2. "You (sg) would go": *megy*.

▼ Show answer

Mennél.

3. "We would work": *dolgozik*.

▼ Show answer

Dolgoznánk.

4. "I would read the book" (definite).

▼ Show answer

Olvasnám a könyvet.

5. "I would like a coffee."

▼ Show answer

Szeretnék egy kávét. (Or **Kérnék egy kávét.**)

6. "If I had time, I would read."

▼ Show answer

Ha lenne időm, olvasnék.

7. "Could you help?" (informal)

▼ Show answer

Tudnál segíteni?

8. "I would have read."

▼ Show answer

Olvastam volna.

9. "If I had known, I would have come."

▼ Show answer

Ha tudtam volna, eljöttem volna.

10. What is the difference between *szeretek* and *szeretnék*?

▼ Show answer

Szeretek is the present, "I like"; **szeretnék** is the conditional, "I would like".

Coming up in Chapter 7: The Imperative. Commands and requests: the bare-stem forms (*olvass, ülj, gyere*), the *-j* marker, definite forms (*olvasd*), polite and plural commands, and the negative imperative with *ne*.

📣 Commands and Requests — A felszólító mód

*The imperative gives commands, invitations ("let's go") and polite requests, and it covers the third person too ("let him wait"). Its marker is **-j**, added to the verb stem. The marker then blends with the stem's last sound, which produces some of the most visible changes in Hungarian verbs (olvas → olvass, lát → láss). The same set of forms returns in Chapter 8, as the subjunctive.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Stem + -j + ending. The second person singular is the bare stem plus *-j*: *írj* (write), *kérj* (ask), *menj* (go). If the stem ends in a sibilant, the *-j* blends in: *olvass* (read), *láss* (see). With a definite object the second person is *-d*: *olvasd* (read it), *írd* (write it). A prohibition is **ne** plus the same form: *Ne menj!* (Don't go!).

1. The indefinite imperative

PERSON	ÍR (BACK)	KÉR (FRONT)	MEANING
I	**írjak**	**kérjek**	let me write / ask
you (sg)	**írj**	**kérj**	write! ask!
he, she	**írjon**	**kérjen**	let him/her write · (formal you)
we	**írjunk**	**kérjünk**	let's write
you (pl)	**írjatok**	**kérjetek**	write! ask! (plural)
they	**írjanak**	**kérjenek**	let them write / ask

The third person singular is also the **polite command** (the formal "you" is grammatically third person, as in Hungarian Basic): **Üljön le!** (Please sit down.), **Várjon, kérem.** (Please wait.). The first person plural is the usual way to say "let's": **Menjünk!** (Let's go!).

2. When the stem ends in a sibilant: olvass, láss

A stem that ends in *-s*, *-sz*, *-z* (or *-t* after some vowels) swallows the *-j* and doubles the sound in the 2sg: the *-j* turns into the stem's last sound.

VERB	2SG IMPERATIVE	MEANING
olvas	olvass	read!
mos	moss	wash!
hoz	hozz	bring!
lát	láss	see!
nyit	nyiss	open!
fut	fuss	run!

The 2sg is often lengthened with *-ál/-él* in everyday speech: **olvassál**, **nézzél**, **üljél**. It is a softer, friendlier command than the short form. Other stems keep the *-j* as usual: **vár → várj**, **ül → ülj**, **ad → adj**.

3. The definite imperative

With a definite object the endings become the definite set, and the 2sg is **-d**: **olvasd** (read it), **írd** (write it), **lásd** (see it).

PERSON	OLVAS	ÍR	LÁT
I	olvassam	írjam	lássam
you (sg)	olvasd	írd	lásd
he, she	olvassa	írja	lássa
we	olvassuk	írjuk	lássuk

PERSON	OLVAS	ÍR	LÁT
you (pl)	**olvassátok**	**írjátok**	**lássátok**
they	**olvassák**	**írják**	**lássák**

INDEFINITE	DEFINITE
Olvass egy könyvet! · Read a book!	**Olvasd el a könyvet!** · Read the book!
Írj levelet! · Write a letter!	**Írd meg a levelet!** · Write the letter!
Láss valamit! · See something!	**Lásd!** · See it! (Look!)

