

Tips, Tricks and Cheats to help you pronounce words in Cornish

Reference 1: Some sounds in Cornish

Letters are sounded as in English with the following exceptions:

A – The sound is as in *'bat'*, but only when followed by a doubled consonant e.g. **dannvon** (which means to send). It is sounded more as in *'father'* but not quite so long when stressed e.g. the first syllable of **bara** (pronounced as **bar-a** which means *'bread'* in English). When unstressed it's a more neutral sound as in *'the'* (not *'thee'*) e.g. the second syllable of **bar-a** (bread). It's never sounded as in English *'made'*.

AW – The sound rhymes with *'how'* e.g. **glaw** (pronounced as **glow**, as in ouch, which means *'rain'* in English).

AY - To rhyme with *'by'* e.g. **chayn** (pronounced as **chyne**, which means *'chain'* in English).

B - Normally the *'b'* sound as in English but it becomes a *'p'* sound at the end of a word, unless followed by a vowel in a word following immediately without any pause e.g. **y vab** (is pronounced as **y vap**, which means *'his son'* in English). In the word **y vab ev** (his own son) the *'b'* sounds as a *'b'*.

C - Only used followed by H or K and is used for the normal **'hard C'** sound.

CH – This is pronounced as in the English *'ch'* sound, like *'choo choo train'* e.g. **chayn** (pronounced as **chyne**, which means *'chain'* in English).

DH – This is normally pronounced as *'th'* in the English word *'this'*. For example **pub dydh oll** is pronounced as **poob dith oll**, which means *'every day'* in English. The *'dh'* is pronounced as *'this'* or as in the English word *'with'*. Another example is: **dydh da**, which is pronounced as **dith da**, meaning *'good day'* in English. The *'i'* can be elongated to **almost** an *'ee'* sound– hence some say **deeth da**.

E - When followed by a doubled consonant or in an unstressed syllable, the sound is as in English *'bet'* e.g. **penn** (head in English), **tiek** (farmer in English). Many adjectives end in unstressed **-ek**. When followed by a single consonant or stressed it has the same sound but lengthened as in French *"tête"*.

EU – This is pronounced as in English *'purr'* or as in French *'peur'* e.g. **beudhi**, which is pronounced as **beurthi**, meaning *'to drown'* in English.

EW – This is approximately pronounced using the sound as in the word *'cow'* in English. Try to say the sound of E in the English word *'bet'* followed immediately by the vowel sound in *'boot'* as in **ooo**. Don't panic but Cornish people can usually make this sound more easily than English people.

EY - As in English *'veil'* e.g. **bleydh**, pronounced as **blayth**, which means *'wolf'* in English.

G - Normally this is pronounced as in English word *'get'* and never as in *'giant'*. Sounds as the English *'k'* at end of word unless followed immediately without a pause by a word beginning with a vowel e.g. **teg** (beautiful in English) sounds as **tek**, but **teg a wel** (*'beautiful to behold'* or *'how beautiful'* in English) sounds as **teg a wel**.

GH - When at the end of a word, it is pronounced like the Scottish *'ch'* in *'loch'* or as in the German *'achtung'*. Examples of this are **blagh**, pronounced as **block**, which means *'bald'* in English. It's the same for the word **logh**, pronounced as **lock**, which means *'lake'* in English. The **GH** here can **almost** sound like a *'g'*, but not quite. Otherwise it's a drawn out *'h'* sound. The English speaker can achieve this sound by heavily breathing an *'h'* sound, but, unlike *'h'* in English, the Cornish **GH** can come in the middle or at the end of words, so this breathing requires a slightly unnatural effort for the English speaker. An example of this is **yeghes**, pronounced as **yairhess**, which means *'health'* in English. It is the same for the word **fleghes**, which is pronounced **flairhess** (it's in the song we sing: **'Bro Goth Agan Tasow'**) meaning *'children'* in English.

GH (cont.) - When between two vowels or in the groups 'lgh' and 'rgh' it is a strongly stressed 'h' as in the English word 'aha!' An example of **GH** between two vowels is **gorthugher**, which is pronounced as 'gorthooher', which means 'evening' in English. Example of **RGH** is **dynnargh**, pronounced as **dinnarh**, meaning 'welcome' in English.

I - Sounds as EE in 'beet' e.g. **gwir**, pronounced as **gweer**, which means 'true' in English.

IW - A fairly accurate pronunciation would probably be obtained by saying the English word 'seaweed' and then omitting the -eed, which would leave the sound of **ea** followed by **w** as pronounced in English. In practice, however, little distinction is made between this and **YW**.

K - This is normally pronounced as in the English word but as a 'c' at end of word if followed by a vowel.

O - Normally as the vowel sound in 'bought', but as 'pot' when followed by a doubled consonant e.g. **lost** is pronounced as **lorst** and means 'tail' in English (as in 'bought'). However **bronn** is pronounced as **bronn**, which means 'hill' in English (as in 'pot').

OE - This is pronounced approximately as in the English word 'toe'. More accurately it's pronounced as the French word 'eau' e.g. **boes** is pronounced as **bows** and means 'food' in English.

OU - This is pronounced as the **oo** in 'boot' e.g. **gour**, pronounced as **goor**, which means 'husband' in English.

OW - This is pronounced as in the English word 'grow' e.g. **down is** pronounced as **done**, (like phone) not as in 'cow'. **Down** means 'deep' in English.

OY - This is pronounced as the 'oy' of the English word 'boy'.

Q - Not used and has been replaced by **KW**.

R - Should always be sounded i.e. rolled in words like **karr**, which means 'cart' or 'car' in English.

U - Usually pronounced as in the French word 'tu' as in **tew**. The sound is sometimes used by Scottish speakers of English in words like 'you' and in the second syllable of 'Glasgow'.

UW - As 'u' in French 'tu' followed by 'w'.

V - Normally as in English, but as 'f' at the end of a word unless followed by a vowel in a word following immediately without any pause e.g. **genev** is pronounced as **genef** and means 'with me' in English. The term **ev a drig** is pronounced as **ev a drig** and means 'he dwells' in English.

W - See pronunciation for **EW**, **IW** and **YW**. Otherwise **W** sounds as it would in English.

X - Not used, replaced by **KS**.

Y - When found at the end of word or between consonants (i.e. not with another vowel) the sound is as 'i' in 'bit' e.g. **bys** is pronounced as **bis** and can mean 'world' (like **norvys**) in English. When followed by a vowel the sound is as in English e.g. **redya**, pronounced as **redya**, meaning 'to read' in English.

YW - In the middle of a word is very much like **IW** above except that Y is short and I is long. For example the sound is illustrated in the name **Pythywwar**. **Pyth yw war** is pronounced **Pith ee war** and means 'What is on' in English. It is used for the name 'Watson' as in Dr. Watson in Sherlock Holmes.

YW on its own has the sound similar to the 'ew' sound in the English word flew. In these cases, **YW** pronounced as in the word 'you' in English.

Z - Not in use

Note: In the Cornish language words are usually stressed on the last but one syllable.