

# Half-hour Hieroglyphs

Discover how the  
ancient Egyptian system  
of hieroglyphs works,  
then write your own  
name in hieroglyphs

[VoicesOfAncientEgypt.com](http://VoicesOfAncientEgypt.com)



# Welcome!

If you're interested in ancient Egypt, then I'm so glad you're here because learning about hieroglyphs will unlock so much about ancient Egyptian life.

In the next 30 minutes or so, you'll discover how hieroglyphs work and you'll write your own name in Egyptian hieroglyphs.

## Hi, I'm Melinda

Or, written another way:



I've written this guide to give you a quick, but detailed introduction to the system of hieroglyphs, and to inspire you to learn more about ancient Egypt.

I love ancient Egypt, and I wanted to be an Egyptologist since I was little. I watched every documentary I could find and bought a number of books on ancient Egypt. Can you relate?

While I did take some detours along the way (can you believe I almost became an accountant?), I eventually made my way back to my first true love and earned a Ph.D. in Egyptology.

Understanding ancient Egypt on a deeper level is such a joy and so empowering! Because I want you to have that same feeling, teaching became a passion.

But I wanted to go beyond the classroom to reach more people like you – people in love with ancient Egypt. That's why I started my YouTube channel and website: Voices of Ancient Egypt. And it's why I created this guide to get you started.

Now that I've introduced myself, I'd love it if you'd introduce yourself – in hieroglyphs! By the end of this guide, you will have written your name in hieroglyphs.

Snap a picture of your hieroglyphic name and post it on Instagram and tag me at @VoicesOfAncientEgypt. Or email it to [melinda@voicesofancientegypt.com](mailto:melinda@voicesofancientegypt.com)

I can't wait to see it!

# Introduction

Most people think that hieroglyphs were like modern emoji — pictures that communicate ideas (rather than sounds).

But they actually are much more like our modern text speak.

In this section, I'll show you why.

## Hieroglyphs and Sounds

Have you passed a note or sent a text message “in code” like this?



In this type of puzzle, the pictures are used for the sound of the thing shown, rather than the name of the thing:

- the eye actually means “I”.
- the female sheep (called a ewe) means “you” because “ewe” and “you” are pronounced the same way in English.

The heart is used in a different way. Instead of being used for its sound, we should read it as suggesting the idea of love.

Reading the pictures in this way, we get “I love you.”

A more modern example of this same type of “code” would be common text speak, such as in this example:



The letters C and U and the number 8 are used only for how their names sound – “see”, “you”, and “ate” – and not for their usual meanings. So, C U L8R actually means “see you later.”

In the same way, we could use:



(bee + leaves) to mean “believes” in English.


# How to read hieroglyphs

So, why am I talking to you about picture-word puzzles and text messaging?


Because Egyptian hieroglyphs worked in exactly the same way as text speak and picture-word puzzles.

Let's see an example of how this worked in Egyptian hieroglyphs...

## Hieroglyphs representing complete words

The hieroglyph that is a picture of a mouth  can be used to write the word for mouth or it can be used for its sound (like our letter r).



An example of the  hieroglyph being used for the word "mouth."


# How to read hieroglyphs

OK, so now you know that hieroglyphs can represent complete words.

But they can also represent sounds that can be used to build words.

Let's see how this works...

## Hieroglyphs representing sounds that build words

 can also be used as a “r” sound in another word, just as 8 was used in the word “later” and a bee was used in “believes.”

If we combine the mouth hieroglyph (sound of the letter *r*) with a water hieroglyph (sound of the letter *n*), it makes the ancient Egyptian word for “name” – *rn*.

The Egyptian word for “name”:



*rn* (pronounced today like “ren”)

### What about vowel sounds?

You probably noticed that there are two consonants and no vowels in the word for name: *rn*. The ancient Egyptians did not have vowels in their hieroglyphic writing system. They would have used vowel sounds when saying words aloud, but much of the time we don't know what these sounds were.

To be able to say words like this one aloud, English-speaking Egyptologists often add a short “e” sound between consonants in Egyptian words. This is why we pronounce *rn* as “ren.”