4. Irregular commands

A handful of very common verbs have their own imperative stems. Learn these as separate words.

VERB	2SG	3SG · POLITE	1PL · LET'S	MEANING
megy	**menj**	**menjen**	**menjünk**	go
jön	**gyere**	**jöjjön**	**gyerünk**	come
van	**légy**	**legyen**	**legyünk**	be
tesz	**tégy**	**tegyen**	**tegyünk**	put, do
vesz	**végy**	**vegyen**	**vegyünk**	take, buy
eszik	**egyél**	**egyen**	**együnk**	eat
iszik	**igyál**	**igyon**	**igyunk**	drink

Plural of *gyere* is **gyertek** (come!), and the polite singular is **jöjjön** (**Jöjjön be!** Come in, please). For *eszik*, the common everyday 2sg is **egyél**: **Egyél még!** (Have some more!).

5. Prohibitions with ne

"Don't ..." is **ne** plus the same imperative form, placed directly before the verb: **Ne menj!** (Don't go!), **Ne olvasd!** (Don't read it!), **Ne gyere!** (Don't come!), **Ne légy ideges!** (Don't be nervous!), **Ne félj!** (Don't be afraid!). Plural and polite: **Ne menjenek!** (Let them not go.), **Ne várjon!** (Please don't wait.)

> **Watch out: ne, not nem**
>
> Declarative sentences are negated with *nem* (**Nem megyek**, I'm not going). Commands use *ne* (**Ne menj**). Using *nem* in a command sounds like a statement, not a prohibition.

> **Softening a command**
>
> Hungarian commands sound blunt in English translation. Add *kérem* (please), *légy szíves* (be so kind) or switch to the *-ál/-él* form: **Légy szíves, nyisd ki az ablakot.** (Please open the window.) The conditional from Chapter 6 (**Kinyitnád az ablakot?**) is softer still.

🗣️ In Use — Használatban

Commands in a kitchen, an office and a street.

① In the kitchen

A:

Gyere ide, és segíts!

Come here and help!

B:

Mit csináljak?

What shall I do?

A:

Vedd elő a tejet, és öntsd a kávéba.

Ne feledd, nem kérek cukrot.

② At the office

A:

Jöjjön be, és üljön le, kérem.

Please come in and sit down.

B:

Köszönöm. Várjak még?

Thank you. Shall I wait longer?

A:

Nem, ne várjon. Kezdjük el!

No, don't wait. Let's begin!

Take out the milk and pour it into the coffee.
Remember, I don't want sugar.

③ On the street

A:

Gyerünk, mert elkésünk!
Let's go, or we'll be late!

B:

Ne siess, még van időnk.
Don't hurry, we still have time.

A:

Nézd az órát! Fuss!
Look at the clock! Run!

📋 Quick Reference — Gyorstábla

IDEA	FORM	EXAMPLE
Indefinite endings	-jak/-jek, -j, -jon/-jen, -junk/-jünk, -jatok/-jetek, -janak/-jenek	**írj · kérjen**
Definite endings	-jam/-jem, -d, -ja/-je, -juk/-jük, -játok/-jétek, -ják/-jék	**írd · írja**
Sibilant stems	-s, -sz, -z, -t often → -ss, -ssz, -zz	**olvass · hozz · láss**
Polite form	3sg (or 3pl for several people)	**Üljön le!**
"Let's"	1pl	**Menjünk! · Kezdjük el!**
Irregulars	menj, gyere, légy, tégy, végy, egyél, igyál	**Gyere ide!**
Prohibition	ne + imperative	**Ne menj! · Ne olvasd!**

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Gyakorlás

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. "Write!" (2sg): *ír*.

▼ Show answer

Írj!

2. "Read!" (2sg): *olvas*.

▼ Show answer

Olvass! The *-j* blends into the final *-s*.

3. "Read it!" (the book, 2sg).

▼ Show answer

Olvasd! Definite object, so *-d*.

4. "Let's go!"

▼ Show answer

Menjünk! (Or **Gyerünk!**)

5. "Come here!" (2sg).

▼ Show answer

Gyere ide!

6. "Please sit down." (formal)

▼ Show answer

Üljön le, kérem.

