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HUNGARIAN LESSON

Hungarian Grammar 3 · Chapter 1 · The Verb Map

🗺️ 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)

STEM	MARKER	PERSON ENDING	WHOLE FORM	MEANING
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

PERSON	INDEFINITE OLVAS	DEFINITE OLVAS	INDEFINITE NÉZ	DEFINITE NÉZ
you (sg)	**olvasol**	**olvasod**	**nézel**	**nézed**
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

TENSE OR MOOD	INDEFINITE	DEFINITE	MEANING	CHAPTER
Conditional	**olvasnék** · **olvasna**	**olvasnám** · **olvasná**	I would read · he/she would read	6
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*.