

How to pronounce the Hmong K, P, T and Z

| Hmong (English phonics) | Equivalent English pronunciation |
|----------------------------|---|
| K (-kaw) | Utter this K like the k in the word “ sky ” – soft K. In other words, only pronounce the “- ky ” sound and not the “s.” Now say the English word “ skaw ” but mute the “s” sound and utter the “- kaw .” |
| P (-paw) | Utter this P like the p in the word “ spy ” – soft P. In other words, only pronounce the “- py ” sound and not the “s.” Now say the English word “ spaw ” but mute the “s” sound and utter the “- paw .” |
| T (-taw) | Utter this T like the t in the word “ stay ” – soft T. In other words, only pronounce the “- ty ” sound and not the “s.” Now say the English word “ staw ” but mute the “s” sound and utter the “- taw .” |
| Z (zhaw) | Utter this Z like the s in the word “mea- sure ” – like zher . In other words, the Hmong “Z” is like “ zh ” in English. Now say the English word “mea saw ” but mute the “mea-” and utter the “- saw ” – like zhaw . The English phonics “ zhaw ” sounds exactly like the Hmong “ zos .” Do not say the “z” like the English word “ zip ”, however. |

If you see the “**Ⓚ**” in front of a letter or word it denotes a **soft k** as in s**Ⓚ**ky. Likewise, “**Ⓟ**” is **soft p** as in s-**Ⓟ**py, and “**Ⓣ**” as in “s-**Ⓣ**ay.” Additionally, the “-**s**” here means “s” as in the word “**see**”, and not as in the word “**sure** or **she**”

The English word “**tasty**” has two **Ts** and two syllables. The *first T* – “**tas-**” has the *audible puff of breath* uttered after which is a **hard T**. The second T “-**ty**” is clear and **soft T**.

The Hmong **k, p, t** and **kh, ph, and th** pronunciations

| Hmong | <u>Equivalent English soft pronunciation</u> | Hmong word | <u>Equivalent English hard pronunciation</u> |
|-------------|--|--------------|--|
| kais | -kai (like s- kai) | khais | kai (like kai) |
| pais | -pai (like s- pai) | phais | pai (like pie) |
| tais | -tai (like s- tai) | thais | tie (like thai) |

We will learn more about these consonants in the **double consonants** section.

| | | |
|------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Hmong: | Kuv zoo siab heev. | = I am happy much. |
| English phonics: | -koo zhong shia heng | = I am very happy. |
| Hmong: | Koj los noj. | = You come eat. |
| English phonics: | -kaw! law naw! | = You come to eat. |
| Hmong: | Peb hais lus Hmoob. | = We speak language Hmong. |
| English phonics: | -pay hai loo Hmong | = We speak Hmong. |

Hmong vowel(English sound), a(ah) ai(ai) au(ao) aw(er) e(ay) ee(eng) i(ee) ia(ia) o(aw) oo(ong) u(oo) ua(oua) w(ew)

© 2012-2022 Jay Xiong Hmong tonal line: koJ muS kuV niaM neeG siaB Zoo toD

Another letter I want to cover again is the Hmong vowel “w”. This Hmong vowel has the sound segment of the English word “hmm” but without the “h” – *nasal-aspirated* sound. Now form your mouth as you are going to utter the word “hmm” but pinch your nose tight and utter the sound softly by opening your mouth and make the sound more **from the back** of your mouth.

Now let's finish learning the remaining single consonants, **C**, **Q**, and **R**. The first letter we are going to learn is the “C”, pronounced “cos.”

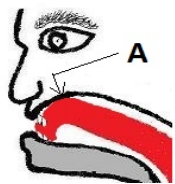


cus

We are going to borrow the English word **situation**, and the sound segment we need is the capitalized letters of the word **siTUation**. Make sure you don't say “TU” as **CHOO** which *it has a puffing sound*. Meaning that if you say the word “si-tu-a-tion” by forming your tongue and mouth looking like the image on the left and *without puffing*, it can only sound like the Hmong “cus” and not like the English “choo” or Hmong “chus” on the right. The image on the right is how you say the Hmong “chus” which it has a *puffing sound* – mouth aspirated effect.



chus

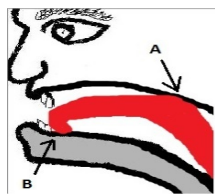


So if you say the word “choo” you can feel the tip of your tongue is *barely* touching your palate. Now press the **tip** of your tongue **hard** against *root* of the **bottom teeth** like the image on the left and then utter the word “coo” simply by *dropping* your tongue at *point A* and releasing the tip of your tongue.

