

25 Lebanese verbs, three tenses

One pattern, three tenses, the 25 verbs you hear most in Beirut, five exercises. Say every form out loud.

NAME _____

DATE _____

A. ONE VERB, THREE TENSES

KATAB / BYEKTOb · TO WRITE

Lebanese verbs have a past form and a present form. The rest is a small word or prefix in front: **b-** for habits and the present, **'am** for "right now", **rah** for the future. Learn this grid and you can conjugate most verbs.

PERSON	PAST	PRESENT (B-)	FUTURE (RAH)	ARABIC (PRESENT)
ana I	katabt	bektob	rah ektob	بكتب
enta you (m)	katabt	btektob	rah tektob	بتكتب
enti you (f)	katabti	btektbi	rah tektbi	بتكتبي
huwwe he	katab	byektob	rah yektob	بيكتب
hiyye she	kabet	btektob	rah tektob	بتكتب
nehna we	katabna	mnektob	rah nektob	منكتب
entu you (pl)	kabtu	btektbu	rah tektbu	بتكتبوا
hinne they	kabu	byektbu	rah yektbu	بيكتبوا

Notice: "we" takes **mn-**, not **b-** (mnektob, mnruh, mnehki). **enta** and **hiyye** share one present form (btektob); **ana** and **enta** share one past form (katabt). Context does the rest.

b- and 'am = present

bektob = I write, I am writing.
beshrab 'ahwe kell yom = I drink coffee every day.

Put **'am** in front for "right now": **'am bektob** = I'm writing (at the moment). **shu 'am ta'mel?** = what are you doing?

rah = future

rah + the present without **b-**:
rah ehkik bukra = I'll call you tomorrow. **rah nruh 'a Beirut bel-sayf** = we're going to Beirut in the summer.

No **b-** after **baddi**, **lazem**, **fiyyi** either: **baddi ektob**, **lazem ruh**, **fiyyi ehki?**

Negation: ma or mish

Put **ma** in front of a verb: **ma katabt** (I didn't write), **ma bektob** (I don't write), **ma rah ruh** (I won't go).

baddi, **'andi**, **fiyyi** also take **ma**: **ma baddi**. Adjectives, nouns and places take **mish**: **mish mabsut**, **mish hon**.

COMMANDS

ADD -I TO A WOMAN, -U TO A GROUP

ruh! go (f: ruhi) · **ta'a!** come (f: ta'i) · **kol!** eat (f: koli) · **eshrab!** drink (f: eshrabi) · **esma'!** listen (f: esma'i) · **'ol!** say (f: 'oli). Negative command: **ma truh!** don't go.

B. SAY IT THE BEIRUT WAY

- **b- sticks to the verb.** bektob is one word, two syllables: **bek-tob**. Before a consonant it is just a quick b: **btruh**, **bshuf**, **bhebb**. Do not add a vowel (not *bi-truh*).
- **e and o, not a and u.** Beirut says **yektob**, **byeshrab**, **kol**, where Standard Arabic has *yaktub*, *yashrab*, *kul*.
- **ق is a glottal stop.** 'al (he said), by'ul (he says), 'ahwe (coffee). **j** sounds like the s in "pleasure": **jit** (I came), **eja** (he came).

Ex. 1 Complete the grid: shereb / byeshrab (to drink)

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Three forms are given in green. Fill in the rest with the pattern of katab above. Say each form as you write it.

PERSON	PAST	PRESENT (B-)	FUTURE (RAH)
ana	shrebt		
enta			
enti			
huwwe		byeshrab	
hiyye			
nehna			rah neshrab
entu			
hinne			

THE 25 VERBS

• = IRREGULAR

Past and present are given for **huwwe** (he), the form dictionaries use. Build the others with the grid on page 1. Tick a verb once you can say both forms without looking.

