

Verbs in Kurmanji Kurdish

Lêker di Kurmancî de

A visual reference guide, stem workbook and practice collection

INFINITIVE	PRESENT STEM	PAST STEM
kirin	k-	kir-
xwarin	xw-	xwar-
dîtin	bîn-	dît-
çûn	ç-	çû-
xwendin	xwîn-	xwend-

Learn the verb system before the tense-by-tense lessons.

Learning goals — Armancên fêrbûnê

Recognize the infinitive; distinguish present and past stems; identify verbal prefixes, personal endings and negation; contrast transitive and intransitive verbs; distinguish present and past alignment; identify basic compound verbs; and prepare for separate tense and modal-verb lessons.

1. What is a verb? — Lêker çî ye?

A verb expresses an action, process, event or state. In Kurmanji, verb forms may indicate tense, aspect, mood, person and number. Verb behavior also interacts with case and alignment. Compare: Ez diçim. (I go / I am going.) Ew radizê. (He/she sleeps.) Em dixwînin. (We read / are reading.) The translations are approximate because English aspect does not map one-to-one onto Kurmanji.

2. Infinitives — Navdêrên lêkerî / Masdar

A dictionary commonly lists verbs in the infinitive ending -in or -în: kirin (to do/make), xwarin (to eat), nivîsîn (to write), dîtin (to see), çûn (to go), hatin (to come), xwendin (to read/study), zanîn (to know), bûn (to become/be). The infinitive is a citation form, not the form normally used as the main finite verb in an ordinary present-tense statement. Note: different sources use different grammatical terms for the infinitive; “masdar” is also widely recognized.

Infinitive	Meaning	Present stem	Past stem
kirin	do / make	k-	kir-
xwarin	eat	xw-	xwar-
dîtin	see	bîn-	dît-
çûn	go	ç-	çû-
xwendin	read / study	xwîn-	xwend-
nivîsîn	write	nivîs-	nivîsî-

3. Two stems — Du rehên lêkerê

Many Kurmanji verbs have a present stem and a past stem. Both must be learned; the present stem is not always predictable from the infinitive. For example, kirin → present stem k-, past stem kir-; xwarin → xw-, xwar-; dîtin → bîn-, dît-; çûn → ç-, çû-; hatin → ê-/tê- in relevant present forms, hat- in past forms. Some stems show prefixes or allomorphy. These are teaching-oriented stem summaries, not a claim that every surface form is generated by a single mechanical rule.

4. A working verb dictionary — Ferhenga lêkeran

For each new verb, record five items: (1) infinitive, (2) present stem, (3) past stem, (4) whether it takes a direct object, and (5) one example in context. Learning only the infinitive makes many later conjugations unnecessarily difficult.

5. Person and number — Kes û hejmar

Finite verbs commonly show person/number agreement. In the present indicative, illustrative endings include -im (1st singular), -î (2nd singular), -e (3rd singular), -in (1st and 3rd plural), and -in (2nd plural). Actual forms vary by stem and phonological environment: dixwînim (I read), dixwîî (you read), dixwîne (he/she reads), dixwînin (we/you plural/they read). The same written ending may serve more than one person; an overt pronoun can clarify.

Pronoun	Present of xwendin	English
ez	dixwînim	I read
tu	dixwîî	you read
ew	dixwîne	he/she reads
em	dixwînin	we read
hûn	dixwînin	you (pl.) read
ew	dixwînin	they read

6. Present indicative pattern — Dema niha

The common present indicative pattern uses di- + present stem + agreement ending: Ez dixwînim. (I read / am reading.) Tu dixwîî. (You read.) Ew dixwîne. (He/she reads.) Em dixwînin. (We read.) But not every verb behaves as a transparent di- + stem form: motion verbs, bûn, and certain prefixed verbs require separate treatment. Lesson 06 will cover full paradigms, usage and exceptions.

7. Past forms — Reha dema borî

The past stem is central to simple past forms. Intransitive example: Ez çûm. (I went.) Tu çûyî. (You went.) Ew çû. (He/she went.) Transitive example: Min kitêb xwend. (I read a book.) The past transitive agent is typically oblique (min), unlike the present agent ez. Agreement in canonical past transitive clauses tracks the direct object, a key feature of Kurmanji split ergativity. Lesson 07 treats this systematically.

8. Transitive and intransitive — Lêkerên gerguhêz û negerguhêz

A transitive verb can take a direct object: Ez kitêbê dixwînim. (I read the book.) An intransitive verb normally does not take a direct object: Ez diçim. (I go.) This distinction matters especially in the past tense: Ez çûm (I went) but Min ew dît (I saw him/her). Some verbs alternate in valency, and some predicates use prepositional complements. “Transitive” is not the same as “takes any complement.”

Present transitive	Past transitive
Ez te dibînim.	Min tu dîtî.

Present transitive	Past transitive
Agent ez (direct)	Agent min (oblique)
Object te (oblique)	Object tu (direct)

9. The case-alignment warning — Rewşa tewandî û ergatîvî

Compare Ez te dibînim (I see you) and Min tu dîtî (I saw you). Present transitive: ez = direct agent, te = oblique object. Canonical past transitive: min = oblique agent, tu = direct object. The past verb dîtî agrees with second-person singular direct object tu. Do not assume that the same English “I” must always be ez. Pronouns and nouns are both affected by the case system; regional speech may simplify or reshape the patterns.

Affirmative	Negative
Ez dixwînim.	Ez naxwînim.
Ez çûm.	Ez neçûm.

