

VANUATU BISLAMA

A brief guide to using the Vanuatu Bislama language

About Vanuatu Bislama

Bislama is an English-based creole language in the Melanesian Pidgin group, closely related to Papua New Guinea Tok Pisin and Solomon Islands Pijin. It is an official language of Vanuatu, alongside English and French.

The language developed during the 1800s through Pacific shipping trade and plantations in Queensland, Fiji, and Samoa, where many ni-Vanuatu (Vanuatu people) worked as indentured labourers. When they returned home in the early 1900s, they brought Pidgin with them, and it quickly spread throughout the islands and was later called Bislama. A creole develops from a pidgin when it becomes a fully developed language spoken natively by a community (often by the next generation). This is the case for Bislama which today is the first language of a number of children in multilingual households in urban areas.

Bislama has a large vocabulary drawn mainly from English and French, along with grammatical structures and local terms from Vanuatu's indigenous languages. With more than 120 indigenous languages spoken across Vanuatu's 80-plus islands, Bislama plays an important role in uniting the country as a common trading and communication language, often referred to as a lingua franca.

The Bislama alphabet | Alfabet blong Vanuatu Bislama

The core Bislama alphabet has 22 letters.

The vowels **A, E, I, O, U** have the same pronunciation as most other Pacific languages, including te reo Māori.

The consonants are **B, D, F, G, H, J, K, L, M, N, P, R, S, T, V, W** and **Y**. Bislama also includes three consonant combinations: **AE, AO** and **NG**.

The sounds of Bislama are very similar to those used in English and words are generally spelt the way they sound.



Everyday language

ENGLISH	BISLAMA
Hello	Halo
Good morning	Gud moning
Greetings everyone	Halo long yufala evriwan
I'm pleased to meet you	Mi glad blong mitim yu
Goodbye	Tata
How are you?	Olsem wanem?
I am well, thank you	Mi oraet, tankyu
I am tired	Mi taed
I am sick	Mi sik
I am so-so	Mi olsem nomo
I am happy	Mi glad
And yourself?	Be yu?
See you later	Lukim yu
See you tomorrow	Lukim yu tumoro
See you next week	Lukim yu neks wik
Blessings	God i blesem yu
Good luck	Gudlak
Call me	Ringim mi
Send me a message	Mesejem mi
Please	Plis

Words of encouragement

ENGLISH	BISLAMA
Great work	Yu mekem wan gudfala wok
You can do it	Yu save mekem nomo
Congratulations	Kongrajulesen
All the best	Gudlak
Stay strong	Stanap strong
Give it a go	Traem nomo
Excellent	Nambawan
Well done	Naes tumas
God is good	God i gud

ENGLISH	BISLAMA
Thank you (very much)	Tankyu (tumas)
You're welcome	I oraet nomo
Excuse me / Sorry	Sori
Have you eaten?	Yu kakae finis?
Come and eat with me	Kam yumitu kakae
Thank you for the food	Tankyu long kakae
Yes	Yes
No	No
Have a good day	Pasem wan gudfala dei
Have a good week	Pasem wan gudfala wik
Have a good weekend	Pasem wan gudfala wiken
Have a good holiday	Pasem wan gudfala holidei
Merry Christmas	Meri Krismes
Happy New Year	Hapi Niu Yia
Happy birthday	Hapi betdei
Happy Vanuatu Bislama Language Week	Hapi Vanuatu Bislama Langwis Wik
Lots of love	Bigfala lav

Relationship-building

ENGLISH	BISLAMA
What is your name?	Wanem nem blong yu?
My name is _____	Nem blong mi _____
Where are you from?	Yu blong wea?
I am from _____	Mi blong _____
Where do you live?	Yu liv wea? / Yu stap wea?
I live in _____	Mi liv long / Mi stap long _____



Email language

ENGLISH	BISLAMA
I hope you're well	Mi hop se yu oraet
Thank you for your email	Tankyu long imel blong yu
Thank you for your response	Tankyu blong kambak long mi
Thank you for your clarification	Tankyu blong mekem i klia
Thank you for your help	Tankyu long help blong yu
That's a good question	Hemia hem i wan gudfala kwestin
I will come back to you tomorrow	Bae mi kambak long yu tumoro
I will come back to you next week	Bae mi kambak long yu neks wik
I will come back to you soon	Bae mi kambak long yu ino long taem
Apologies for the delayed response	Sori we mi no kambak kwiktaem long yu
As per my previous email...	Folem lasfala imel we mi bin sendem...
Please see attached document	Plis lukluk dokiumen long atajmen
As per our conversation...	Folem storian blong yumitu*... / Folem storian blong yumi**...
Happy to discuss	Mi glad blong tokabaot
I look forward to your response	Mi luk fowod long ansa blong yu
I look forward to seeing you	Mi luk fowod blong luk yu
Kind regards	Wetem rispek
Cheers	Tankyu tumas

* Yumitu means 'You and I' (us two).

