

## So you want to learn chuukese?

*Ka mochen kaéo fóósen chuuk?*

As a JV on my way out of Chuuk, here are a few things that I found useful to know about the Chuukese language...before you even start to try to tackle it. Now, a disclaimer is that I have in no way mastered this language, but I do claim to have enough knowledge to be a credible provider of information on this document at the very least. My best piece of advice is to let go of any preconceived notions that you have of language structure and start on a blank slate. This guide is not meant to be all-inclusive or even cover all major areas...it's only meant to give you something to do over the summer if you are looking to get a foundation of language under your belt. Thus, I am only going to provide you with 10 rules to get you started (vocab included!)

**Rule #1:** Spelling doesn't matter...as long as you can pronounce what you are reading, we'll go with it. Everyone has their own way of spelling, so no two Chuukese are identical spellers (cute, right?). Keep in mind this will probably lead to arguments about who's right with their Chuukese within your community. Guess what? You're all winners!

**Rule #2:** Chuukese is a vowel-based language – this means that whereas we are very keen in picking up consonant sounds as English speakers, we don't always hear the differences in vowels (i.e. whether southern drawl or NE nasal-business, we can still understand, despite the different vowel sounds). Subsequently, Micronesians may struggle in understanding the difference between your consonants. This means that they have many more vowels and many less consonants in their alphabet. Shall we take a look at this? Well, it's up to you really, but I will put it right below this here paragraph.

### Chuukese Vowels

- A = *ah* as in car
- Á = *a* as in apple
- E = *eh* as in men
- Ē/É = *eh* as in further
- I = *ee* as in feet
- O = *oh* as in open
- Ó = *aw* as in saw
- U = *oo* as in toot (haha)
- Ú = *eh* as in ration (it's close)
- W = *whh* as in a pretentions 'where'
- PW = *pwh* as in plenty (as said by a 2-year-old without Ls)
- MW = *mwh* as in mwahahaha!
- NG = *ng* as in sing

### Chuukese Consonants (Where spelling gets a bit iffy)

- B or P = sounds like a b.
- C or G or K or Q = sounds like a k.
- D or T = sounds like between a d/t – put your tongue on the back of your front teeth and say 'today.' Yep, that's it.
- F or V = sounds like an f.
- CH or J = sounds like a ch or a tch
- M = sounds like an m.
- N = pronounced like a 'd' between vowels
- NN = pronounced like an English 'n'
- R = this is a rolled R. every time.
- S = sounds like an s.

**Rule #3:** There is no specific verb for 'to be.' I know. It's crazy. Actually, there aren't even necessarily...verbs. Action is explained by adding an 'action word' before a "verb"/"noun" – I have found that 73% of the time, this works and happens to be correct. In my own head, I pretend like these 'action words' actually equal 'to be'...and it seems to work just fine. Let's take a look at the present tense for our action words, and match it up with a common word you will use often, *mwongé* (food).

ua	sa/ai	=	I am	we (inc)/ we (exc) are
ke/ka	ou		you are	y'all are
a	ra		s/he/it is	they are

ua mwongé	sa/ai mwongé	=	I am eating/I eat	we (inc)/we (exc) are eating
ke/ka mwongé	ou mwongé		you are eating	y'all are eating
a mwongé	ra mwongé		s/he/it is eating	they are eating

See how on the previous page we took an action word (ua) and put it with a noun (mwongé), thus **[I action] + [food] = I eat?** Cool, right? I often find it beneficial to think in the absolute simplest terms possible.

You will also notice that there is an 'inclusive we' and an 'exclusive we' – I will miss this the most back in the US. If you want to say, "We're going to go" but you want to say it in a way that is talking just about yourself and your posse, then you would use the exclusive we. If you wanted to include everyone, or at least open up the invitation to everyone, you would use the inclusive we.

**\*\*Special point of interest** – you will hear the phrase "Sa mwongé!" more than any other during your time in Chuuk. If someone is eating in front of you, they will always invite you to join in! (In this case, "sa mwongé" translates to *Let's eat!*)

**Rule #4:** Simply throwing a "No" in front of a phrase doesn't make it negative. In fact, in order to make a statement negative, you have to change your action word completely. It's really quite simple and you will catch on quickly! Let's take a look at a new word in the process, *tutu* – shower.

use tutu	sise/aise tutu	=	I didn't shower	we didn't shower
kese/kose tutu	ouse tutu		You didn't shower	y'all didn't shower
ese tutu	rese tutu		s/he didn't shower	they didn't shower

**Rule #5:** You probably were like, "Wait. You are using the negative present, but now your English translation is in the past. You are confusing!" The past tense doesn't *exactly* exist. It's mainly through context and through other words (i.e. "yesterday" or "this morning") that tell the time of action being discussed. In this case, you wouldn't say *kese tutu* to someone that isn't showering unless you are trying to be overtly obvious they are not, in fact, lathering themselves with soap. There are some nuances with this in terms of island location, but we'll save that until you get here. Here's a couple words to help you in the mean time:

*fen* = already

*omw* = yet

Example: *Ua fen tutu* = I've already showered

*Use omw tutu* = I haven't yet showered

**\*\*Special point of interest** – be careful not to close the *tutu* into an 'n' making it *tuntun* unless you want some crazy looks/laughter while you are talking about male genitalia.