7. "Don't go!" (2sg)

▼ Show answer

Ne menj!

8. "Be nice!" (2sg), with *kedves*.

▼ Show answer

Légy kedves!

9. "Eat some more!" (2sg)

▼ Show answer

Egyél még!

10. Which is right for "Don't read it!": *Nem olvasd* or *Ne olvasd*?

▼ Show answer

Ne olvasd! Commands use *ne*, not *nem*.

Coming up in Chapter 8: The Subjunctive. The same *-j* forms after *hogy* ("that"): *azt akarom, hogy jöjj* (I want you to come), the ability endings *-hat/-het* (*mehetek*, I may go), and the verbs that call for the subjunctive.

🔗 "That you should..." — A kötőmód

*The subjunctive has no forms of its own: it is the **imperative** of Chapter 7 used inside a **hogy** ("that") clause. It appears whenever one person wants, asks, advises or orders another person to act: azt akarom, hogy gyere (I want you to come). The second half of the chapter covers **-hat / -het**, a suffix that turns a verb into "may" or "can" (mehetek, I may go).*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

hogy + imperative form when the subject of the second clause is a *different* person: *Azt akarom, hogy gyere.* (I want you to come.) If the subject is the same, use an infinitive instead: *Menni akarok.* (I want to go.) The suffix **-hat/-het** on any verb gives "may, can": *olvashat* (he/she may read), *mehetek* (I may go).

1. hogy + the imperative form

The verb in the *hogy* clause takes the same forms as in Chapter 7, with the person that fits the second subject, in the definite set when the object is definite.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH	FORM
Azt akarom, hogy gyere.	I want you to come.	2sg of *jön*
Azt akarom, hogy olvasd el.	I want you to read it.	definite 2sg
Kérlek, hogy segíts.	I'm asking you to help.	2sg of *segít*
Fontos, hogy tanulj.	It's important that you study.	2sg
Azt mondta, hogy jöjjek.	He/she told me to come.	1sg of *jön*
Azt akarja, hogy menjünk.	He/she wants us to go.	1pl

Watch out: "said that" or "told to"?

Azt mondta, hogy jövök. (plain present) means "He/she said that I am coming." **Azt mondta, hogy jöjjek.** (subjunctive) means "He/she told me to come." The verb form decides between a report and an order.

Which words call for the subjunctive?

TYPE	EXAMPLES
Wanting and asking	**akar** (want) · **szeretné** (would like) · **kér** (ask) · **követel** (demand)
Advising, telling, allowing	**tanácsol** (advise) · **javasol** (suggest) · **mond** (tell to) · **enged** (let, allow)
Necessity and value	**fontos, hogy** (it is important that) · **kell, hogy** (it is necessary that) · **jó, ha** (it is good if)
Purpose	**azért, hogy** (so that, in order that)

2. Purpose, avoidance and wishes

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Azért tanulok, hogy jó munkát kapjak.	I study so that I get a good job.	purpose: *azért, hogy*
Siess, nehogy elkéss!	Hurry, so you don't get late!	*nehogy* = lest, so as not to
Legyen szerencséd!	Good luck! (may you have luck)	wish with the 3sg/2sg subjunctive
Éljen a király!	Long live the king!	the third person as a toast or slogan

3. -hat / -het: "may" and "can"

Add **-hat** (back vowels) or **-het** (front vowels) to the verb stem. The result is a new verb that conjugates in the normal way: *megy + het → mehet-*, *olvas + hat → olvashat-*. The suffix says that the action is **allowed** or **possible**.

PERSON	OLVASHAT- (BACK)	MEHET- (FRONT)
I	**olvashatok**	**mehetek**
you (sg)	**olvashatsz**	**mehetsz**
he, she	**olvashat**	**mehet**
we	**olvashatunk**	**mehetünk**
you (pl)	**olvashattok**	**mehettek**
they	**olvashatnak**	**mehetnek**

With a definite object, the definite set follows: **olvashatom** (I may read it). The past and conditional also work: **mehettem** (I was allowed to go), **mehetnék** (I could go).

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
Kérdezhetek valamit?	May I ask something?
Hozhatok egy kávét?	Can I bring you a coffee?
Most már mehetsz.	You may go now.
Holnap esős idő lehet.	Tomorrow it could be rainy.
Nem mehetsz oda.	You can't (aren't allowed to) go there.

