

HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE: A QUICK PRIMER



THE ALPHABET

The Hawaiian alphabet has eight consonants and five vowels in words of native origin. The consonants are: H, K, L, M, N, P, W, plus the 'okina, which appears as a vertical mark. The five vowels are: A, E, I, O, U.

Vowels are pronounced as this, without the kahako:

- a (as the "o" sounds in "blonde")
- e ("ay" as in "day")
- i ("ee" as in "needle")
- o ("o" as in "low")
- u ("oo" as in "moon")

UkuleleTonya.com

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THE KAHAKO

The kahako is a diacritical mark, or macron, that indicates a long vowel. It's indicated with a horizontal line over a vowel to signify the vowel's elongation. Instead of one beat of sound, give a vowel two when it has a kahako.

THE 'OKINA

The eighth consonant in the Hawaiian alphabet is called the 'okina, or glottal stop. The symbol for the 'okina is a single open quote or vertical mark.

SPELLING

- Every word has at least one vowel.
- No word has two consecutive consonants.
- Words never end with a consonant.

RULES OF THUMB FOR PRONOUNCING HAWAIIAN WORDS

- All letters are sounded. There are NO silent letters in Hawaiian.
- Vowels are sounded separately EXCEPT when two vowels are next to each other and the sound is then blended as diphthongs.
- Stress the "next-to-the-last" sound. Sounds with kahakô and diphthongs are stressed.

W-Sounds:

- "W" sounds like "V" or "W" when it starts a word or follows "a".
- "W" sounds like "V" when it follows "e" or "i".
- "W" sounds like "W" when it follows "o" or "u."

Y-Glides and W-Glides:

These glide sounds are automatically produced with certain vowel combinations. Hawaiian is not spoken in staccato fashion. When two vowels are next to each other (in the same word and with adjacent words), smooth out the sounds with these glides.

W-glides:

Mauī [Mau'-(w)ee]

`oe [oh-(w)eh'] : you

Auê [au-(W)EH'!] : Oh no! Darn!

lauoho [lau-(w)oh' hoh] : hair

Y-glides:

`O ia [oi'-(y)ah] : he, she, it; he is, she is, it is

`iâia [ee-(Y)AH'-(y)ah] : to him, to her

heiau [hei'-(y)au'] : place of worship, rock shrine

E Hawai`i Aloha ê [eh hah vai' ee-(y)ah loh' hah-(Y)EH]

Information compiled from various Hawaiian language resources including Auntie D (www.Hawaiianlanguage.com); the Instant Immersion Hawaiian CD course (http://www.panpolynesia.net/language/olelo_hawaii/topics/index.html), Kamehameha Schools (<http://ksdl.ksbe.edu/kulaiwi/index.html>) and Joyce Flaughner (<http://www.alohayall.net/>).

Diphthongs

A diphthong is a blended sound from two vowels in a row, as in “ou” in house or “oi” in noise. In Hawaiian the two vowels are not so tightly joined as in English and BOTH sounds must be completely executed. The first vowel of the blended pair is stressed more.

Diphthong	Sounds like	Example
ai	“i” in ice	kai = sea water
ae	I or eye	Mmae`ole = never-fading
ao	“ow” in how, but without the nasal sound	maoli = true kaona = hidden meaning
au	“ou” in house or out, but without the nasal sound	au = I, I am
ei	“ei” as in chow mein or eight	lei = garland
eu	“eh-(y)oo”	‘eleu = lively
iu	“ee-(y)oo” similar to few	wekiu = topmost
oe	oh-(w)eh	‘oe = you
oi	“oi” as in voice	poi = Hawaiian staple
ou	“ow” as in bowl	kou = your
ui	“oo-(w)ee” as in gooey	hui = together, team, chorus

Practice saying the eight major Hawaiian islands correctly:

Ni`ihau, Kaua`i, O`ahu, Moloka`i, Lâna`i, Kaho`olawe, Maui, Hawai`i.

Pronounced: [nee ee hau’], [kau-(w)ah’ ee], oh ah’ hoo], [moh loh kah’ ee], [LAH’ nah ee], _ [kah hoh oh lah’ veh], [mau’-(w)ee], [hah vai’ ee] or [hah wai’ ee].

Honolulu is pronounced [hoh noh loo’ loo]

10 COMMON WORDS

aloha (ah-LOW-ha): encompasses many meanings including love, affection, compassion, mercy, sympathy, pity, kindness, sentiment, grace, charity; also, hello, goodbye, farewell.

Hawaii (ha-VAI-ee): both the official name for the island known as the Big Island and for the chain of the Hawaiian Islands.

kalo (KAH-low): taro, a sacred plant considered an ancestor to the Hawaiian people.

kapu (KAH-poo): taboo, prohibited, forbidden, sacred, holy, no trespassing, keep out.

keiki (KAY-kee): child, offspring, descendant, son, lad, kid, cub.

kupuna (kuu-POO-nah): elder, grandparent, ancestor.

kokua (ko-KOO-ah): help, aid, assistance, assistant, associate, deputy.

mana: (MAH-nah): supernatural or divine power, powerful, authority.

‘ohana (OH-hana): family, relative, kin group, related.

‘ono (OH-no): delicious, tasty, savory. (Ono, spelled without the ‘okina, is a large mackerel-type fish.)