



Learning Armenian: Passport to an Ancient and Vibrant Culture

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Are you reconnecting with Armenian roots? Preparing for a journey back to your long-ago homeland?

Do you want to visit [ancient ruins at Garni](#), see stunning vistas at monastic sites such as [Tatev](#) and [Geghard](#), or savor the lights and sights of [Yerevan](#)? Or do you simply want to form stronger friendships in the global Armenian community?

No matter what your motivation, learning the Armenian language can be your passport to the richness of Armenian culture, connecting you with speakers in Armenia and across the world.

A Little Bit about the Armenian Language

The Armenian language has a long, fascinating history, stretching back at least sixteen centuries. It's part of the Indo-European language family—just like more familiar “cousins” such as [French](#), [Spanish](#), [Italian](#), and [German](#).

However, unlike most Indo-European languages, Armenian stands alone on its own branch of the family tree. Armenian is an [offshoot of the Armeno-Aryani limb](#), which has its roots in the Aryano-Greco-Armenic languages.

While Armenian has been a world language for over a millennium, events within the past hundred years have radically changed the language's course. The [tragic Armenian genocide](#) of the early 20th century resulted in a diaspora that spread the language across the world and widened the divide between the two major standardized forms: Eastern and Western Armenian.

Eastern vs Western Armenian

Eastern and Western Armenian have been diverging from their common, classical root for centuries. As speakers of Western Armenian have settled in many other lands over the past century, the two forms of the language have grown further apart.

How does Western Armenian differ from the Eastern form?

- Pronunciation
- Spelling
- Word choice
- Idiomatic expressions

If you're a native speaker of one standardized form of Armenian, you should be able to understand the other standardized form without much trouble—just like native speakers of American English and British English can usually understand one another.

But there's a world of difference between a native speaker and a novice.

For a fledgling Armenian speaker, variations in pronunciation, syntax, and common phrases could be very confusing. When you're first learning Armenian, you'll want to focus on either Eastern or Western Armenian.



Eastern Armenian is the official language of the Republic of Armenia. You'll also find speakers of Eastern Armenian in the Russian Federation, the Republic of Georgia, Iran, and the Republic of Artsakh.

There are about [three million native speakers](#) of Eastern Armenian in the Armenian Republic itself, plus many more outside of Armenia, who have produced a wealth of media for the aspiring language learner to enjoy.

The other standardized form of the Armenian language is Western Armenian, which is often identified as the language of the diaspora—the language of the people who left Armenia to settle in countries around the world. Western Armenian only has [about a million speakers worldwide](#). Although some Armenian speakers consider Eastern Armenian truer to classical Armenian than its Western counterpart, others recognize the legitimacy of both forms.

Western Armenian is spread across many different countries, in immigrant communities. Some have formed ethnic Armenian communities in their new countries, such as Little Armenia in Los Angeles—where about 172,000, or roughly half of the local Armenian community, speak Armenian. However, economics and other driving forces often marginalize the Armenian language among expatriates. With a dwindling number of native speakers, Western Armenian has become an [endangered language](#). Still, it's a tie that binds together families of Armenian heritage throughout the world.

So, the question remains: As a new student of Armenian, which form should you try to learn?

Ultimately, the best way to decide is to look at your own motivations for learning Armenian, and how you plan to use it.

If you want to travel, live, or work in the Republic of Armenia, Eastern Armenian would be a more practical choice. If you'd like to communicate better with Armenian speakers in other parts of the world—such as America, France, Syria, Lebanon, or Turkey—then Western Armenian would be a better bet.

Whatever you decide, you'll need to start your journey by tackling the Armenian alphabet.

Unique Character: The Armenian Alphabet

Unlike many other Indo-European languages, such as English, Italian, Flemish, and Portuguese, Armenian is not written in the Latin alphabet. Armenian has an alphabet all its own.

The Armenian alphabet was [invented by Masrop Mashtots](#), a theologian and scholar, in 405 AD. Today, both Western and Eastern Armenian use the same alphabet, although there are some pronunciation differences between these two dialects. (In most cases, the Eastern pronunciations follow those of Classical Armenian, which is also known as Grabar.)



While you can find some written materials that have been transliterated—given phonetic representation—in the familiar Latin alphabet, it's better to get used to the Armenian alphabet right off the bat. Knowing the Armenian alphabet well will help you learn the proper pronunciations, as well as open up a whole world of Armenian writings.

Since mastering the Armenian alphabet is such a crucial part of learning the language well, we've found several resources to help. Stay tuned for useful websites, books, and apps to get you off to a running start with the Armenian alphabet...and then on to a long, satisfying marathon of Armenian language learning.

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