

CHINOOK WAWA PRONUNCIATION & BC ALPHABET

By David Douglas Robertson PhD

Consulting linguist

Spokane, WA, USA

VOWELS:¹

a	as in “ha!”
ai	as in “hi!”
e	as in “heh!”
ei	as in “hey!”
i	as in “he”
o	as in “ho!”
oi	as in “ahoy!”
oo	as in “who?”
ou/ow	as in “how?”
u	as in “huh?”

CONSONANTS:²

’³

p	p’ ⁴	b
t	t’	d

k	k’	g
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kw ⁵	k’w
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<u>k</u> ⁶	<u>k</u> ’
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<u>kw</u>	<u>k</u> ’w
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- 1 As needed, in BC CW writing we can double a vowel to show when stress comes anywhere later than its usual place at the start of a word. So we have < **yawaa** > ‘(over) there; (and) then’ and < **nawitka** > ‘yes; indeed’.
 - 2 Consonants highlighted in yellow are typical Indigenous sounds. If you grew up speaking a European language like English, French, etc., you need to pay good attention to these.
 - 3 Unlike English, < ’ > is always a sound, the “glottal stop” catch in your voice, when it’s next to a vowel. This apostrophe sign is also super important when it’s after a consonant, as you’ll see below. In other words, in Chinook Wawa, apostrophe is something. So if you see something, say something!
 - 4 < **p’** > is a “popped” < p >. You put your lips etc. into place to say a plain < p >, build up some pressure behind that closure, and then “pop” it out. All of the sounds written with an apostrophe at the end have this kind of forceful release.
 - 5 < **kw** >, and the other consonant sounds that have a “w” in them, are pronounced with your lips kept in a round shape.
 - 6 Underlining a letter in our CW alphabet means that you make the sound in the back of your mouth. (This also applies to < **h** > and < **wh** > below.) If you’re familiar with the way many Pacific NW Indigenous languages are written, this k is the same as their q.

ch ch' j
 ts ts'
 tɬ⁷ tɬ'⁸

m n ng

f v
 s sh z
 th

h...⁹
 ...h¹⁰ wh¹¹
 h¹² wh

l r
 y w

7 People call this < tɬ > sound “slurpy L”, “juicy L”, etc., which might help you :) It’s what many PNW Indigenous languages write as ł (“barred l”). Say it with your tongue set up exactly the same as saying regular “L”, but just breath out past it, comparable to the way you make the “sh” sound.

Good news – in Chinook Wawa, it’s also okay (and maybe easier) to say this sound with a “t” at the beginning.

8 < tɬ' > is the hardest sound in every Northwest language! No wonder many languages write it as a man running away sweating, < ʔ >!

If I break this sound into components, you (1) put your tongue in place for “T” and (2) do the sort of lifting of the side of the tongue to make “L”, (3) build up air pressure against all of that closure, and (4) suddenly let the air explode out. Simple, eh?! This one’s going to take you a lot of practice...

Links to pronunciation help for it: (A) [TulalipLushootseed](#). (B) [Nuu-chah-nulth](#) (Barkley dialect) words that start with it. (C) The excellent [Nsilxcən \(Okanagan Salish\) alphabet song](#): 0:15 is what you want to listen for.

9 < h... > means “h before a vowel”, and it’s the same sound as English “h”. See the next footnote!

10 < ...h > means “h after a vowel”, and it’s a raspier sound, like in German “ich”. It’s pretty uncommon in CW.

11 < wh > is very much like old-fashioned English pronunciations, where “what” sounds sort of like “hwat”, “whistle” is like “hwistle”, etc.

12 < h > is made in the back of your mouth, and it’s quite raspy. If you can say German “ach”, you’re making the right consonant sound.