The sounds of nêhiyawêwin

Standard Cree Alphabet (SCA)

The letter ‘r’

English: read British English: car

French: arrêt, roy

Spanish: pero,

Perro

Cree: no ‘r’ !

1. Consonants

p, t, k, c, s, h, m, n

(p, t, k between two vowels)

pîsim, tânisi, kiya, cî, sêmâk, hâ, môw, nîso

nipiy, nitânis, âpakosîs

2. Short vowels

i, a, o

iskwêw, atim, otin

elision - only with short vowels, never long vowels

3. Long vowels

î, ê, â, ô

pîsim, sêmâk, tânisi, ôhow

Minimal pairs

- short versus long vowels isn't just about sound, it also affects meaning

	English translation		English translation
nipiy	water	nîpiy	leaf
niyânan	five	niyanân	we, us, our
maskosis	bear cub	maskosîs	small blade of grass

4. semi-vowels

y, w

yôtin, wacask

Vowel + y

- Vowel sounds change when partnered with a semi-vowel

nêhiyawêwin sound		Similar sound in English
iy	askiy	bee, see
êy	pêyak	pay, say
ay	ayapi	ice, mice
oy	apoy	foil, boil

Vowel + w

- Vowel sounds change when partnered with a semi-vowel

nêhiyawêwin sound		**Similar sound in English**
êw	nâpêw	Like “ay” in say + “o” in low (ay-o)
aw	nêhiyaw	out, ouch
âw	kîsikâw	cow, how
ow	mîcisow (end sound only)	soon, loon
iw	misikitiw (end sound only)	soon, loon

Vowel sounds

SHORT VOWELS: **a i o**

LONG VOWELS; **â ê î ô**

SEMI VOWELS: **iy êy ay oy êw aw âw ow iw**

Vowel + h + consonant

vowel + -hk, -ht, -hp

p**ahk**wêsikan (NA bread)
âhkosi (VAI to be sick)
bacon)

t**oht**ôsâpoy (NI milk)
k**ôhk**ôsowîyin (NA

mask**ihk**îwâpoy (NI tea)
p**îht**wâ (VAI to smoke)

mîkiw**âhp** (NI tipi)

Stressed? Where?

nêhiyawêwin word

- 2 syllables
  - atim (dog) = a/**tim**
  - maskwa (bear) = mas/**kwa**
- 3 syllables + more
  - maskisin (shoe) = **mas**/ki/sin
  - maskisina (shoes) = mas/**ki**/sin/a

Breaking up syllables

nikiskinwahamâkosin kiskinwahamâtowikamikohk

- ✗ Try breaking syllables up by:
  - consonant and vowel
  - if there are two consonants together, split them up

nikiskinwahamâkosin

ni-kis-kin-wa-ha-mâ-ko-sin

Breaking up syllables

nikiskinwahamâkosin kiskinwahamâtowikamikohk

- ✗ Try breaking syllables up by:
  - consonant and vowel
  - if there are two consonants together, split them up

nikiskinwahamâkosin

ni-kis-kin-wa-ha-**mâ**-ko-sin

Breaking up syllables

nikiskinwahamâkosin kiskinwahamâtowikamikohk

- ✗ Try breaking syllables up by:
  - consonant and vowel
  - if there are two consonants together, split them up

kiskinwahamâtowikamikohk

kis-kin-wa-ha-mâ-to-wi-ka-mi-kohk

Breaking up syllables

nikiskinwahamâkosin kiskinwahamâtowikamikohk

- ✗ Try breaking syllables up by:
  - consonant and vowel
  - if there are two consonants together, split them up

kiskinwahamâtowikamikohk

kis-kin-wa-ha-mâ-to-wi-**ka**-mi-kohk

Breaking up syllables

nikiskinwahamâkosin kiskinwahamâtowikamikohk

ni-kis-kin-wa-ha-**mâ**-ko-sin

kis-kin-wa-ha-mâ-to-wi-**ka**-mi-kohk

Slides Carnival. 2025. Colorful Pencils slides template. Retrieved from: https://www.slidescarnival.com/template/ely-free-presentation-template/4761

© 2025 by Chelsea Vowel licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.