

Thai Greetings and Ending Particles

You say goodbye and I say hello - Beatles

The Thai formal greeting

สวัสดี – hello, greetings, goodbye, farewell

First impressions are as important in Thailand as anywhere else, and the first impression one usually gives is how you say “Hello”. So this is our first of the Ten Essentials.

In order to use a Thai greeting successfully we need to know a little about Thai culture and history.

One of the first words a new Thai student learns is สวัสดี, often phonetically transcribed as “*sawasdee*”, but the “s” at the end of the second syllable is pronounced as a “t”.

Every Thai textbook and teacher will tell you that this is the Thai word for “hello” and also for “goodbye”. But that isn’t the whole story.

Up until the 1930s Thais greeted each other without the use of สวัสดี (We’ll get to other Thai greetings below.) It is an invented word (by Phraya Upakit Silapasan of Chulalongkorn University) supposedly to help bring the Thai people into the modern era. It is probably based on the Sanskrit word *svasti*, and is now in common usage all over the country – but we should use this greeting, as well as most all the Thai language vocabulary and phrases we will be covering, with some caveats.

In order to use สวัสดี correctly we first need to understand how to use the Thai polite particles.

Thai polite particles

A Thai particle is a word used at the end of a sentence or phrase – it doesn’t have a specific meaning but does imply a feeling and sometimes a relationship with the listener. Speaking Thai without the use of the ending particles can sound stilted, sometimes harsh, and lacking in fluency. And can often lead to the dreaded language faux pas.

There are many particles in Thai. The two most important ones, especially for beginning Thai students, are the ones used to express politeness.

ครับ – a polite particle used by males.

Example: สวัสดี ครับ – hello, goodbye

คะ – a polite particle used by females

Example: สวัสดี คะ – hello, goodbye

It is important for Thais to use the polite ending particles at the end of most sentences when they are speaking in a formal situation, and speaking with someone older, or of a higher status, or someone of importance to you (e.g. your boss, your mother-in-law, a police officer, an immigration official)

The Thai *wai*

We will often *wai* when we greet someone (or say Goodbye, or Thank you, or I'm sorry). In order to *wai* correctly you should first have a Thai teach you how to *wai*.

Or Watch [this video clip](#) which is fun and will show you how and when to *wai*.

Usually the Thai *wai* is given as the greeting words are spoken (when meeting a new person, or someone older or someone with a higher status).

The younger person, the one with a lower status *wais* first and if a person *wais* you it is a social requirement for you to return the *wai*. We usually don't *wai* children, people who work for us, or serving people – unless they *wai* us first. We *wai* monks but they do not return a *wai*.

When to use สวัสดี ครับ/ค่ะ

- Said with people we first meet.
- Said when we greet people in a fairly formal situation.
- Said when we greet someone of a higher status or an older person.
- Said when we greet an acquaintance we haven't seen recently.
- It is probably a good idea to say it to someone who says it to you first.
- It is not necessarily said with people we meet often or daily as with coworkers, or family members.
- We don't usually say it with people who serve us or work for us.
- It is usually not said to monks – although we do *wai* monks, but silently.
- The younger person or the one with a lower status *wais* first and the older person returns the *wai*. (Exception: If you happen to be older than your mother-in-law it would suit you well if you were to *wai* first.)

Conversation

You are meeting the department head for the first time.

- You: สวัสดี ครับ/ค่ะ (*wai* as you speak)
- Dept. Head: สวัสดี ค่ะ (and she returns your *wai*)

* * *

You are visiting your mother-in-law.

- You: สวัสดี ครับ/ค่ะ (and you *wai* her)
- Mother-in-law: สวัสดี ค่ะ (she returns your *wai*)

* * *

Someone greets you first.

- Your student: สวัสดี ค่ะ (she *wais* you)
- You: สวัสดี ครับ/ค่ะ (you return her *wai*)

* * *

You are leaving a party and saying goodbye to the hostess.

- You: สวัสดี ครับ/ค่ะ (*wai* only in formal situations)
- Hostess: สวัสดี ค่ะ (she returns the *wai* if you *wai*)

* * *

When someone greets you with a perfunctory greeting you can answer with a contraction.