ENGLISH	PAST (HE)	PRESENT (HE)	ARABIC	EXAMPLE
☐ go	rah •	byruh	بيروح	bruh 'ash-shighl I go to work
☐ come	eja •	byeji	بيجي	hiyye ejat mbareh she came yesterday
☐ do, make	'emel	bya'mel	بيعمل	shu 'am ta'mel? what are you doing?
☐ eat	akal •	byekol	بياكل	akalt tabbouleh I ate tabbouleh

☐ drink	shereb	byeshrab	بيشرب	beshrab 'ahwe I drink coffee
☐ know	'eref	bya'ref	بيعرف	ma ba'ref I don't know
☐ want	ken baddo	baddo (l: baddi)	بدو	baddi mayy I want water (no b-, takes endings)
☐ say	'al •	by'ul	بيقول	shu 'elt? what did you say?
☐ see	shaf •	byshuf	بيشوف	shift el-film? did you see the film?
☐ speak, talk	haka	byehki	بيحكي	btehki 'arabi? do you speak Arabic?
☐ understand	fehem	byefham	بيفهم	fhem! got it!
☐ learn	t'allam	byet'allam	بيتعلم	'am bet'allam lebnani I'm learning Lebanese
☐ work	shteghel	byeshteghel	بيشتغل	wein bteshteghel? where do you work?
☐ live (reside)	seken	byeskon	بيسكن	saken b-Berlin I live in Berlin (participle, very common)
☐ sleep	nam •	bynam	بينام	nemt bakkir I slept early
☐ wake up	fa' •	byfi'	بيفيق	bfi' 'as-sab'a I wake up at seven
☐ buy	shtara	byeshtri	بيشتري	shtarit khebez I bought bread
☐ pay	dafa'	byedfa'	بيدفع	khalas, ana bedfa' no, no, I'm paying
☐ take	akhad •	byekhod	بياخد	khod taxi take a taxi
☐ give	a'ta •	bya'ti	بيعطي	a'tini l-hsab give me the bill
☐ love, like	habb	byhebb	بيحب	bhebb el-man'ushe I love manoushe
☐ read	'ara	bye'ra	بيقرا	be'ra 'arabi I read Arabic
☐ write	katab	byektob	بيكتب	ktob esmak write your name
☐ walk, leave	meshi	byemshi	بيمشي	yalla nemshi? shall we go? (lit. walk)
☐ can	ken fiyyo	fiyyo (l: fiyyi)	فيو	ma fiyyi I can't (works like baddi)

The irregular ones •

- **Hollow verbs** (a long vowel in the middle) shorten it before a consonant ending: rah → **reht** (I went), shaf → **shift**, nam → **nemt**, 'al → **'elt**, fa' → **fe't**. The present keeps the long vowel: bruh, bshuf, bnam, b'ul, bfi'.
- **akal, akhad** (eat, take) start with a vowel: past akalt, akhad; present **bekol, bekhod. eja** (come) is the odd one out: **jit** (I came), **ejet** (she came), present **beji**, byeji.
- **a'ta, haka, shtara** end in -a. The -a becomes -it before an ending: **a'tit** (I gave), **hkit** (I talked), **shtarit** (I bought).
- **baddi** and **fiyyi** are not verbs at all: they take the endings you know from "my, your": baddi, baddak, baddik, baddo, badda, baddna, baddkon, baddon.

C. EXERCISES**Ex. 2 Past, now or future?**

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Tick P (past), N (now / habit) or F (future). The prefix tells you.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 rah shuf el-film bukra. ☐ P ☐ N ☐ F | 2 beshrab 'ahwe kell yom. ☐ P ☐ N ☐ F |
| 3 reht 'a Jbeil mbareh. ☐ P ☐ N ☐ F | 4 hiyye bteshteghel b-bank. ☐ P ☐ N ☐ F |
| 5 akalna tabbouleh lyom. ☐ P ☐ N ☐ F | 6 rah nehki 'arabi ba'd sene. ☐ P ☐ N ☐ F |
| 7 ana 'am bektob halla'. ☐ P ☐ N ☐ F | 8 shtarit khebez es-sobh. ☐ P ☐ N ☐ F |

Ex. 3 Change the tense

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Rewrite the verb in the tense in brackets.

- 1 bekol (past) → _____
- 2 shift (future) → _____
- 3 rah ruh (now) → _____
- 4 hiyye katabet (now) → _____
- 5 bnam (past) → _____
- 6 entu dafa'tu (future) → _____

Ex. 4 Say no

__ / 6

Negate each sentence. ma or mish?