**Rule #6:** Even though there isn't a past form, there are three different future forms (2 positive, 1 negative), so it makes up for the loss in tenses we had yesterday. Both of these tenses work in a "I will...", a "I should", or even a "when I...[in the future]" sort of way. I'll give you some examples using some new words. Let's look at *feitán* (walk), *sá* (run), and *fóós* (speak).

upwe feitán	sipwe/aipwe feitán	=	I will walk	We'll walk
kopwe feitán	oupwe feitán		You will walk	You'll walk
epwe feitán	repwe feitán		S/he will walk	They'll walk

Example: *Inet upwe feitán nesor, Will epwe sá.*  
When I walk **tomorrow**, Will will be running.

*Kopwe mwongé inet kopwe tutu.*  
You will eat **when** you shower.

**\*\*Special note of interest** – you will see that in English, we only use one "will" (future tense) per sentence, whereas Chuukese will make every verb in the future tense!

The negative form of the future tense follows the same “Let’s throw in an ‘s’ and an extra syllable!” rule that the present tense followed when turning negative. Here you have it:

usapw fóós	sisapw/aisapw fóós	=	I won't speak	We won't speak
kosapw fóós	ousapw fóós		Don't speak	Y'all won't speak
esapw fóós	resapw fóós		s/he won't speak	They won't speak

(fóós is pronounced like the first syllable of faucet)

Example: *Esapw mwongé nepwinei.*  
She won't eat tonight.

*\*\*Special note of interest - you can also use this as a command in a classroom. “Kosapw fóós!” Basically translates to “stop talking!”*

Finally, our last future tense speaks of something farther in the future. This “farther in the future” could be three days or three months...I haven’t really figured it out. At least you will know what it means when you hear it!

upwapw kittiw	sipwapw/aipwapw kittiw	=	I will cry	We'll cry
kopwapw kittiw	oupwapw kittiw		You will cry	You'll cry
epwapw kittiw	repwapw kittiw		S/he will cry	They'll cry

Example: *Upwapw kittiw inet epwapw na.*  
I will cry when he leaves.

*\*\*Special note of interest - “sipwapw chuu” is a common phrase meaning “we will meet” or “see you later”*

**Rule #7:** You are probably wondering what to call yourself and others when you don’t want to use names, but you’d rather use pronouns. I know, you are dying to know and I’ve held off long enough.

I/Me = *ngang* (Say the word sing. hold the ng. then open up into ‘ah’ and close back to the held ‘ng.’ Now try it again, without saying the “si” in “sing” and just start at the ng. It’s hard. Keep practicing.)

You = *en*

He/she/it = *ii* (all the same – no gender difference)

Us = *kiich*

Y’all = *ami* (when an *m* falls between two vowels, it is a soft *b* sound)

Them = *iir*

<b>ngang</b>	<b>kiich</b>
<b>en</b>	<b>ami</b>
<b>ii</b>	<b>iir</b>

**Rule #8:** You have seen me start to use a “question word” above. Chuukese question words can be a little confusing at times and will not follow your normal construct always, specifically with the word ‘where.’ The others are pretty standard. Let’s dive into them, shall we?

Who: *ié* (EE-yuh)

Melissa: *Mei wor emén chon sukun ikei.*

Meghan: *ié?*

Melissa: *Dreama.*

There is a **student** here.

Who?

Dreama.

“You and Who?” is also used when you are out shopping, walking, swimming, etc., because people want to know who you are with! It looks like *En me ié?* but it sounds like *Enmyé?* This would be a ‘small talk’ question if you meet someone you know somewhere...which you will. It’s an island. You will also notice there is no verb in that sentence. Yep....verbs not needed.

What: *met*

Will: *Met ena?*

Ben: *efew nuu.*

What's that? (literally what-that)

A coconut.

Why: *pwata*

Kathryn: *Pwata ka kittiw?*

Paige: *Pwe upwe pwósituk!*

Why are you **crying**?

Because I will **miss you**!

How: *Ifa ussun*

Jay: *Ifa ussun sukun ikenai?*

Will: *mei eoch.*

Jay: *Ka makken??*

Will: *apw!*

How was school **today**?

**Good.**

Are you **lying**??