- The Guard at your gated community: สวัสดี ครับ (as he salutes you)
- You: ครับ/ค่ะ (no need to *wai*)

* * *

Other forms of greetings

Although สวัสดี is more or less the “official” Thai greeting, one does not hear it that often when close friends and acquaintances greet each other.

The following can all be used to greet someone close to you, like coworkers, drinking buddies, a paramour, anyone we feel comfortable with, and in less formal situations. No polite particles are required with them but you can say them just to add respect if you wish. No need to *wai* either.

These other forms of greetings probably shouldn't be used with people of higher status or importance to you like your mother-in-law, etc. Then you can stick with สวัสดี, and don't forget the polite particle.

All the following are in the form of rhetorical questions but can be interpreted into English as a simple greeting. The conversations could all be interpreted as

- Them: Hello.
- You: Hello.

ไปไหน – Where are you going?

Ubiquitous, and rhetorical question. Doesn't require a true answer. It is the Thai equivalent to the English, “How are you?” No one usually cares how you are. It is just a way to say “Hi”. Here no one really cares where you are going, so any answer is okay.

Some answers to ไปไหน

- ไป ตลาด – going to the market
- ไป เที่ยว – going to have some fun
- ไป ทำงาน – going to work
- ไม่ ไปไหน – not going anywhere.

Conversation

- Your boss: ไปไหน – Where are you going?
- You: ไป ทำงาน ครับ/ค่ะ – Going to work.
- Your neighbor: ไปไหน – Where are you going?
- You: ไม่ ไปไหน – Nowhere (in particular).

ไปไหนมา – Where are you coming from? (The มา, literally “to come” at the end indicates something you have just come from doing.

The same usage as the above but it may be obvious to the speaker that you are coming from somewhere or from doing something. It also doesn't require a true answer.

Some answers to ไปไหนมา

- ไปตลาดมา – I went to the market
- ไปเที่ยวมา – I came back from doing some fun stuff.

Conversation

- A friend: ไปไหนมา – Where are you coming from?
- You: ไปตลาดมา – I just went to the market.
- Your in-law: ไปไหนมา – Where are you coming from?
- You: ไปเที่ยวมา – Coming back from hanging out.

กินข้าวหรือยัง – Have you eaten yet? (informal)

This is more or less taken word-for-word from a Chinese greeting. If you say that you haven't eaten yet, many a friend would be obliged to take you out for a meal. So it is wise to say that you have already eaten, even if you have to bend the truth a bit.

Some answers to กินข้าวหรือยัง

- กินแล้ว – I've already eaten.
- เรียบร้อยแล้ว – normally means “neat”, “everything is in order”, but here it is slang for “I have already eaten”.

Conversation

- A work colleague: กินข้าวหรือยัง – Have you eaten yet?
- You: กินแล้ว – Yes I have.

ทาน ข้าว หรือ ยัง – Have you eaten yet? (a little formal)

The same as above except that the word **ทาน** is used instead of **กิน**. Both words mean “to eat” but **ทาน** is considered the more polite form. It is probably good to use **ทาน** as it works for close friends as well as the upper crust.

Some answers to **ทาน ข้าว หรือ ยัง**

- **ทาน แล้ว** – I’ve already eaten.
- **ทาน เริ่บร้อย แล้ว** – I have already eaten.

Conversation

- Your boss: **ทาน ข้าว หรือ ยัง – Have you eaten yet?**
- You: **ทาน เริ่บร้อย แล้ว ครับ/คะ – I’m okay.**

เป็น อย่างไร บ้าง – How are you doing? How is it going?

เป็น ใจ บ้าง – contraction of the above

Literally, “How are you?” A lot of new Thai speakers make the mistake of interpreting this question as being similar to the Thai inquiry about one’s health, **สบายดี ไหม**. **เป็น อย่างไร บ้าง** (usually shorten to **เป็น ใจ บ้าง**) is often used to ask “What’s the matter?” if you notice something out of quilter. But it is also heard as a greeting, similar to the English “How are you?” which is in fact not a question about one’s health but simply a “Hello”.

The answer to “How are you?” is quite often “How are you?” or a silent lift of the head (which you could also do in response to **เป็น ใจ**).