-hat/-het or tud?

Tud (Chapter 5) means a learned ability: **Tudok úszni.** (I know how to swim.) *-hat/-het* means permission or possibility: **Úszhatok?** (May I swim?) A pool rule says **Itt nem úszhat** (you may not swim here), while a person with no training says **Nem tudok úszni** (I can't swim).

Watch out: lehet and -hat

Lehet (Chapter 5) is the impersonal "it is possible, may one": **Lehet itt parkolni?** A person-specific "may I" with a verb is usually the *-hat/-het* form: **Parkolhatok itt?** Both are everyday Hungarian.

🗣️ In Use — Használatban

Wishes and permissions in conversation.

① Wishes for the visit

A:

Azt szeretném, hogy hétvégén eljöjjetek hozzánk.

I'd like you to come to us at the weekend.

B:

Szívesen! Mit hozzak?

Gladly! What shall I bring?

A:

Semmit, csak azt kérem, hogy ne késsetek.

Nothing, I only ask that you aren't late.

② Permission

A:

Bocsánat, leülhetek ide?

Excuse me, may I sit down here?

B:

Persze, üljön le.

Of course, please sit down.

A:

Kérdezhetek valamit? Tudják, hogy hol van a posta?

May I ask something? Do you know where the post office is?

③ Advice

A:

Mit javasolsz, mit tegyek?

What do you suggest I do?

B:

Fontos, hogy korán feküdj le, és hogy sokat aludj.

It's important that you go to bed early and sleep a lot.

A:

Rendben, megpróbálom.

All right, I'll try.

📋 Quick Reference — Gyorstábla

IDEA	FORM	EXAMPLE
Subjunctive	hogy + imperative form (Chapter 7)	**Azt akarom, hogy gyere.**
Same subject	infinitive instead	**Menni akarok.**
Report against order	indicative against subjunctive	**hogy jövök · hogy jöjjek**
Purpose · avoidance	azért, hogy · nehogy	**nehogy elkéss**
May, can	-hat (back) · -het (front)	**olvashat · mehet**
Permission	-hat/-het verb, normal endings	**Mehetsz. · Leülhetek?**
Ability	tud + infinitive	**Tudok úszni.**

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Gyakorlás

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. "I want you to come" (2sg).

▼ Show answer

Azt akarom, hogy gyere.

2. "I'm asking you to help" (2sg).

▼ Show answer

Kérlek, hogy segíts.

3. "He/she told me to come."

▼ Show answer

Azt mondta, hogy jöjjek.

4. "He/she said that I'm coming."

▼ Show answer

Azt mondta, hogy jövök. Present, so a report and not an order.

5. "It's important that you study" (2sg).

▼ Show answer

Fontos, hogy tanulj.

6. "Hurry, so you don't get late" (2sg).

▼ Show answer

Siess, nehogy elkéss!

7. "May I ask something?"

▼ Show answer

Kérdezhetek valamit?

8. "You may go now" (2sg).

▼ Show answer

Most már mehetsz.

9. "I want to go" and "I want you to go": give both.

▼ Show answer

Menni akarok. and **Azt akarom, hogy menj.** Same subject: infinitive. Different subject: *hogy* + subjunctive.

10. Which fits a pool sign, *Tudok úszni* or *Nem úszhat itt*?

▼ Show answer

Nem úszhat itt (You may not swim here). *Tudok úszni* is an ability, not a rule.

Coming up in Chapter 9: Compound Tenses. How the pieces combine: the past with *volt*, the past conditional with *volna*, and helper verbs in the past and conditional (*akartam volna*, *mennem kellett volna*).

🧩 Putting the Pieces Together — Összetett igeidők

*The last four chapters gave you the separate pieces: the past (Chapters 2–4), the future and helper verbs (Chapter 5), the conditional (Chapter 6), the imperative and the subjunctive (Chapters 7–8). Hungarian builds its longer forms by stacking these pieces, with **volna** and **volt** as the two fixed connecting words. Once you see the pattern, there is very little new to learn.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Three building blocks, all unchanging in the second slot: **past + volna** (would have: *olvastam volna*), **helper in the past + infinitive** (*akartam menni*, I wanted to go), and **helper + volna** for "should have / could have" (*mennem kellett volna*, I should have gone). The person shows on the first verb only.

