

A brief guide to the languages of the world

How many languages are there in the world?

It is estimated that there are 6,809 'living languages' in the world today.

The geographic distribution of these languages is as follows.

	<i>Total Living Languages</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
The Americas	1,013	15%
Africa	2,058	30%
Europe	230	3%
Asia	2,197	32%
The Pacific	1,311	19%

Source: Ethnologue 14th Edition

What is the rarest language in the world?

357 languages have fewer than 50 speakers.

46 languages are classified as having just one speaker.

Some languages have undoubtedly become extinct since these statistics were compiled.

Source: Ethnologue 14th Edition

What are the world's most common languages?

Native speakers

These are the world's top 10 languages by the number of 'native speakers'. Your 'native' language is the first one you learn as a baby or small child.

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Number of native speakers (millions)</i>
1	Mandarin Chinese	1,200
2	English	330
3	Spanish	300
4	Hindi/Urdu	250
5	Arabic	200
6	Bengali	185
7	Portuguese	160
8	Russian	160
9	Japanese	125
10	German	100

Source: Language Today Volume 2 1997

What are the world's most common languages?

Native and secondary speakers

These are the world's top 10 languages by the number of native and 'secondary' speakers. This includes people who have learned a language later on life.

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Number of native and secondary speakers (millions)</i>
1	Mandarin Chinese	1,220
2	English	480
3	Spanish	320
4	Russian	285
5	French	265
6	Hindi/Urdu	250
7	Arabic	221
8	Portuguese	188
9	Bengali	185
10	Japanese	133

Source: Language Today Volume 2 1997

Where are different languages spoken?

The following list shows the number of countries in which the world's most common languages are widely spoken.

<i>Language</i>	<i>Number of countries</i>	<i>Including...</i>
English	115	Britain, USA, Canada
French	35	France, Canada, Belgium
Arabic	24	Egypt, Algeria, Morocco
Spanish	20	Spain, Mexico, Colombia
Russian	16	Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus
German	9	Germany, Austria, Switzerland
Mandarin Chinese	5	China, Taiwan, Singapore
Portuguese	5	Portugal, Brazil, Mozambique
Hindi/Urdu	2	India, Pakistan
Bengali	1	Bangladesh
Japanese	1	Japan

Source: Language Today Volume 2 1997



How do you say "Hello" in different languages?

Arabic

Al salaam a'alaykum (pronounced Ahl sah-LAHM ah ah-LAY-koom)

Chinese

Ni hao (pronounced Nee HaOW)

French

Bonjour (pronounced bohn-ZHOOR)

German

Guten Tag (pronounced GOOT-en Tahk)

Greek

Kalimera (pronounced Kah-lee-MAY-rah)

Italian

Buon giorno (pronounced bwohn-JOR-no)

Japanese

Konnichiwa (pronounced Ko-NEE-chee-wah)

Korean

Annyong ha shimnikka (pronounced An-YOH HASHim-ni-kah)

Portuguese

Bom dia (pronounced bohM DEE-ah)

Russian

Zdravstvuite (pronounced ZzDRAST-vet-yah)

Spanish

Hola (pronounced OH-lah)

Swedish

God dag (pronounced goo dahg)

Turkish

Merhaba (pronounced MER-ha-ba)

Source: about.com