Conversation

- Your friend: **เป็น ใจ บ้าง – How you doin’?**
- You: **ดี มาก – Very well.**
- Your companion: **เป็น ใจ บ้าง – How you doin’?**
- You: **ไม่ เป็น อะไร – Nothing. I’m fine.**

ว่า อย่างไร – What's up?

ว่า ไง – contraction of the above

Literally "How do you say?" but as above it really means "Hello". This is another phrase that is more often shortened (ว่า ไง).

Conversation

- Your friend: ว่า ไง – What do you say?
- You: ว่า ไง – What do you say?

* * *

เจอกัน ใหม่ - meet again

It is more or less the equivalent to the English "See you later."

Conversation

- Your friend: สวัสดี ครับ – Goodbye
- You: สวัสดี ครับ/คะ เจอกัน ใหม่ ครับ/คะ – Goodbye. See you later.

* * *

สบาย ดี – Feeling good

Just wanted to add this one as it is really the greeting in the Lao language which is spoken widely in the northeast of Thailand.

Conversation

- Your Laotian friend: สบาย ดี – Hello
- You: สบาย ดี – Hello

* * *

Time to leave

Let's say you are visiting with someone and you feel you have to leave. Thai has a few very polite ways of saying, "Gotta Go. Bye."

ลาก่อน (ลา – *to leave* + ก่อน – before)
Goodbye, farewell

And to be quite polite you can ask permission

ขอ ลา ก่อน (ขอ - *please*)
Same as above but more like "With your permission ..."

And even more apologetic

ขอ ตัว (ตัว – body)
Excuse me, I beg to be excused

Conversation

- You: ขอโทษ ขอ ลา ก่อน ครับ/คะ – Apologies, please excuse me.
- Your hostess: ไม่เป็นไร ค่ะ – That's alright.

- You: ลา ก่อน ครับ/คะ เจอ กัน ใหม่ – I have to go. See you soon.
- Your hostess: เจอ กัน ใหม่ ค่ะ - See you again.

- You: ขอ ตัว ครับ/คะ – With your permission I'll take my leave.
- Your hostess: เชิญ ค่ะ – Go right ahead.

* * *

Good morning, Good evening, Good night

There are two very formal and not often used Thai greetings. You will probably not hear them in normal conversation but may hear a TV show host use it to greet their viewers.

The suffix **สวัสดิ์** in these two greetings is an indication that they are also invented words similar to **สวัสดิ์**.

อรุณ สวัสดิ์ – Good Morning

อรุณ – dawn

สวัสดิ์ – happiness

ราตรี สวัสดิ์ – Good Evening, Good Night

ราตรี – evening

สวัสดิ์ – happiness

Note: There really isn't an informal way of saying "Good morning", "Good evening", or "Good night" in Thai. It will feel odd for most westerners not to wish someone a good morning or good night, but it is just not a requirement in Thai culture. If you use either of the above you might give your listener a good laugh.

* * *

Vocabulary used in this chapter

<u>Thai</u>	<u>Definition</u>
เจอ	to meet
เชิญ	to invite
เที่ยว	trip, fun
เรียบร้อย	neat, orderly
แล้ว	already
ใหม่	new, again
ไป	to go
ไม่	no, not
ไม่เป็นไร	It doesn't matter. Don't mention it., etc.
ไหน	where
ก่อน	before
กัน	together
กิน	to eat
ขอ	please
ขอโทษ	excuse me
ข้าว	rice
ดี	good
ตลาด	market
ตัว	body
ทาน	to eat
ทำงาน	to work
บ้าง	some
มาก	a lot
ยัง	yet
ราตรี	evening
ลา	to leave

The Ten Essentials of Thai Conversation: Thai Greetings and Ending Particles

ว่า	to say
สบาย	comfortable
สวัสดิ์	happiness

หรือ	or
อย่างไร	how
อรุณ	dawn
อะไร	what

* * *

Review of Thai greetings

Thai

สวัสดี ครับ

สวัสดี ค่ะ

ไป ไหน

ไป ไหน มา

กิน ข้าว หรือ ยัง

ทาน ข้าว หรือ ยัง

เป็น อย่างไร บ้าง

เป็น ไง บ้าง

ว่า อย่างไร

ว่า ไง

ลาก่อน

ขอ ตัว

เจอ กัน ใหม่

สบาย ดี

อรุณ สวัสดี

ราตรี สวัสดี