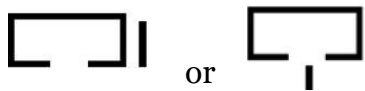
## Using a “Meaning Sign”

The hieroglyph that is a simple plan of a house can be used to write the word for house. But it can also be used for its sound values (*p* and *r*) to make other words.

To help you tell apart words with the same signs, another hieroglyph – a “meaning sign” – is added to the end of most words.

Both of the words below would represent the sounds *p* and *r* together (pronounced today like “per” or “pair”). But the meaning sign lets us know which word we should recognize.

Using a dash after or below a hieroglyph shows that it is being used to write what it pictures. So “house” (*pr*) would be written like this:



“Go out” (*pr*) would be written with a different meaning sign. The walking legs let you know that the word has something to do with moving:



The image to the right is an example of how these meaning signs were used in an ancient text.



This example is from a stela belonging to a man named Heqa-ib, which is now in the British Museum (1671). It shows these two uses of the house hieroglyph.

In this part of the text, Heqa-ib says of himself: **“I went out from my house.”**

# Do you realize that you just read your first Egyptian hieroglyphs?

You now can recognize the words for  
“house,” “go out,” and “name”!

Stop for a minute and congratulate yourself  
for getting this far (and do a little happy  
dance – I won’t tell)!



Now, let’s take this a step further and learn  
how to write your own name in hieroglyphs.





Horemheb celebrating having received the  
gold of honor.  
(Photograph by Rob Koopman)

# Write your name in hieroglyphs

Now that you know how hieroglyphs work, it's time to start combining sounds so that you can write your name in hieroglyphs.

## Combining sounds

Earlier, we saw how to combine  (*r*) and  (*n*) to write the ancient Egyptian word for “name” (*rn*):



Using these and other common hieroglyphs, we can start writing our own names. Let's take a look at some examples.

The hieroglyph of a lower leg is used for the sound like our letter *b*:



Let's put this together with the hieroglyphs we already learned.

Remember that the ancient Egyptians did not write vowels? Good. Let's do this!

How could you use this information to spell the name Ben in hieroglyphs?

That's right, like this:



combining *b* and *n* for Ben (*bn*).



# Write your name in hieroglyphs

Remember how the words for house and go out had those meaning signs at their ends?

Egyptian names also need a meaning sign to indicate that they are names and not words.

## The name "meaning sign"

The name meaning sign lets you know that you are reading a name, and not something else spelled the same way.

The meaning signs used for names were:





a seated man (for men's names)










a seated woman (for women's names)

Examples of names written with their meaning signs:

Hieroglyphs	Sounds	English Version
	<i>bn</i>	Ben
	<i>dn</i>	Jen

Use the list of hieroglyphs and examples on the next few pages to find the signs you need for the sounds in your name.

# hieroglyphs with sounds like those in English






Hieroglyph	Transliteration	How it would be written in English	Closest sound in English
	<i>i</i>	i	i (pronounced like “ee”) *
 or 	<i>y</i>	y	y (a stronger “y” sound than “i”, also often pronounced like “ee”)
 or 	<i>w</i>	w or u	either w or a long u (like “oo”) **
	<i>b</i>	b	b
	<i>p</i>	p	p

\* called *yōd*, a weak “y” sound like at the end of the word *tea*, but often shown in English as “i” and pronounced like “ee”

\*\* called *w* or *waw*, a “w” sound, but sometimes shown in English as “u” and pronounced like “oo”

Use these signs if you have any of these sounds in your name.

