## Lesson 1. The alphabet

The Nuu-chah-nulth alphabet has forty-five letters. This is a phonetic alphabet, which means that each letter represents a different sound, and every sound is represented by only one letter.

## Pronunciation tips

- The common consonants hkmnstwy are pronounced the same as in English.
- The barred el $(t)$ is a continuous, hissing el sound, and can be said for a long time.

The barred lambda ( $\chi$ ) begins in silence, and can be said only briefly.

- The back consonants $h q q^{w} x x^{w} £$ tend to deform adjacent vowels, especially the high vowels ( $i$ ii $u u u$ ), because they pull the tongue back.
- The hard plosives $\dot{c} \dot{c} \dot{k} \dot{k}^{w} \dot{\chi} \dot{p} \dot{t}$ have a stronger release than plain plosives. To practise them, say them with your mouth without exhaling from the lungs.


## Handwriting tips

These diagrams illustrate some handwritten Nuu-chah-nulth letters.

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\begin{equation*}
C C^{\prime} C^{V} \check{C}^{\prime} S S^{Y} \tag{2}
\end{equation*}
$$


(4)



- The underdot in $h \underset{x}{x}$ can be written as a line in handwriting.
- To make them easy to tell apart, give $\nsucceq$ a loop, $\chi$ a hook, and $t$ a tail.


## Quick reference

Below is a quick reference to every letter. It includes each letter's name, a brief clue to its pronunciation, and a Nuu-chah-nulth example word that uses that sound.

| Letter | Name | Pronunciation | Word | Translation |
| :---: | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| a | short a | $u h$ | patpat | inboard motorboat |
| aa | long a | long ah | waa | say |
| c | plain cee | ts | caapin | sawbill duck |


| ć | hard cee | explosive $t$ s | ćawaak | one |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| č | cee wedge | ch | čakup | man |
| $\stackrel{\text { č }}{ }$ | hard cee wedge | explosive ch | čapac | canoe |
| e | short e | as in pet | we?ič | sleep |
| ee | long e | as in eh, and long | Reepinis | apple |
| h | aitch | $h$ | husmin | kelp |
| h | back aitch | like breathing on glass | hayu | ten |
| i | short i | as in pit | hisit | sockeye salmon |
| ii | long i | as in ski, and long | tiičma | heart |
| k | kay | $k$ | kuuk | packed lunch |
| $\mathrm{k}^{\text {w }}$ | round kay | $k$ with rounded lips | $\mathrm{k}^{\text {wistuup }}$ | something different |
| k | hard kay | explosive $k$ | kee?in | crow |
| $\stackrel{\mathbf{k}^{\text {w }}}{ }$ | hard round kay | $\stackrel{k}{k}$ with rounded lips | $\dot{k}^{\text {w }}$ iis | snow |
| $\nrightarrow$ | barred el | a hissed $l$, like lth | łuucsma | woman |
| $\chi$ | barred lambda | $t l$ | 入ama | house post |
| $\dot{\lambda}$ | hard barred lambda | explosive tl | $\dot{\chi}^{\text {disuk }}$ | white |
| m | em | $m$ | maamaati | bird |
| m | hard em | $m$ with a catch | maamiaqsu | older sibling |
| n | en | $n$ | nunuuk | sing |
| n | hard en | $n$ with a catch | huun̉ii | drift whale |
| 0 | short o | oh or aw | - |  |
| oo | long o | long oh or aw | Rooyinčas | orange (fruit) |
| p | pee | $p$ | puupuuca | dreaming |
| p | hard pee | explosive $p$ | p’apii | ear |
| q | cue | back $k$ | qawii | salmonberry |
| $q^{\text {w }}$ | round cue | $q$ with rounded lips | $\mathrm{q}^{\mathrm{w}}$ inii | seagull |
| s | ess | $s$ | saasin | hummingbird |
| š | ess wedge | sh | šuuk ${ }^{\text {w }}$ a ${ }^{\text {a }}$ | sugar |
| t | tee | $t$ | tupkuk | black |
| t | hard tee | explosive $t$ | tatuus | star |
| u | short u | as in put | susaa | swimming |
| uu | long u | as in due, and long | muu | four |
| w | double-u | $w$ | witwaak | warrior |
| w | hard double-u | $w$ with a catch | suw̉a | you |
| X | front ex | like a cat's hiss | xa?uumin | pigeon |
| $\mathrm{x}^{\mathrm{w}}$ | round front ex | $x$ with rounded lips | $\mathrm{x}^{\text {w }}$ akak | swollen |
| X | back ex | like hissing to spit | xaxaş̧̌kuk | pilot biscuit |
| $\mathrm{x}^{\text {w }}$ | round back ex | $\underset{\sim}{x}$ with rounded lips | mux̣ ${ }^{\text {w }}$ aškin | soapberry |
| y | wye | $y$ | yačaa | dogfish |
| y | hard wye | $y$ with a catch | siỷa | me |
| $?$ | glottal stop | a catch, as in uh-oh | Paama | loon |
| ¢ | pharyngeal stop | a catch plus $r$ | faanus | heron |