10. Negation — Neyînî

Negation varies with tense and mood. In a common present indicative pattern, na- replaces di-: Ez naxwînim. (I do not read.) Compare Ez dixwînim. (I read.) In simple past forms, ne- is common: Ez neçûm. (I did not go.) The imperative/subjunctive and lexical exceptions have additional patterns. A learner should not use na- for every tense and construction.

11. Commands and the subjunctive — Ferman û mercî

Commands and non-indicative forms frequently use a different prefix pattern from present indicative: Bixwîne! (Read! singular.) Bixwînin! (Read! plural.) The prefix bi- is widespread in affirmative imperatives and subjunctive forms, but the exact formation depends on the verb and construction. The full imperative, subjunctive and conditional system is reserved for a later lesson.

12. The verb bûn — Lêkera bûn

Bûn is a high-frequency and irregular verb used in meanings such as “be/become,” depending on construction. The present copular endings can appear after nouns and adjectives: Ez xwendekar im. (I am a student.) Tu xwendekar î. (You are a student.) Ew xwendekar e. (He/she is a student.) Em xwendekar in. (We are students.) Distinguish the bound copula from the independent infinitive bûn; do not assume all “be” constructions behave alike.

13. Compound verbs — Lêkerên hevedudanî

Kurmanji often combines a nominal or adjectival element with a light verb such as *kirin* or *bûn*. For example, *kar kirin* (“to work”, literally “do work”) is a useful pedagogical example. The verbal component bears inflection, while the other element contributes lexical meaning. These combinations should be learned as expressions, not translated mechanically from English.

14. Modal meanings — Wateyên modal

Ability, necessity, desire, permission and possibility are important, but Kurmanji does not express them all with one uniform English-style modal-auxiliary category. For instance, *karîn* is associated with ability, *xwestin* with wanting, and *divê* with necessity. Their complementation, person marking and mood requirements differ. Lesson 10 (Modal Verbs and Modal Expressions) will analyze them separately and avoid treating every item as a structurally identical “modal verb.”

Avoid	Remember
Every stem = infinitive minus -in	Learn both stems individually
English I = always <i>ez</i>	Past transitive agent can be <i>min</i>
Every negative = <i>na-</i>	Negation depends on construction

15. Common learner errors — Çewtiyên gelemperî

Error 1: Assuming every present stem is simply the infinitive minus -in. Error 2: Using *ez* in every clause translated “I,” including canonical past transitive clauses. Error 3: Treating *na-* as universal negation. Error 4: Confusing the infinitive with a finite verb. Error 5: Forgetting person endings. Error 6: Translating English progressive forms word-for-word. Error 7: Treating *karîn*, *divê* and *xwestin* as grammatically identical.

16. Short dialogues — Axaftinên kurt

A: Tu çî dikî? (What are you doing?) B: Ez dixwînim. (I am reading.) A: Tu her roj dixwîni? (Do you read every day?) B: Erê, ez her roj dixwînim. (Yes, I read every day.)

A: Tu duh çûyî? (Did you go yesterday?) B: Erê, ez çûm. (Yes, I went.) A: Te kitêb xwend? (Did you read a book?) B: Erê, min kitêb xwend. (Yes, I read a book.)

17. Exercises — Rahênan

A. Identify infinitives: *xwarin*, *dixwînim*, *çûn*, *dîtin*, *naxwîne*, *kirin*. B. Supply present and past stems: *kirin*, *dîtin*, *xwarin*, *çûn*. C. Translate: *Ez dixwînim*. *Ez naxwînim*. *Ez çûm*. *Min ew dît*. D. Choose *ez* or *min*: ___ diçim; ___ ew dît; ___ te dibînim; ___ kitêb xwend. E. Explain why the English pronoun “I” corresponds to *ez* in one clause and *min* in another. F. Identify transitivity: *çûn*, *dîtin*, *xwendin* (in “read a book”). G. Form present negative of *Ez dixwînim*. H. Explain why *divê*, *karîn* and *xwestin* require separate analysis.

18. Answer key — Bersiv

A. Infinitives: xwarin, çûn, dîtîn, kirin. B. kirin: k-/kir-; dîtîn: bîn-/dît-; xwarin: xw-/xwar-; çûn: ç-/çû-. These are simplified stem representations. C. I read/am reading; I do not read; I went; I saw him/her. D. ez; min; ez; min. E. Kurmanji shows split alignment: present transitive agents are direct; canonical past transitive agents are oblique. F. çûn = intransitive; dîtîn = transitive; xwendin = transitive in the specified frame. G. Ez naxwînim. H. They express different modal meanings and have different syntactic and inflectional behavior.

19. Source and editorial notes — Çavkanî

This lesson is a pedagogical synthesis, not a verbatim translation of a single grammar. Cross-check the paradigms and alignment discussion against Geoffrey Haig and Ergin Öpengin, “Introduction to Special Issue: Kurdish — A Critical Research Overview” (Kurdish: Linguistic and Cultural Crossroads, 2018); Geoffrey Haig, “Northern Kurdish (Kurmanjî): An Areal Perspective” (2018); and W. M. Thackston, *Kurmanji Kurdish: A Reference Grammar* (2006). Kurdish dialects differ, and some example translations are context-dependent. Before publishing, a proficient Kurmanji editor should verify idiomatic phrasing and dialect consistency.

20. What comes next? — Piştî vê dersê

Lesson 06: Present Tense; Lesson 07: Past Tense; Lesson 08: Future Tense; Lesson 09: Perfect and Compound Tenses; Lesson 10: Modal Verbs and Modal Expressions. This lesson deliberately introduces their building blocks rather than repeating full tense paradigms.