1. past + volna: "would have"

You met this in Chapter 6. The past verb carries the person (and the definite or indefinite set), and *volna* is fixed. It is also the pattern behind regret and unreal conditions.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
Elmentem volna.	I would have gone.
Elolvastuk volna a levelet.	We would have read the letter.
Nem mondtam volna.	I wouldn't have said it.
Ha otthon lettem volna, felvettem volna.	If I had been at home, I would have picked it up.

2. Helper verbs in the past

A helper in the past takes an infinitive, just as in the present (Chapter 5); only the helper changes. The past forms come from Chapter 4: *akartam, tudtam, szerettem, próbáltam, kellett, lehetett, szabad volt*.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Akartam menni.	I wanted to go.	past of *akar*
Nem tudtam aludni.	I couldn't sleep.	past of *tud*
Szerettem olvasni.	I used to like reading.	past of *szeret*
Mennem kellett.	I had to go.	personal infinitive + *kellett*
Nem lehetett parkolni.	One couldn't park.	impersonal
Mehettem.	I was allowed to go.	-het stem in the past

3. Helper + volna: "should have, could have, would have liked"

Put **volna** after the past form of the helper. This gives the most useful regret and politeness phrases in the language.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH	PATTERN
Mennem kellett volna.	I should have gone.	personal infinitive + kellett volna
Jönnöd kellett volna.	You should have come.	2sg
Nem kellett volna!	You shouldn't have! (said for a gift)	negative, set phrase
Mehettem volna.	I could have gone.	-het + past + volna
Szerettem volna kérni egy kávét.	I would have liked to ask for a coffee. (a polite "I'd like")	szeretni + volna
Akartam volna menni.	I would have wanted to go.	akar + volna

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH	PATTERN
Lehetett volna jobb.	It could have been better.	lehetett volna

> **Watch out: szerettem volna as a polite "I'd like"**
>
> In shops and offices people say **Szerettem volna egy jegyet venni** as a softened "I would like to buy a ticket". It is more formal than **Szeretnék** (Chapter 6), and it is not strictly about the past.

4. A longer chain: helper + infinitive + volna

The order of the pieces stays the same when you add more: person-carrying verb first, *volna* after the verbs that it governs. The chain below shows every piece from this course in one place.

IDEA	HUNGARIAN
I read	**Olvastam.**
I wanted to read	**Olvasni akartam.**
I would have read	**Olvastam volna.**
I should have read	**Olvasnom kellett volna.**
I could have read	**Olvashattam volna.**
If I had read, I would have known	**Ha olvastam volna, tudtam volna.**

5. Wishes with bárcsak

A wish that did not or cannot come true uses **bárcsak** ("if only") with the conditional or the past conditional: **Bárcsak itt lennél!** (If only you were here!) **Bárcsak tudtam volna!** (If only I had known!)

6. A note on volt: the literary past perfect

Older and literary Hungarian has a past perfect: the past tense followed by **volt**, for an event completed before another event in the past. It is rare in speech. You will mostly meet it in novels: **Már elmentem volt, mikor megérkeztek.** (I had already left when they arrived.) In everyday Hungarian people use the plain past (**Már elmentem, mikor megérkeztek**) and let the context do the work. The map in Chapter 1 listed it; you only need to recognise it.

🗣️ In Use — Használatban

The compound forms in regret, courtesy and a plan that went wrong.

① A missed train

A:

Lekéstem a vonatot.

I missed the train.

B:

Korábban el kellett volna indulnod.

You should have set off earlier.

A:

Tudom. Ha korán keltem volna, elértem volna.

I know. If I had got up early, I'd have made it.

② At the ticket office

A:

Jó napot! Szerettem volna két jegyet venni Szegedre.

Good day! I'd like to buy two tickets to Szeged.

B:

Mikorra szeretne utazni?

For when do you want to travel?

A:

Holnapra, ha lehet.

For tomorrow, if possible.

③ A gift

A:

Ez a tiéd, boldog születésnapot!

This is for you, happy birthday!

