

KERNOWAK: A GUIDE TO SPELLING AND PRONUNCIATION

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KERNOWAK: A GUIDE TO SPELLING AND PRONUNCIATION

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0. INTRODUCTION

This short guide was written to accompany the more detailed “Proposed Standard Written Form of Cornish”, and is aimed at a more general readership than its more academic companion. Both may be downloaded from **<http://kernowak.com>**.

Readers who want a more detailed view of the proposal should download the latest version of the proposal file, **kernowak-revision-14.pdf**. Its 170+ pages cover a much wider area than this short guide, with sections on:

- the background to the Kernowak project,
- a more academic IPA-based approach to pronunciation and spelling,
- initial mutations,
- tables of some nouns, pronouns and verbs,
- sentence-building

This is a proposal for a standard spelling system for the Cornish language. The spelling system proposed here can be referred to as ‘**Kernowak**’. The phonology is based on the Cornish language as it was reconstructed to have been pronounced around 1600, but variant pronunciations based on earlier or later time periods are also permissible.

Two minimum requirements were considered:

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- The spelling system must be based on attested traditional orthographic forms.
- In the orthography the relationship between spelling and sounds must be unambiguous.

The sounds of Cornish are not particularly difficult for the average English speaker to produce. Many of the sounds that occur in English are also found in Cornish. This is a somewhat generalized and idealized overview of the spelling to sound correspondences in Cornish. As is true of most languages, Cornish pronunciation is not uniform, expect variation! A few common variations are explained in the pronunciation section below.

1. THE CORNISH ALPHABET

The Cornish alphabet has the same 26 letters as the English alphabet.
a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z

The following consonant combinations are significant:

bm, ch, ck, dh, dn, ff, gh, gwr, lh, ll, qw, qwr, th, wh, wr

The following vowel combinations are significant:

ai, au, aw, ay, ew, êw, ey, ia, ou, ow, oy, yw

The letter **y** is both used as a vowel and a consonant. When diacritics are added to **y** it is written **î** or **ÿ**.

The sound of *k* as in English *cat*, *kitten* and *quail* is represented by an alternating set of three letters:

c before consonants and **a, o, u**;

k before **e, y, i** and at the end of a word; this is **ck** when **c** or **k** are doubled;

q before **w**;

Before **e, y, i** the letter **c** is pronounced like English *s* in *sit* or *c* in *city*:
cyta ‘city’, **certan** ‘certain’.

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Cornish vowels are either long or short. **Kernowak** has specific rules concerning the predictability of vowel length. If certain words do not conform to the rules then accents are used over the letter to make clear whether the vowel in question is long or short:

- vowels with a circumflex accent are *long*: **â, ê, î, ô**
- vowels with a grave accent are *short*: **à, è, ì, ò**

As the length of a vowel can often be predicted from other features in how a word is spelt, most words don't need an accent. Accents are reserved for those exceptional words where vowel length cannot be predicted from the normal rules of spelling. The accented letters **ù** and **û** have a different sound from regular **u** – see below.

2. SPELLINGS AND THE CORRESPONDING SOUNDS

- a**
- 1) when long, the sound can vary (from speaker to speaker) from a drawn out version of *a* in southern English *sad* to the *ai*-sound in English *air*: **tas** 'father', **mab** 'son', **shâp** 'shape'.
 - 2) when short, like *a* in southern English *cat*: **dall** 'blind', **mabm** 'mother', **câr** 'car'. when unstressed like *a* in English *sofa*: **screfa** 'to write', **bednath** 'blessing'.

NOTE: Some speakers distinguish a "darker" sound from the one described above that occurs in a number of words. The long sound is the one heard in southern English *father*, and the corresponding short sound is like English *pot* as pronounced in the South-West: long: **brâs** 'big, large', **clâf** 'sick', **tâl** 'brow'; short: **câr** 'car', **part** 'part', **brâssa** 'bigger'.