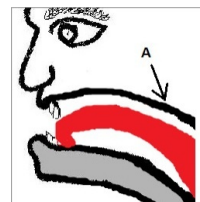
*It is helpful for me to think about **pressing** my tongue against the back of my teeth to pronounce the Hmong “cos” – Dr. Nick Poss.*

How to Pronounce the Consonant Q

The pronunciation of this consonant *perhaps* only exists in the Hmong language because Hmong used to live close to many frogs in the past. :) Other than that, I can't think of any words in English that would come close to this “Q”, pronounced “qos.” But let's not give



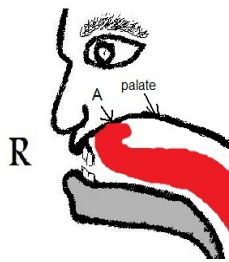
up because if frogs can say it, we can, too. So let's try this. First, let's say the English word “ah” a few times. Then form your tongue like the image on the left – by pressing the tip of your tongue at point **B** then **arc** the back top of your tongue to touch the roof of your mouth at point **A**. To utter the Hmong “qas” just softly dropping your tongue, with a little push forward, at point **A** like the image



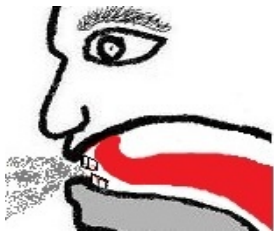
on the right. In other words, say this consonant “Q” from the *back of your tongue and throat* by **dropping** or **opening** your tongue at **point A**. You **might have to gag** the first few tries, but don't give up because we know it can be done.

*Yog tsis txom nyem txaus ces yuav tsis nquag; yog tsis pluag txaus ces yuav tsis khwv.
Ua ntej yuav khwv ciaj khwv tuag xav kom zoo seb puas txaus noj ib pluag.*

How to Pronounce the Consonant R



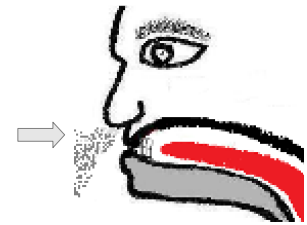
The English word that has the closest sound similar to the Hmong **R**, pronounced “**ros**”, is perhaps the word “**straw**.” However, mute the “**s**” but keep the sound “**-traw**” part exactly like when the “**s**” is in front of it. Now say “**-traw**” a few times and make sure you **press** the tip of your tongue **tightly** at point **A**, and it should sound very close to the word “**draw**” indeed. Now we want to eliminate the “**R**” sound – *no vibrations at the tip of your tongue at all*, and it should sound like the English phonics “**daw**” instead. Now **press** the tip of your tongue *very hard* against your palate (point **A**) like you are going to say the word “**-traw**”, see image on the left, but utter with one clear sound *similar* to the word “**daw**” but not exactly like “**daw**”, however.



chat

Mouth-aspirated means exhale thru your mouth i.e., **ch**at and **Th**ai – has a puffing sound.

Nasal-aspirated means *exhale* thru your nose while your mouth is closed like when saying the word “**hmm**.”



Hmong or hmm...

Letters such as **L**, **M**, and **N** are *unaspirated consonants* – **clear** pronunciations Likewise **K**, **P**, **T** in Hmong are also *unaspirated consonants* – *soft -K, -P, and -T* that is.

Review Single Consonants

The English phonics for “**-aw**” below sounds exactly as in the English word **awe** that is.

| No | Hmong Letter | English phonics | Like English consonant | Hmong word | English phonics |
|----|--------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | B | ba w | bay, bee | <i>A simplified version of the “np” consonant.</i> | |
| 2 | C | <i>n/e</i> | <i>No equivalent in English</i> | | |
| 3 | D | da w | day, dee | de do dua di dai dia | <i>day daw doua dee dai dia</i> |
| 4 | F | fa w | fay, fee | fe fo fua fi fai fia | <i>fay faw foua fee fai fia</i> |
| 5 | G | ga w | go, guy | <i>A simplified version of the double “nk” consonant.</i> | |
| 6 | H | ha w | how, hay, hi | he ho hua hi hai hia | <i>hay haw houa hee hai hia</i> |
| 7 | J | ja w | jay, joe, jar | <i>A simplified version of the triple “nts” consonant.</i> | |
| 8 | K | -ka w | s-ky, s-ki | ke ko ku ki kai kia | <i>-kay -kaw -koo -kee -kai -kia</i> |
| 9 | L | la w | lay, low, lie | le lo lu li lai lia | <i>lay law loo lee lai lia</i> |