- 1 bektob → _____
- 2 rah ruh → _____
- 3 'andi wa't → _____
- 4 huwwe baddo → _____
- 5 shift → _____
- 6 ana mabsut → _____

D. SPEAKING: YOUR DAY

PAIR WORK

Ex. 5 Your day

__ / 5

Write five sentences about yourself: two about yesterday (past), two about every day (b-), one about tomorrow (rah). Use at least five different verbs from the verb table.

1 · MBAREH (YESTERDAY)

2 · MBAREH

3 · KELL YOM (EVERY DAY)

4 · KELL YOM

5 · BUKRA (TOMORROW)

With a partner: ask **shu 'melt mbareh?** (what did you do yesterday?) and **shu rah ta'mel bukra?** (what will you do tomorrow?). To a woman: **shu 'melti, shu rah ta'mli.** Note one answer each, then switch.

PARTNER · MBAREH

PARTNER · BUKRA

Done? Speaking check

- ☐ I said the whole katab grid out loud, all three tenses, with mn- for "we".
- ☐ I can say past and present of 15 verbs from the verb table without looking.
- ☐ I told my partner (or my mirror) my five sentences from Ex. 5 without reading.

Answer key

For teachers and self-learners. Remove this page before handing the sheet out in class.

Ex. 1 **Past:** shrebt · shrebt · shrebt · shereb · sherbet · shrebna · shrebtu · sherbu · **Present:** beshrab · bteshrab · bteshrabi · byeshrab · bteshrab · mneshrab · bteshrabu · byeshrabu · **Future:** rah eshrab · rah teshrab · rah teshrabi · rah yeshrab · rah teshrab · rah neshrab · rah teshrabu · rah yeshrabu. (Accept small vowel differences such as shirbet or bishrab; Beirut speakers vary too.)

Ex. 2 1 F · 2 N · 3 P · 4 N · 5 P · 6 F · 7 N · 8 P

Ex. 3 1 akalt · 2 rah shuf · 3 bruh (or 'am bruh) · 4 hiyye btektob · 5 nemt · 6 entu rah tedfa'u

Ex. 4 1 ma bektob · 2 ma rah ruh (mish rah ruh is also heard) · 3 ma 'andi wa't · 4 huwwe ma baddo · 5 ma shift · 6 ana mish mabsut

Ex. 5 Open answer. A model: 1 mbareh reht 'ash-shighl. · 2 akalt man'ushe w shrebt 'ahwe. · 3 kell yom bfi' 'as-sab'a. · 4 'am bet'allam lebnani kell yom. · 5 bukra rah shuf film ma' sahbi.

TEACHER'S NOTES

- Timing: about 50 minutes for the full sheet. It splits well into two lessons: tenses (A, B, Ex. 1 to 3) and negation plus speaking (Ex. 4 and 5).
- Drill the katab grid chorally before Ex. 1: you say the person, the class says all three forms. Make a point of **mn-** for "we" (mnektob, mnruh); learners who know Egyptian or Syrian textbooks often say bnektob.
- Ex. 4 is the key exercise. Verbs and the verb-like words baddi, 'andi, fiyyi take **ma**; everything else takes **mish**. Learners coming from Egyptian add -sh (ma ba'refsh); Beirut speech mostly leaves it out.
- Common mistakes: keeping b- after baddi, lazem, fiyyi and rah (baddi bektob, rah bruh). Correct it every time: baddi ektob, rah ruh. Also watch for the Fusha future sa- or sawfa instead of rah.
- 'am: in fast speech the b- after 'am often disappears (shu 'am ta'mel?, 'am yehki). Accept both 'am bektob and 'am ektob.
- Transliteration: ' = glottal stop (the Beirut ق), ' = 'ayn, j as the s in "pleasure", kh as in Scottish "loch", e and o as in Beirut speech. In the Lebanese mountains and the south you will also hear the ق as a real q.

NEXT WORKSHEET

Worksheet 5: 100 core Lebanese words in six groups plus 20 everyday expressions and slang (yalla, tfaddal, ya'tik el-'afye ...), with a 7-day plan. Free at yallahspeak.com/worksheets/lebanese-arabic.

To tell an AI partner about your day in Lebanese Arabic and get your verb forms corrected as you speak, try the Yallah Speak app (free to start, iOS and Android).