

### 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.

- (1)    a    aa    c    ċ    č    ċ̣    e    ee    h    ḥ    i    ii    k    k<sup>w</sup>    ḳ
- k<sup>w</sup>    ł    λ    λ̣    m    ṃ    n    ṇ    o    oo    p    p̣    q    q<sup>w</sup>    s
- š    t    ṭ    u    uu    w    ẉ    x    x<sup>w</sup>    x̣    x̣<sup>w</sup>    y    ỵ    ?    ʔ

#### Pronunciation tips

- The common consonants *h k m n p s t w y* are pronounced the same as in English.
- The barred el (*ł*) is a continuous, hissing el sound, and can be said for a long time. The barred lambda (*λ*) begins in silence, and can be said only briefly.
- The back consonants *ḥ q q<sup>w</sup> x x<sup>w</sup> ʔ* tend to deform adjacent vowels, especially the high vowels (*i ii u uu*), because they pull the tongue back.
- The hard plosives *ċ č̣ ḳ ḳ<sup>w</sup> λ̣ p̣ ṭ* 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.

- (2)                          (3)    
- (4)                          (5)    

- The underdot in *ḥ x̣* can be written as a line in handwriting.
- To make them easy to tell apart, give *ł* a loop, *λ* a hook, and *ṭ* 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   | <i>uh</i>           | patpat | inboard motorboat |
| aa     | long a    | long <i>ah</i>      | waa    | say               |
| c      | plain cee | <i>ts</i>           | caapin | sawbill duck      |
| ċ      | hard cee  | explosive <i>ts</i> | ċawaak | one               |

|                 |                    |                                     |                          |                     |
|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| č               | cee wedge          | <i>ch</i>                           | čakup                    | man                 |
| č̣              | hard cee wedge     | explosive <i>ch</i>                 | čapac                    | canoe               |
| e               | short e            | as in <i>pet</i>                    | —                        | —                   |
| ee              | long e             | as in <i>eh</i> , and long          | ʔeepinis                 | apple               |
| h               | aitch              | <i>h</i>                            | husmin                   | kelp                |
| ḥ               | back aitch         | like breathing on glass             | ḥayu                     | ten                 |
| i               | short i            | as in <i>pit</i>                    | hisit                    | sockeye salmon      |
| ii              | long i             | as in <i>ski</i> , and long         | tiičma                   | heart               |
| k               | kay                | <i>k</i>                            | kuuk                     | packed lunch        |
| k <sup>w</sup>  | round kay          | <i>k</i> with rounded lips          | k <sup>w</sup> istuup    | something different |
| ḳ              | hard kay           | explosive <i>k</i>                  | ḳaaʔin                  | crow                |
| ḳ <sup>w</sup> | hard round kay     | ḳ with rounded lips                | ḳ <sup>w</sup> iis      | snow                |
| ł               | barred el          | a hissed <i>l</i> , like <i>lth</i> | łucma                    | woman               |
| λ               | barred lambda      | <i>tl</i>                           | λama                     | house post          |
| λ̣              | hard barred lambda | explosive <i>tl</i>                 | λ̣isuk                   | white               |
| m               | em                 | <i>m</i>                            | maamaati                 | bird                |
| ṃ              | hard em            | <i>m</i> with a catch               | ṃaamiiqsu               | older sibling       |
| n               | en                 | <i>n</i>                            | nunuuk                   | sing                |
| ṇ              | hard en            | <i>n</i> with a catch               | huuñii                   | drift whale         |
| o               | short o            | <i>oh</i> or <i>aw</i>              | —                        | —                   |
| oo              | long o             | long <i>oh</i> or <i>aw</i>         | ʔooyinčas                | orange (fruit)      |
| p               | pee                | <i>p</i>                            | puupuuca                 | dreaming            |
| p̣              | hard pee           | explosive <i>p</i>                  | p̣ap̣ii                  | ear                 |
| q               | cue                | back <i>k</i>                       | qawii                    | salmonberry         |
| q <sup>w</sup>  | round cue          | <i>q</i> with rounded lips          | q <sup>w</sup> inii      | seagull             |
| s               | ess                | <i>s</i>                            | saasin                   | hummingbird         |
| š               | ess wedge          | <i>sh</i>                           | šuuk <sup>w</sup> aa     | sugar               |
| t               | tee                | <i>t</i>                            | tupkak                   | black               |
| ṭ              | hard tee           | explosive <i>t</i>                  | ṭaṭuus                 | star                |
| u               | short u            | as in <i>put</i>                    | susaa                    | swimming            |
| uu              | long u             | as in <i>due</i> , and long         | muu                      | four                |
| w               | double-u           | <i>w</i>                            | witwaak                  | warrior             |
| ẉ              | hard double-u      | <i>w</i> with a catch               | suẉa                    | you                 |
| x               | front ex           | like a cat's hiss                   | xaʔuumin                 | pigeon              |
| x <sup>w</sup>  | round front ex     | <i>x</i> with rounded lips          | x <sup>w</sup> akyuu     | swollen             |
| x̣              | back ex            | like hissing to spit                | x̣ax̣aṣ̌kuk              | pilot biscuit       |
| x̣ <sup>w</sup> | round back ex      | x̣ with rounded lips                | mux̣ <sup>w</sup> aṣ̌kin | soapberry           |
| y               | wye                | <i>y</i>                            | yačaa                    | dogfish             |
| ỵ              | hard wye           | <i>y</i> with a catch               | siya                     | me                  |
| ʔ               | glottal stop       | a catch, as in <i>uh-oh</i>         | ʔaama                    | loon                |
| ʕ               | pharyngeal stop    | a catch plus <i>r</i>               | ʕaanis                   | heron               |