

Nā Inoa Hawai'i a me nā Ka'i

(Hawaiian Names and Ka'i)

Hawaiian names have meaning. Understanding this meaning builds appreciation of the language. Correct pronunciation of Hawaiian names is important.

Some Hawaiian names are composed of a single kikino (*noun*). For example:

| | |
|------------|-------------------|
| Pua | flower |
| Koa | warrior/brave one |
| Lei | flower garland |

Some Hawaiian names include a kikino with a **ka'i** (*lead word, such as "the"*), in the form of **ka/ke** (*"the"–singular*), or **nā** (*"the"–plural*). For example:

| | |
|--------------|---------------------|
| Kapua | the flower |
| Kekoa | the brave one |
| Nālei | the flower garlands |

The KEAO rule: When to use "ke" or "ka"

In the examples above, we see that there is only one way to express the plural version of the word "the" (**nā**), but there are two ways to translate the singular version of "the" in English, **ke** and **ka**.

Ke is used before all words starting with k, e, a, and o:

| | |
|----------------|-----------|
| Kekai | the sea |
| Keehu | the vigor |
| Keali'i | the chief |
| Keola | the life |

Ka is used for all remaining letters. A simple way to know when to use ke or ka is to memorize the word KE AO (*the cloud*). That is, all words that start with k, e, a, or o use "ke," and all other words use "ka."

| | | | |
|---------------|------------|---------------|-------------|
| Kanani | the beauty | Kalani | the heavens |
| Kalama | the lamp | Kahanu | the breath |

Nā Kū'ēlula – The Rule Defiers

There are some exceptions to the KE AO rule. For example, the word for “table” is “pākaukau.” Even though this word starts with a “p,” it uses the ka'i “ke” — ke pākaukau. These exceptions to the rule are called kū'ēlula (kū'e means to defy, and lula means rule). Other examples of kū'ēlula are the words for eating utensils: puna (spoon), and 'ō (fork). The word “mele” also uses “ke”— ke mele (the song).

In the Pukui and Māmaka Kaiāo dictionaries, words that are kū'ēlula include the phrase “**preceded by ke**” in their definitions. Using the PDF versions of the dictionaries found at ulukau.org, you can search for “preceded by ke” to familiarize yourself with most of these kū'ē cases where “ke” takes the place of the expected “ka.” Following are a few more examples that are also Hawaiian names:

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Ke'ala the fragrance | Kemele the song/chant |
| Kenoi the request | Keli'i the chief (li'i is short for ali'i) |

Hawaiian Names with Kikino (Nouns) and 'A'ano (Descriptive Words)

Often, longer Hawaiian names include a root word followed by a modifier either with or without a ka'i. Remember, unlike the English word order, in Hawaiian, modifiers follow the word they modify. For example:

Kikino -'A'ano Names without Ka'i

Leialoha – love lei (lei of aloha)

Kaipo'i – crashing sea

Puanani – beautiful flower

Kikino-'A'ano Names with Ka'i

Kaleimakamae – the precious lei

Kekainalu – the wave-filled sea

Nāpualei – the lei flowers