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How many credits an SMS uses: 160, 153, 70 and 67 characters explained

WhatsApp & APIs

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How many credits an SMS uses: 160, 153, 70 and 67 characters explained

WhatsApp & APIs Created on **November 10, 2026** 4 min read



The short answer: an SMS is charged by parts, and **each part uses 1 credit**. If the message only has unaccented letters, digits and common punctuation, one part holds **160 characters**; when it is longer, each part holds **153**. A **single** character outside that alphabet, such as ã, ç or an emoji, switches the whole message to Unicode: **70** characters in one part and **67** in each part when there are several. The phone joins the parts back together, so the person reads one message.

The four numbers in one table

Parts (credits per number)	Standard alphabet only (GSM)	With one special character (Unicode)
1	up to 160 characters	up to 70 characters
2	161 to 306	71 to 134
3	307 to 459	135 to 201
4	460 to 612	202 to 268

A message can be up to **1,600 characters** long. You do not need to count by hand: before you send, the page shows how many parts the message has and how many credits it will use.

What counts as special

Characters	What happens
Unaccented letters, digits, common punctuation, plus é, è, à, ù, ì, ò, capital Ç, ñ and ü	Standard alphabet: 160 in one part, 153 in each part when there are several.
`€ [ ] { } ^ ~ \ |`	Still standard alphabet, but each one **counts as 2**.

Characters	What happens
ã, õ, á, í, ó, ú, â, ê, ô, lower-case ç, curly quotes and apostrophes (“ ” ’) and long dashes pasted from a document	The whole message switches to Unicode: 70 in one part, 67 in each part when there are several.
An emoji	Switches the message to Unicode **and counts as 2**.

The trap in English: curly apostrophes

Plain English rarely needs Unicode, but a word processor or a phone keyboard often turns the apostrophe into a curly one. This message is 74 characters long:

```
Hi Ana, your order’s ready. You can collect it until Saturday, 8am to 5pm.
```

The curly ’ in “order’s” makes it Unicode, and 74 is more than 70: **2 parts, 2 credits per number**. Type the same text with a straight apostrophe and it stays in the standard alphabet: **1 part, 1 credit**.

And in Portuguese: almost every sentence

If you write to customers in Portuguese, most messages contain an ã, a ç or an á. This 78-character notice is Unicode because of the “á” in “Olá”, “já”, “levantá-la” and “sábado”, so it takes 2 parts:

```
Olá Ana, a sua encomenda já chegou. Pode levantá-la até sábado, das 8h às 17h.
```

Without those “á” it stays in the standard alphabet (the “é” and “à” can stay) and fits in 1 part:

```
Ola Ana, a sua encomenda ja chegou. Pode levanta-la até sabado, das 8h às 17h.
```

For 5,000 customers, that is **10,000 credits against 5,000** for the same send. Whether to drop accents is your call: they read better, and 70 characters is often enough for a short notice. What matters is knowing the cost before you send, and the price of each send is covered in **SMS credits and price tiers**.

Four habits that save credits:
Aim for one part (160 without special characters, 70 with them); where you have a choice, pick words without those accents; type the text on the page itself or paste it as plain text, because text copied from a document brings curly quotes and dashes that switch the message to Unicode unseen; and keep emoji for small sends.

The contact’s name counts too.
In a personalised message, a name like João or Conceição can switch the message to Unicode and add parts. See **the pitfalls of variables**.

This article is for whoever sends and pays. For developers, the technical detail is in **GSM-7 or Unicode in SMS**.

RECOMMENDED

Before every send, the page shows the parts and the credits. See the price per SMS on the SMS page.

See SMS prices →

SEE ALSO

- SMS credits and price tiers: how buying works and how to pay less per message →
- Personalised SMS with the contact's name: variables, examples and pitfalls →
- GSM-7 or Unicode in SMS: why one accent splits a message into more parts →
- How to plan an SMS marketing campaign: list, message, cost and timing →
- SMS templates and AI: ready-made messages, the template library and improving a text →

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