

## FAVOR project: *Tere!* How to say hello to an Estonian

Every language has its own set of greetings suitable for different people, depending on how well you know them, and different times of the day. Estonian is no exception, and here is a rough guide to the etiquette of greeting people in Estonian.

In Estonian, there are a few ways of saying ‘hello’ and ‘goodbye’. They depend on the situation, the time of day, how well the speakers know each other, and of course whether the conversation is face to face or on the telephone. When picking up the telephone, for instance, Estonians might say *Hallo* – but they would not expect the same greeting in response, as an English speaker might give, and they would not use *Hallo* in face-to-face conversation. That word is reserved for answering the telephone.



When we meet Estonians, we might use one of several greetings, depending on the circumstances. The most common greeting in all circumstances is:

**Tere! or Tervist!** hello, hi (at any time of day). This is a universal word for use between people of all ages and status.

The other common greetings depend more on the circumstances:

**Tere päevast!** good day (in the daytime)

**Tere hommikust!** good morning

**Tere õhtust!** good evening

And to say goodbye, we might choose between these greetings:

**Head aega!** good-bye

**Head ööd!** good night

**Nägemiseni! or Nägemist!** see you later

All of these phrases are considered polite in any circumstances. But how do Estonians show extra familiarity with their own relatives or good friends and classmates, and extra politeness or deference to older people or people of higher status?

### Polite and familiar forms

In Estonian, unless you know a person well, it is usual to use the polite form of ‘you’ **Teie** (short form **Te**). To good friends, children and family members it is usual to use the intimate, familiar form **sina** (short form **sa**). When meeting an Estonian for the first time, it is safest to use **Te(ie)** – and note that it is written with a capital T.

And similarly, 'your' is also **Teie** in the polite form, but **sinu** in the familiar form. So to a child or someone we want to show familiarity to, we might ask:

**Mis on sinu nimi?** or in the short form, **Mis on su nimi?**

And they might reply:

**Mu / minu nimi on Sirje.** My name is Sirje.

To a person who is older, or unfamiliar or worthy of respect, we would ask:

**Mis on Teie nimi?**

**Mu / minu nimi on Andres Laikmaa.**

If we want to add 'please' to that, we can say:

**Palun, mis on Teie nimi?**

**Palun** also means 'you're welcome' in returning thanks. It also means 'here you are' when offering something. Literally it means 'I beg'.

And to thank someone we would say either:

**Aitäh** (which is generally quite familiar)

Or, more formally:

**Tänan!**

With more gratitude we can say:

**Tänan väga!** or **Suur tänu!** Thanks very much!

And to excuse ourselves we can use various words:

**Vabandust!** Excuse me!

**Vabanda** means 'sorry' or 'forgive me' in the familiar form, and **Vabandage** is the more polite form.