

Ha'awina Puana (Pronunciation Lesson)

Ka Pī'āpā 'Ōiwi (Hawaiian alphabet)

The pī'āpā 'ōiwi consists of 5 **woela** (*vowels*) and 8 **koneka** (*consonants*). In parentheses after each alphabet symbol is its name.

nā woela – a ('ā), e ('ē), i ('ī), o ('ō), u ('ū)

nā koneka – h (hē), k (kē), l (lā), m (mū), n (nū), p (pī), w (wē), ' ('okina)

Ka Hakalama

The hakalama is a chant that was developed during the reign of King Liholiho to help the people learn reading and writing. The hakalama is still recited today by preschool and early elementary aged children. The hakalama is comprised of 80 consonant-vowel clusters and 10 vowel sounds (called huahakalama).

It is helpful to use the hakalama when pronouncing Hawaiian words. For example, the word Kalaniana'ole includes 7 huahakalama: Ka | la | ni | a | na | 'o | le

Nā Woela (vowels)

Hawaiian is a vowel rich language. All Hawaiian words include at least one vowel. Vowels are the key to good pronunciation of Hawaiian. The individual vowel sounds in the alphabet are pronounced:

a – above

e – et

i – ieat

o – ole

u – umoon

Common Mispronunciations of Vowels

These vowel combinations are commonly mispronounced:

au & ao

ai & ae

oi & oe

ou & ō

ei & ē

For example, the word “pau” is commonly mispronounced as “pao.” “Pau” means “finish, complete” whereas “pao” means “to scoop out, peck, chisel out.” In this example, pronouncing a word with the incorrect vowel sound completely changes the meaning of the word.

Another common mispronunciation is to “drop” the second vowel completely, as in the word “lei,” commonly mispronounced as “lē.” Again, you end up with two completely different meanings—“lei” is a garland worn around the neck, and “lē” means to “go about aimlessly, be lazy.”

Practice saying the different vowel sounds in the following sets of words. Notice how different the meanings are in each word pair:

mau (*always, steady, perpetual*) **mao** (*cleared, as rain; alleviated*)

kai (*sea, ocean*) **kae** (*refuse or rubbish*)

poi (*pounded taro mixed with water*) **poe** (*round, rounded*)

hou (*new, fresh, again*) **hō** (*to give; to wheeze*)

nei (*to rumble; this*) **nē** (*fretting, teasing*)

The proper way to combine two vowel sounds is to glide them together. Try to avoid inserting an ‘okina in between the vowels, for example, the place name ‘Aiea is commonly mispronounced as ‘Ai‘ea. Also be careful to pronounce each vowel in each combination, without dropping one of the vowels (as in hou vs. hō). Practice these vowel combinations:

ae	ai	ao	au
ea	ei	eo	eu
ia	ie	io	iu
oa	oe	oi	ou
ua	ue	ui	uo

Ka ‘Okina (*glottal stop*)

The ‘okina is an essential feature of Hawaiian. When pronounced, it causes a break between two vowel sounds, like the word “uh-oh” in English. The ‘okina was not included in the original Hawaiian alphabet written by English speaking missionaries, but is standard in written Hawaiian today. Its appearance is identical to a single open-quote mark (‘) looking like a 6. The tick mark (`) is an acceptable variation of the ‘okina. The ‘okina is only placed next to a vowel (as in the place name Ka‘a‘awa) and is never used next to another consonant (o‘lu).

It’s essential to practice the proper pronunciation of Hawaiian words. Improper pronunciation of the woela, ‘okina, and kahakō usually results in changing the meaning of a word. For example, the place name Waipi‘o, which means “curved water,” is commonly mispronounced as “Waipio,” which changes the meaning of the word to “water that has disappeared.” In Hawaiian thinking, this mispronunciation, and subsequent change in the meaning, can have negative consequences for the object.

Ke Kahakō (*macron*)

The kahakō (¯) is also an essential feature of Hawaiian. It’s written as a line above a vowel, and is used to draw out and stress a vowel, as in the word pūpū.

nā woela kō (*vowels with kahakō*) – ā, ē, ī, ō, ū

Kahakō never occur over a consonant. It is possible to have two woela kō side by side, as in the word pōā.