- ai** same as long **e**, the pure vowel sound of *made* as heard in Wales and Northern England: **air** 'air', **bai** 'bay', **chair** 'chair', **pain** 'pain', **paint** 'paint'.

NOTE: Some speakers prefer to pronounce these words with an "igh"-sound as in English *night*.

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au is a short *o* as in English *top*: **cauns** ‘pavement’, **dauns** ‘dance’, **chauns** ‘chance’.

aw as *ow* in English *cow*: **maw** ‘boy’, **naw** ‘nine’, **saw** ‘but, except’.

ay as *igh* in English *night*: **bay** ‘kiss’, **may** ‘that’, **ha’y** ‘and his/her’.

b as in English *boy*

bm a rapid sequence of *b* and *m* as in English *webmail*: **tabm** ‘bit, bite’, **obma** ‘here’.

NOTE: Some speakers may prefer to say *mm* as in English *summer*, or with a long *mm* as found in Italian *mamma*.

c 1) *k* as in English *cat*: **cabm** ‘bent’, **cath** ‘cat’, **colon** ‘heart’.
2) *s* as in English *s* in *sit* or *c* in English *city*, *certain* before *e*, *y*, and *i*: **cyta** ‘city’, **certan** ‘certain’.

ch 1) usually as *ch* in *church*: **chy** ‘house’, **chauns** ‘chance’, **chanjya** ‘change’.

2) as the *k*-sound, like *ch* in English *chemist* in technical terms, usually derived from Greek (also having *ch*- spelling in English): **chemyst** ‘chemist’, **technologyeth** ‘technology’.

ck *k* sound as in *ck* in English *tackle*: **lacka** ‘worse’, **tecka** ‘prettier’.

NOTE: Some speakers like to lengthen the *k* sound as in Italian *bocca* ‘mouth’.

d as in English *door*.

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dh as *th* in English *this* or *that* (never as in *thing*): **bloudh** ‘year of age’, **Godhalak** ‘Irish (language)’, **bledhen** ‘year’.

NOTE: At the beginning of words, some speakers prefer to pronounce this as **d**. In such cases *d* may be written also.

dn a rapid sequence of *d* and *n* as in English *hadn’t* or *wouldn’t*: **hedna** ‘that’, **radn** ‘part’.

NOTE: Some speakers may prefer to say *nn* as in English *scanner*, or with a long *nn* as found in the Italian pronunciation of the names *Anna* or *Giovanna*.

e 1) when long, like the pure vowel sound of *made* as head in Wales and Northern England: **den** ‘man’, **segh** ‘dry’.
2) when short, as *e* in *bet*: **let** ‘hindrance’, **kelly** ‘to lose’, **gedn** ‘wedge’, **bèr** ‘short’. when unstressed, as *e* in English *fallen*: **seythen** ‘week’, **mowes** ‘girl’.

ew a sequence of *ee* in English *see* and *oo* in *took* in rapid succession: **deweth** ‘end’, **Dew** ‘God’, **bewgh** ‘cow’.

êw a sequence of *e* in English *bed* and *oo* in *took* in rapid succession: **dêw** ‘two’, **bêw** ‘alive’, **têw** ‘fat’.

ey a sequence of *a* in English *sofa* and *ee* in *see* in rapid succession, similar to the way *see* is pronounced in Cockney or Australian English: **seythen** ‘week’, **seyth** ‘seven’.

f 1) as *v* in English *vine* or *have*: **ef** ‘he’, **haf** ‘summer’, **gaf** ‘forgive, excuse’.
2) as *f* in English *fallen*: **freth** ‘fluent’, **fowt** ‘fault’.
3) after a vowel in unstressed syllables **f** may be very weak and not sounded at all: **genaf** ‘with me’, **enaf** ‘soul’, **coref** ‘beer’.

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NOTE 1: Initial **f** is often voiced, and in those words **v** can alternatively be spelt for **f**: **fenten/venten** 'spring, fountain', **forgh/vorgh** 'fork', **folen/volen** 'page'.