## hieroglyphs with sounds like those in English (cont.)

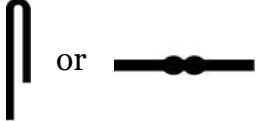

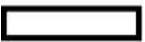




Hieroglyph	Transliteration	How it would be written in English	Closest sound in English
	<i>f</i>	f	f
	<i>m</i>	m	m
	<i>n</i>	n	n <sup>‡</sup>
	<i>r</i>	r	r <sup>‡</sup>
	<i>h</i>	h	h

<sup>‡</sup> *There was no L sound in ancient Egyptian.*






*Instead, the Egyptians used r (or sometimes n and r together) for the L sound in foreign names.*

*If you have an L in your name, substitute r or nr. I did this with my name on page 2!*

## hieroglyphs with sounds like those in English (cont.)

Hieroglyph	Transliteration	How it would be written in English	Closest sound in English
 or 	<i>s</i>	s	s
	<i>š</i>	sh	“sh” as in ship
	<i>k</i>	k	k
	<i>g</i>	g	g (a hard “g” as in “gate”)
	<i>t</i>	t	t
	<i>d</i>	d	d




# hieroglyphs with sounds not quite like those in English

Hieroglyph	Transliteration	How it would be written in English	Closest sound in English
	ʾ	a <sup>††</sup>	(called aleph) a glottal stop – the sound made in the middle of “uh oh”
	ʿ	a <sup>††</sup>	(called ayin) a sound made by clenching the throat muscles, like saying “ah” while swallowing
	ḥ	h	(called second h or dotted h) a breathy “h” pronounced in the throat
	ḫ	kh	(called third h) a guttural sound like in the Scottish “loch”
	ḫ	kh	(called fourth h) close to third h, but softer and closer to English “sh”

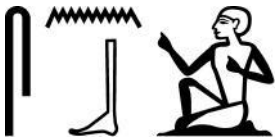
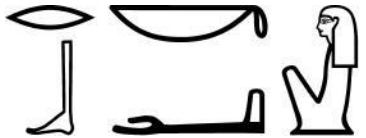



<sup>††</sup> For ease of pronunciation, English-speaking Egyptologists usually treat: ʾ and ʿ as a long “ah” sound. Use one of these signs if you have an “ah” sound in your name.

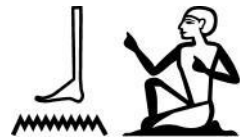






## hieroglyphs with sounds not quite like those in English

Hieroglyph	Transliteration	How it would be written in English	Closest sound in English
	<i>ḳ</i>	q or k	(called q or qaf) close to “k”, but pronounced at the back of the mouth/top of the throat
	<i>t̄</i>	tj	(called second t) a soft “t” that sounds much like the “ch” in church or the “t” in adventure
	<i>d̄</i>	dj	(called second d) a soft “d” that sounds much like English “j”, such as in joke, or like “dg” in judge

# Examples of ancient Egyptian and modern names

Hieroglyph	Trans- literation	English pronunciation
	<i>snb</i>	Seneb (sen-eb)
	<i>rbk<sup>c</sup></i>	Rebecca
	<i>wndy</i>	Wendy
	<i>ḏwrs</i>	Jules
	<i>din</i>	Dean

Hieroglyph	Trans- literation	English pronunciation
	<i>bn</i>	Ben
	<i>špsi</i>	Shepsi (shep-see)
	<i>ḏ<sup>c</sup>in</i>	Jane (or Jain)
 or 	<i>ḏ or ḏ<sup>c</sup>d</i>	Chad