No!

The way to ask someone how they are doing is simple. You will learn throughout your time that there are different suffixes for words that make it pronoun specific. For example *ifa ussun* → *ifa ussumw* adds the 'you' pronoun to the end of 'how'. Now, it reads "How you?" When pronounced, it sounds more like *eefowsume*. If you wanted to ask the same question to multiple people at once, you would say *ifa ussumi*. (The y'all ending is similar to the y'all pronoun of *ami*)

Where: *Ifa or ia*

Aru: *Kopwe no ia?*

Ben: *Ikenan.*

Where are you going? (You are going where?)

There.

"*Kopwe no ia*" (or one of its many forms) is equivalent to the way that English speakers use of "How are you?" No one actually cares, but they ask it to be polite.

Jay: *Rufina! Rufina?*

Rufina: *Oi!*

Jay: *Ifa en?*

Rufina: *Ikei!*

Jay: *Nge ifa ii ikei?*

Rufina! Rufina?

Oi!

Where are you? (where you?)

Here!

But where is here?

**Rule #9:** Numbers are a funny little thing in Chuuk. There are different ways to count, depending on what the object looks like. There are five main ways to count, categorizing objects into either something round, long, flat, alive, or none of the above. Let's make a chart!

numeral	base (day)	round object (coconut)	long object (pencil)	alive object (girl, not plant)	flat object (leaf or paper)
1	ew	eféw	efóch	emén	eché
2	ruu	ruuweféw	rúófóch	ruuwemén	ruuweché
3	unugat	unuféw	unufóch	unumén	unuché
4	ruano	féféw	fófóch	fémén	faché
5	nimwu	nimwuféw	nimwufóch	nimmén	nimaché
6	wonu	wonuféw	wonufóch	wonomén	wonaché
7	fisu	fúúféw	fúúfóch	fúúmén	fuuché
8	wanu	wanuféw	wanufóch	wanimén	waniché
9	tiu	tiuféw	tiufóch	tiwemén	tiwaché
10	engon	engon	engon	engon	engon

It is important to note that using a different method of counting could change the object. Let's take a look at Jay and his host brother, Joshua.

Jay: *Wawan, ifa ussumw?*

Joshua: *Pechekun, kinisou. Ka **kaka**?*

Jay: *Ewer! Mei wor efoch nuu?*

Joshua: *Pwata ka kuna **efoch nuu**? Mei wor **efew nuu** ikei!*

Joshua, how are you?

Strong, thanks. Are you **thirsty**?

Yes! Is there a coconut tree?

Why are you looking for a **coconut tree**?

There is a **coconut** right here!

Or what about this one: Jay and his host mother, Atis.

Atis: *Jay, watte eché **uuch**.*

Jay: *Ikei!*

Jay: *...Pwata ka **takir**?*

Jay, bring me a **banana** leaf.

Here! (Hands her a banana)

...Why are you **laughing**?

**Rule #10:** Our last rule will be looking at different types of adjectives. You will, for the most part, find adjectives after the noun, using the word *mei* (pronounced MAY or MEE) between the two.

Gabe: *Ifa ii efóch **fuk** mei par?*

Ben: *Use sine, nge ka **mochen** efew nuu mei paat?*

Gabe: *Apw, efóch fuk mei par **chok**.*

Where is the red **fork**?

I don't know, but do you **want** a cold coconut?

No, **just** a red fork. (No, a fork that's red just)

You can also use the [noun mei adjective] structure to talk about yourself.

Jay: *Ngang mei **pechuk**!*

Melissa: *En mei pechuk, nge kese tutu!*

Will: *Ami mei **echik**? Sa mwongé!*

Paige: *Ua echik! Met sipwe mwongé?*

I am **strong**!

You are strong, but you haven't showered!

Are you all **hungry**? Let's eat!

I'm hungry! What are we going to eat?

Notice how Jay and Will both used [pronoun + mei + adjective], but Paige said the same thing using the [action word + adjective] method. Both are legit. Finally, we are going to learn *basic* placement adjectives (this, that, these, those, and *that*).

This = *ei* (pronounced as AY)

*Met kopwe **féeri** ei summer?*

What are you going to **do** this summer?

That = *ena* (pronounced eh-da)

*Kose mochen, watte ena **uuch**.*

Please, pass me that **banana**.

These = *ekkei*

*Ekkei konak ra **fokkun** anné!*

These dogs are **really** tasty!

Those = *ekkena*

*Ua sani **aramas** ekkena.*

I like those **people**.

That (way over there) = *ewe* (pronounced ay-way)

\*also used for "the"

*Ewe maram a fokkun **ngiiéché** nepwenei.*

That (/The) moon is really **pretty** tonight.

*iwe....sa wees!*

alrighty....we're done!