NOTE 2: At the end of an unstressed syllable, **f** is often dropped.

ff *f* as in English *stuff* or *strife*: **scriff** 'writing', **deffa** 'came (subj.)', **scaffa** 'faster (comp.)'.

NOTE: Between two vowels some speakers like to lengthen the *f* sound as in Italian *caraffa* 'jug'.

g as *g* in English *get* or *gun* (never as in *George*): **gallos** 'to be able', **egery** 'open', **aga** 'their', **rag** 'for'.

gh 1) at the end of a word after a vowel the pronunciation varies from speaker to speaker, some pronounce it strongly, as *ch* in Scottish *loch*; others pronounce it more weakly, as *h* in *aha!*; while for others it is silent: **segh** 'dry', **yagh** 'healthy', **flogh** 'child'.

2) before a consonant it is strong *ch* as in Scottish *loch* or *nicht*: **syght** 'sight', **maghteth** 'virgin'.

gwr as *gr* in English *ground*: **gwra** 'does', **gwreg** 'wife', **gwredh** 'root'.

NOTE: Some speakers insert a very short unstressed *uh*-sound between **g** and **r**, imagine saying "*guhrround*" for *ground*.

h some speakers pronounce it as *h* in English *hand* or *aha!*, while for others it is silent: **flehas** 'children', **bohes** 'a little (adv.)', **crohen** 'skin, leather'.

i see **y**.

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- ia** has a stress on the **i**, as *ea* in the name *Lea* or *ia* in the name *Mia*: **bian** ‘small’, **bia** ‘would be’, **tiak** ‘farmer’, **annia** ‘annoy’.
- j** as in English *jam*.
- k** always *k* as in English *kitten*: **kelly** ‘to lose’, **Kernow** ‘Cornwall’.
- l** always a “light *l*” as in English *leave*, not a “dark *l*” as in *full*.
- lh** this sound is a “light *l*” followed quickly by **h**; some people pronounce this as an unvoiced *l*, less strong than the Welsh *ll*; try putting the tongue in the *l*-position and say **h**: **telher** ‘place’, **gwelha** ‘best’, **pelha** ‘further, farther, -est’.
- ll** *l* following a short vowel as *ll* in English *tell*: **dall** ‘blind’, **kelly** ‘to lose’.
- NOTE: For some speakers, **ll** between vowels is lengthened as in Italian *collo* ‘neck’.
- m** as in English *man*.
- n** as in English *now*.
- o** 1) when long, the pure vowel sound of *home* as head in Wales and Northern England: **nos** ‘night’, **cost** ‘district’, **don** ‘carry’, **lôk** ‘look’. when short as *o* in English *top*: **cot** ‘short’, **toll** ‘hole’, **gòn** ‘I know’.
- 2) when unstressed as the two *o* in English *collaborate*: **gallos** ‘to be able’, **eglos** ‘church’, **ebron** ‘sky, firmament’.
- ou** long vowel, as *oo* in English *cool*: **bous** ‘food’, **bloudh** ‘year(s) of age’, **goun** ‘gown’.

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- ow** 1) as *oa* in English *boat*: **bownans** ‘life’, **glow** ‘coal’, **towlal** ‘throw’.
2) before another vowel it is pronounced as *oo* in English *cool*: **Kernowak** ‘Cornish language’, **lowen** ‘happy’, **Jowan** ‘John’.

NOTE: In unstressed syllables, especially in the plural endings, some speakers prefer to say *o* as in English *pot*: **Kernow** ‘Cornwall’, **tasow** ‘fathers’, **levow**.

- oy** 1) as *oy* in English *boy*: **noy** ‘nephew’, **poyson** ‘poison’, **oyl** ‘oil’.
2) in the two words **oy** ‘egg’ and **moy** ‘more’, some speakers pronounce this more like English *goeey*.
p as in English *put*.

qw as *qu* in English, *quick*: **sqwyth** ‘tired’, **qweth** ‘garment’.

qwr as *cr* in English *crate*: **a qwressa** ‘if he did’, **ow qwrydnyia** ‘wrestling’.