B:

Jaj, nem kellett volna! Köszönöm!

Oh, you shouldn't have! Thank you!

📋 Quick Reference — Gyorstábla

IDEA	FORM	EXAMPLE
Would have	past + volna	**Elmentem volna.**
Helper in the past	past helper + infinitive	**Akartam menni.**
Had to	personal infinitive + kellett	**Mennem kellett.**
Should have	personal infinitive + kellett volna	**Mennem kellett volna.**
Could have	-hat/-het past + volna	**Mehettem volna.**
If only	bárcsak + conditional or past + volna	**Bárcsak itt lennél!**
Past perfect (literary)	past + volt	**elmentem volt**

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Gyakorlás

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. "I would have gone."

▼ Show answer

Elmentem volna.

2. "I wanted to go."

▼ Show answer

Akartam menni.

3. "I had to go."

▼ Show answer

Mennem kellett.

4. "I should have gone."

▼ Show answer

Mennem kellett volna.

5. "You (sg) should have come."

▼ Show answer

Jönnöd kellett volna.

6. "I could have gone."

▼ Show answer

Mehettem volna.

7. "You shouldn't have!" (for a gift)

▼ Show answer

Nem kellett volna!

8. "If I had read it, I would have known."

▼ Show answer

Ha elolvastam volna, tudtam volna.

9. "If only you were here!"

▼ Show answer

Bárcsak itt lennél!

10. Which word is fixed and which carries the person in *mennem kellett volna*?

▼ Show answer

Volna and *kellett* are fixed. The person shows only in the personal infinitive *mennem*.

Coming up in Chapter 10: Putting It Together. The whole verb map in one table, a decision procedure (which tense, which mood, which set of endings), an error-spotting clinic, a recap of the course, and a pointer to the suggested Hungarian Grammar 4.

🎯 One Verb, Every Form — Minden egy helyen

Nine chapters have given you the parts: the verb map, the indefinite and definite past, the irregular pasts, the future and helper verbs, the conditional, the imperative, the subjunctive and the compound tenses. This chapter puts them side by side, gives you a short procedure for choosing a form, and then tests it with an error-spotting clinic.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Every Hungarian verb form answers four questions: **when or what mood** (marker), **who** (person ending), **what kind of object** (indefinite or definite set), and **which stem** (regular, or one of the changing ones). Answer them in that order and the form follows.

1. The whole map: one verb, every form

Here is *olvas* (read) with its definite partner. Each row is one idea; the Chapter column says where to look.

IDEA	INDEFINITE (I)	DEFINITE (I ... IT)	CHAPTER
Present	olvasok	olvasom	1
Past	olvastam	olvastam	2, 3
Future	fogok olvasni	fogom olvasni	5
Conditional	olvasnék	olvasnám	6
Imperative (you)	olvass	olvasd	7
Subjunctive	hogy olvassak	hogy olvassam	8
May, can (-hat)	olvashatok	olvashatom	8

IDEA	INDEFINITE (I)	DEFINITE (I ... IT)	CHAPTER
Past conditional	**olvastam volna**	**olvastam volna**	6, 9
Must (personal infinitive)	**olvasnom kell**	**olvasnom kell**	5
Should have	**olvasnom kellett volna**	**olvasnom kellett volna**	9

Where both columns show the same form, the object makes no difference: the 1sg past *-tam* serves both sets, and *volna* and the personal infinitive never change. In other persons the past does differ (*olvastál* against *olvastad*).

2. A short decision procedure

1. **Pick the time or mood.** Did it happen (past), will it (future), would it (conditional), is it an order (imperative), is it wanted or required of another person (subjunctive), is it permitted (*-hat/-het*)?
2. **Find the stem.** Is the verb regular, an *-ik* verb, a sibilant stem, or one of the irregulars (*megy, jön, van, tesz, vesz, visz, hisz, eszik, iszik*)? Check the irregular lists in Chapters 4 and 7.
3. **Choose the harmony.** Back (*-nak, -tam, -hat*), front (*-nek, -tem, -het*) or rounded (*-ött, -öm*), following Hungarian Grammar 1.
4. **Decide indefinite or definite.** Is there a definite object (*a könyvet, ezt, őt*, a possessed noun, a proper name)? If yes, use the definite set. Remember the special *-lak/-lek* for "I ... you" (Chapter 3).
5. **Add the person ending** from the paradigm you chose, and place the extra words: *volna* after the past form, *ne* before an imperative, *hogy* before the subjunctive, *fog* before an infinitive.