# Time to practice...

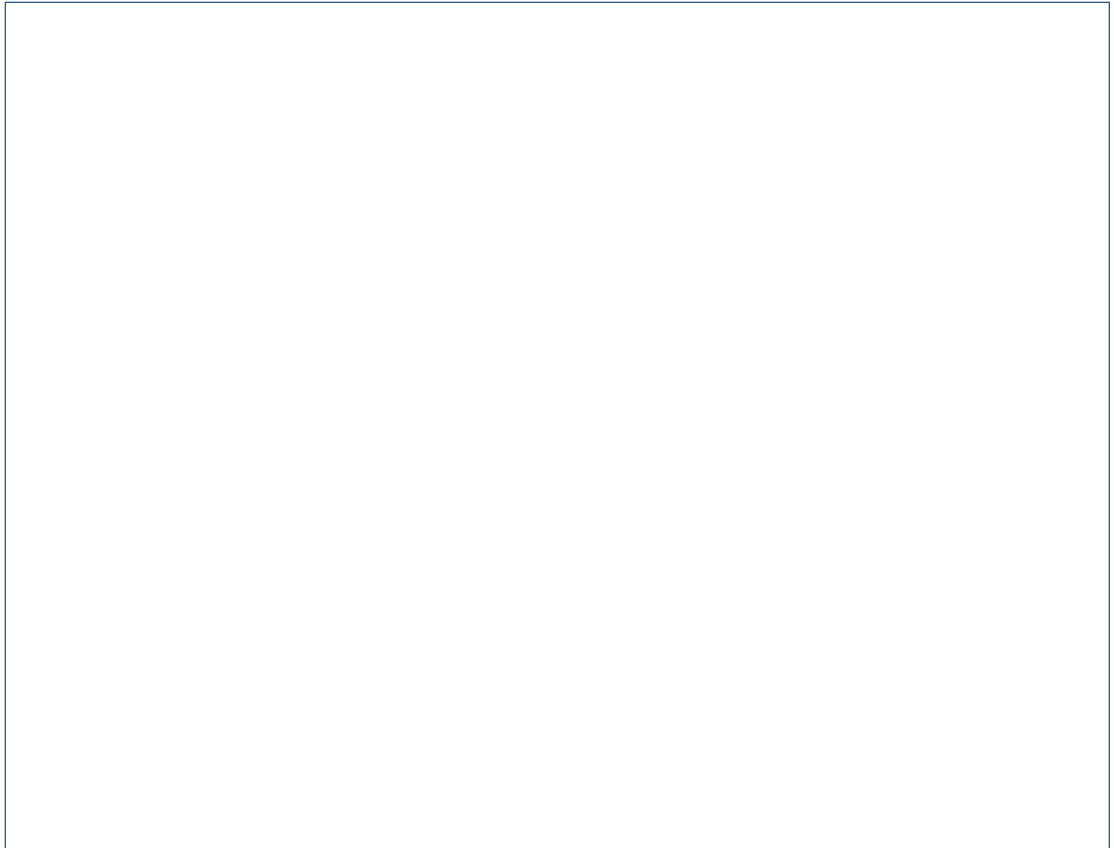
Use the lists of hieroglyphs and example names on the previous pages to find the signs you need for your own name.

Practice writing the hieroglyphs you will need in the space on this page.

When you're ready, turn the page and write your name in hieroglyphs.

## Practice writing your name in hieroglyphs...

Don't be too hard on yourself if you can't draw the hieroglyphs perfectly (I'm right there with you!). It's all part of the fun! Just keep practicing and try to get the main elements of each of the signs.



# your name in hieroglyphs!

Write your name in hieroglyphs in  
the box to the right.

Snap a photo of your hieroglyphic  
name and post it on Instagram and  
tag me: @VoicesOfAncientEgypt.

Instagram not your thing? No  
problem. Email the photo of your  
name to me at: [Melinda@  
VoicesOfAncientEgypt.com](mailto:Melinda@VoicesOfAncientEgypt.com)


You can also send me any questions  
about this guide, or about the  
broader field of Egyptology.

I can't wait to hear from you and  
see your first written hieroglyphs!



I just wrote my name  
in hieroglyphs!

Download the guide at  
**[VoicesofAncientEgypt.com/glyphs](https://VoicesofAncientEgypt.com/glyphs)**  
and learn how to write your own name  
in hieroglyphs!





## Ready to learn more about ancient Egypt...?

I hope you've had as much fun going through this guide as I've had putting it together.

If you're interested in learning more about ancient Egypt, subscribe to my YouTube Channel to learn more about Ancient Egypt in fun and informative whiteboard-style videos.

Also be on the lookout for my next Voices of Ancient Egypt email newsletter, in which I'll shine the spotlight on a particular aspect of ancient Egypt and bring you the latest news and discoveries.

You can also follow me on Instagram and Facebook (and don't forget to tag me when you post your name in hieroglyphs!).

I promise that, at Voices of Ancient Egypt, there'll be none of the overly-dramatic plots you'll see in Hollywood movies, but also no confusing academic jargon that you might find in some books.

Instead, you'll learn about what life (and death) was really like in ancient Egypt.

Best,

Melinda



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