NOTE: Some speakers insert a very short unstressed *uh*-sound between **c** and **r**, imagine saying “*culhrowd*” for *crowd*.

- r** 1) at the beginning and at the end of a word, as well as before and after other consonants, as in Cornish English: **ros** ‘rose’, **dor** ‘earth, ground’, **crejy** ‘to believe’.
2) between two vowels it is a single tongue flap, like *tt* in American English *butter* or like the *r* in Spanish *pero*: **cara** ‘to love’, **bara** ‘bread’, **egery** ‘to open’.

NOTE: Some speakers prefer other realizations of **r**, either as in English throughout, or trilled as in Welsh.

NOTE: When doubled between vowels, some speakers like to lengthen the **rr**, as in Italian *birra* ‘beer’.

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- s** 1) as *z* in English *zeal* in most contexts, especially in stressed words of one syllable, word finally: **tas** ‘father’, **bis** ‘until’, **res** ‘need’, **whans** ‘desire’, **gwyns** ‘wind’;
- 2) in the past participle ending **-ys**: **kellys** ‘lost’, **budhys** ‘drowned’ as *s* in English *seal*, especially in unstressed syllables: **genas** ‘with you (sg.)’, **gwelas** ‘to see’, **myternes** ‘queen’.

NOTE: Initial **s** is often voiced, and in those words **z** can alternatively be spelt for **s**: **seythen/zeythen** ‘weak’, **segh/zegh** ‘dry’, **seyth/zeyth** ‘seven’.

- ss** as *ss* in English in *message*, between vowels. For some speakers lengthened as in Italian *messa* ‘mass’.

- t** as in English *tall*.

- th** as *th* in *thin, think* (never as in *this, that*): **eth** ‘eight’, **leth** ‘milk’, **bannothow** ‘blessings’.

- u** 1a) when long, as a drawn out *u* sound in French *lune* ‘moon’, or *ü* in German *grün* ‘green’: **Lun** ‘Monday’, **tus** ‘people’, **fur** ‘wise’.

- 1b) alternatively, this can also be pronounced as *ee* in English *see*: **Lun** ‘Monday’, **tus** ‘people’, **fur** ‘wise’.

- 2) when stressed, at the end of a word, as **ew** and **yw**, a sequence of *ee* in English *see* and *oo* in *took* in rapid succession: **tu** ‘side’, **du** ‘black’, **Jesu** ‘Jesus’.

- 3a) when short as a short *u* sound in French *lune* ‘moon’, or *ü* in German *Mütter* ‘mothers’, **udn** ‘one’, **budhy** ‘to drown’, **uja** ‘to howl’.

- 3b) alternatively, this can also be pronounced as *i* in English *bit*: **udn** ‘one’, **budhy** ‘to drown’, **uja** ‘to howl’.

- û** long *oo* sound in English *cool*, same as **ou**: **frût** ‘fruit’, **gûn** ‘down, unenclosed land’, **Stûl** ‘Epiphany’, **dûk** ‘duke’. In the word **ûsya** ‘to use’ it is pronounced as in English *use*.