3. The person carries the form: one word, one place

STRUCTURE	WHERE THE PERSON SHOWS	EXAMPLE
Past + volna	on the past verb	**Olvastunk volna.**

STRUCTURE	WHERE THE PERSON SHOWS	EXAMPLE
fog + infinitive	on *fog*	**Fogunk olvasni.**
Helper + infinitive	on the helper	**Akarunk olvasni.**
kell + personal infinitive	on the infinitive	**Olvasnunk kell.**
hogy + subjunctive	on the subjunctive verb	**Azt akarja, hogy olvassunk.**

4. Error-spotting clinic

Each sentence below has one mistake. Find it, then click.

1. Fogok olvasom a könyvet. (I will read the book.)

▼ Show answer

Fogom olvasni a könyvet. The helper takes the definite ending and the main verb is an infinitive (Chapter 5).

2. Nem menj olvasd! (Don't read it!)

▼ Show answer

Ne olvasd! Commands are negated with *ne* and one verb (Chapter 7).

3. Azt akarom, hogy jössz. (I want you to come.)

▼ Show answer

Azt akarom, hogy gyere. After *akar* with a different subject the verb is the subjunctive (Chapter 8).

4. Mennem kellünk. (We have to go.)

▼ Show answer

Mennünk kell. *Kell* never changes; the person goes on the infinitive (Chapter 5).

5. Ha tudok, mennék. (If I could, I'd go.)

▼ Show answer

Ha tudnék, mennék. An unreal condition takes the conditional in both clauses (Chapter 6).

6. Mentem volnam. (I would have gone.)

▼ Show answer

Mentem volna. *Volna* is fixed (Chapters 6 and 9).

7. Mehetnek vagyok? (May I go?)

▼ Show answer

Mehetek? The *-het* verb conjugates by itself (Chapter 8).

8. Olvasottam a levelet. (I read the letter.)

▼ Show answer

Olvastam a levelet. The stem *olvas-* takes plain *-t-* in the past, not *-ott-* (Chapter 2).

9. Voltam mentem. (I went.)

▼ Show answer

Mentem. The past of *megy* is *ment-* (Chapter 4); *voltam* would be a separate verb.

10. Szeretek egy kávét. (I would like a coffee.)

▼ Show answer

Szeretnék egy kávét. *Szeretek* means "I like"; "I would like" is the conditional (Chapter 6).

🎓 Course Complete — Hungarian Grammar 3

WHAT YOU CAN NOW DO

You can build the Hungarian verb in every tense and mood this course covers: the indefinite and definite past, the irregular pasts, the future, the conditional, the imperative and the subjunctive, plus the helper verbs and the personal infinitive. You can combine them into longer forms (*mennem kellett volna*, *olvashattam volna*), choose between the indefinite and definite sets, and check a form against a short procedure.

CHAPTER	TITLE	THE KEY IDEA
1	The Verb Map	stem + marker + person ending; indefinite and definite
2	The Indefinite Past	-t- and the linking vowels
3	The Definite Past	-tam, -tad, -ta … and -talak/-telek
4	Irregular Pasts	ment-, jött-, tett-, vett-, lett-, volt-
5	The Future and Helper Verbs	fog + infinitive, lesz, mennem kell
6	The Conditional	-nék, -nám, and past + volna
7	The Imperative	-j, olvass/olvasd, ne
8	The Subjunctive	hogy + imperative form, -hat/-het
9	Compound Tenses	kellett volna, szerettem volna, bárcsak
10	Putting It Together	the whole map, a decision procedure, a clinic

What comes next: A natural follow-up is a **Hungarian Grammar 4** on what the verb still has to learn: prefixes and aspect (*megír, elolvas*), participles and verbal nouns, and word order and focus (*Én olvasom a könyvet* against *A könyvet olvasom*). It is a suggestion, not a commitment. For practice in real situations, the Hungarian Basic Conversation courses use these forms in dialogues.