** Yumi means 'You (which can be plural) and I'.

Talking about work

ENGLISH	BISLAMA
Where do you work?	Yu wok wea?
I work at _____	Mi wok long _____
I have worked here for _____ months / years	Mi wok _____ manis / yia nao long ples yia
What is your job?	Wanem wok nao yu stap mekem?
I am a _____	Mi wan _____
Teacher	Tija
Student	Studen
Nurse	Nes
Doctor	Dokta
Manager	Maneja
Police officer	Polis
Advisor	Advaesa
I am a librarian	Mi wok long laebrari
I am a musician	Mi stap plei musik
Where do you study?	Yu skul wea?
I study at high school / I study at the University of _____	Mi skul long hae skul / Mi stadi long Yuniveseti blong _____

Numbers

0 Siro	1 Wan	2 Tu	3 Tri	4 Fo	5 Faev	6 Siks	7 Seven	8 Eit	9 Naen
10 Ten	11 Leven	12 Twelv	13 Tetin	14 Fotin	15 Fiften				
16 Sikstin	17 Seventin	18 Eitin	19 Naentin	20 Twenti					



Proverbs

Wan stik faea i no save mekem sospen i hot.

Meaning One piece of firewood cannot heat a cooking pot.

Application Teamwork achieves more than working alone.

Yu stanap long bak blong totel afta yu lukaotem totel.

Meaning You're standing on the back of the turtle looking for the turtle.

Application You are searching for something that is right in front of you. This could be interpreted as striving to obtain more in life when all the ingredients for happiness are already within reach.

Nabangga taem hem i kam natora, bae had blong benem.

Meaning When a branch becomes mature, it is hard to bend.

Application It is easier to teach and guide people when they are young; once they are older and set in their ways, change becomes difficult. You cannot teach an old dog new tricks.

Prayers

BISLAMA	ENGLISH
Prea Yumi prei Papa God long Heven Mifala i askem blesing blong yu long wik ia Long evriwan long mifala Long nem blong Jisas, mifala i stap prei olsem Amen	Prayer Let us pray Our heavenly father We ask for your blessings this week To each and every one of us In Jesus' name we pray Amen
Prea blong blesem kakae Papa God Mifala i talem tankyu from kakae ia Plis blesem ol han we oli priperem, mo letem kakae ia i givim paoa long bodi blong mifala Mifala i stap prei olsem long nem blong Jisas Amen	Blessing of food Father God We thank you for this food Please bless the hands that prepared it, and let it give strength and health for our bodies We pray in Jesus' name Amen

He Kaikōhau

Below is a traditional Te Reo Māori karakia or kaikōhau used in the Aotearoa context.

Nau mai ngā hua. Nau mai ngā pai. Nau mai kia nui. Kia hāwere ai. Tihei mauri ora.

A kaikōhau is an expression of hope welcoming all things positive – including bountiful harvests, good health and work or study achievements. It can be used during Matariki celebrations as you prepare for the new year ahead, before you share a meal, or to open or close a meeting. Here is an adaptation of this kaikōhau in Bislama, with an English translation.

Letem evri samting we i gro i kam

Letem evri samting we i gud i kam

Letem i kam plante

Mo i fulap

Ol blesing we i mekem laef i kam strong mo fulap long

gudfala samting

Welcome all that has grown

Welcome all that is good

May it be plentiful

And in abundance

Lifeforce blessings

Cultural note

Kastom

Kastom comes from the English word 'custom' and encompasses the customs, beliefs, and practices passed down through generations, strongly shaping Ni-Vanuatu identity. Deeply rooted in spirituality, rituals, and community traditions, it influences ceremonies, dance, art, clothing, and even village governance. Each island in Vanuatu has its own variations of kastom, but all share a common vision of respect for ancestors, harmony with nature, and the transmission of knowledge.

An example of kastom is the way land connects Ni-Vanuatu to their ancestors and defines identity and belonging. Land is generally passed down from generation to generation and the majority of land in Vanuatu is held under customary ownership.



Yumi wan solwara | We are one ocean

Each Melanesian nation has its own unique identity but the phrase *Yumi wan solwara* emphasises the region's commonalities and unity. Its literal meaning is "You and me, one saltwater" but it is usually translated as "We are one ocean."