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- ù** short *oo* sound in English *took*: **jùj** ‘judge’, **lùk** ‘enough’, **bùsh** ‘bush’.
- v** as in English *vine*.
- w** as in English *wine*.
- wh** a voiceless **w**, say *w* and *h* at the same time, like the breathy *wh* in accents of English that distinguish *wear* and *where*, such as Scottish and Irish English: **why** ‘you (pl.)’, **wheg** ‘sweet’, **whans** ‘desire’. The sound is not really *h* followed by *w*, though this or even a soft *f* followed by *w* is an approximation.
- x** always *ks* as in English *extreme* (not *gz* as in *examine*): **text** ‘text’, **vexya** ‘to vex’.
- y, i** 1a) as a vowel, when long as *ea* in *bead*: **gwyn** ‘wine’, **tyr** ‘land’, **scriff** ‘writing’; when short as *i* in *bit*: **gwydn** ‘white’, **bis** ‘until’, **pryck** ‘point’.
- 1b) at the end of a word, when stressed, some speakers pronounce it as **ey** (see above): **chy** ‘house’, **hy** ‘she’, **ky** ‘dog’.
- 2a) when unstressed, *i* as in English *laughing*: **kellys** ‘lost’, **termyn** ‘time’, **flehyk** ‘little child’.
- 2b) when final, unstressed as *y* in English *baby*: **kelly** ‘to lose’, **ankevy** ‘to forget’.
- y** as a consonant, like *y* in English *yet*: **yeyn** ‘cold’, **yagh** ‘healthy’, **yonk** ‘young’, **clappya** ‘to speak, chat’.
- NOTE: At the beginning of some words, especially before *e* the *y*-sound is dropped by some speakers. For those **yeth** ‘language’ sounds like **eth** and **yehas** ‘health,’ like **ehas**.
- yw** same as **ew**, a sequence of *ee* in English *see* and *oo* in *took* in rapid succession: **lyw** ‘colour’, **pyw** ‘who’, **yw** ‘is’.

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z as in English *zeal*.

3. LENGTH OF VOWELS

All vowels in unaccented syllables are short (exceptions: some foreign words, **-ow**). Vowels in accented monosyllables may be either short or long. The following rules with regard to length of vowels in monosyllables will serve as a guide:

The vowel is short if followed by **-p, -t, -k, -ch, -x**, two or more consonants, double consonants or consonant clusters (other than **-sc/-sk** and **-st**) e.g.: **cans** 'hundred', **top** 'top', **mabm** 'mother', **stryng** 'clasp', **fyt** 'fit, bout', **coll** 'loss', **lynn** 'liquid', **torr** 'womb, belly', **pedn** 'head', **sqwych** 'spasm', **box** 'box', **fordh** 'road, way', **bryck** 'brick'.

Any short vowel that does not conform to the aforementioned rule replaces **a, e, y, o** with **à, è, ì, ò**: **càr** 'car', **bèr** 'short', **bìs** 'until', **gòn** 'I know'.

The vowel is long when followed by **-b, -d, -dh, -f, -g, -gh, -l, -n, -r, -th, -s, -sc/sk, -st**, e.g. **mab** 'son', **ged** 'leads', **bedh** 'grave', **haf** 'summer', **kyg** 'meat, flesh', **flogh** 'child', **tal** 'pays', **den** 'man', **mor** 'sea', **cath** 'cat', **nos** 'night', **tus** 'people', **pesk** 'fish', **best** 'animal, beast'.

Any long vowel that does not conform to the aforementioned rule replaces **a, e, y, o** with **â, ê, î, ô**: **shâp** 'shape', **pênt** 'paint', **scriff** 'writing', **lôk** 'look', land'.

4. WORD STRESS

In words of more than one syllable the stress falls normally on the last but one, the penultimate. If a syllable is added, the stress moves accordingly, e.g. **'Kernow** 'Cornwall, a Cornishman', **Ker'nowak** 'the Cornish language', **kerno'weger** 'a Cornish speaker', **kernowe'goryon** 'Cornish speakers'.

Stress is not normally indicated in writing, but ought to be shown in dictionaries and learners' material. Here, a vertical bar in front of the stressed syllable is used to indicate stress. There are a few words which are irregularly stressed, such as:

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Verb-noun endings in **-he**: **yagh'he** 'to heal, get well', **gwak'he** 'to empty', **gwell'he** 'to make better, improve'.

The emphatic personal pronouns: **ma'vy**, **ta'jy**, **hy'hy**, **e'ef**, **ny'ny**, **why'why**, **an'jy**.

Some words have final stress: **a'dro** 'about, around', **yn'wedh** 'also, too', **my'tern** 'king', **ales** 'abroad', **dhe'worth** 'from', **ha'dre**.

Some words borrowed from English are stressed as in English: **'polycy** 'policy', **'benefyt** 'benefit', **uni'versita** 'university'.