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Write in Maya Glyphs
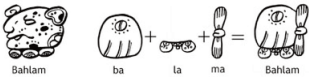
Ancient Maya words are formed from combinations of nearly 800 signs. While the American writing system is also based on signs, they are formed from combinations of only 26 signs, or the Alphabet. Each Maya sign is a full syllable so that list of signs is called a Syllabary, not an Alphabet.

In the small syllabary here, sounds are formed by combining a consonant on the left column with one of the five vowels; a, e, i, o, or, u across the top.

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Maya writing combined logographs (symbols representing whole words) with symbols that represented sound syllables (for example: ma, me, mi, mo, mu).

The word jaguar (bahlam), for example, could be written as a symbol which looks like a jaguar's head, or as a cluster of three syllables: ba-la-m(a). In syllabic systems like Mayan the final vowel (in this case the "a") is often silent.

In Maya writing, the symbols representing syllables were arranged in glyph blocks to sound out each word. In each glyph block the symbols were generally read from top to bottom and from left to right. Here are just a few of the many combinations possible.

Syllabary (left table)

	a	e	i	o	u
b'					
ch					
ch'					
j					
k					
k'					
l					
m					

Syllabary (right table)

	a	e	i	o	u
n					
p					
s					
t					
tz					
tz'					
w					
x					
y					