

Guide to the
Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians

Nisenan Alphabet

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The Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians Tribal Council has adopted the following 24-letter alphabet for writing Nisenan. This alphabet is “phonetic” – each letter has a consistent and unique pronunciation. You do not need to memorize special rules for the pronunciation of individual letters in different words.

’ a b c’ d e ə h i † k k’ l m n o p p’ s t t’ u w y

The purpose of this booklet is to teach you to read this alphabet, so that you can read and write the Nisenan language.

Vowels

- a pronounced like “a” in *father*
- e pronounced like “e” in *get*
- ə pronounced like “u” in *yuck*
- i pronounced in between “ea” in *seat* and “i” in *sit*
- † pronounced like “oo” in *loot*; keep your lips relaxed
- o pronounced like “o” in *core*
- u pronounced like “oo” in *boom*; keep your lips rounded

Consonants

- ’ pronounced as a catch in your throat, like you feel in the middle of *uh-oh*
- b pronounced like “b” in *boy*, but by sucking air inward
- c’ ... pronounced like “ch” in *chip*, but with more force
- d pronounced like “d” in *dog*, but by sucking air inward
- h pronounced like “h” in *home*

- k pronounced like “k” in *kick*
- k’ ... pronounced like “k” in *kick*, but with more force
- l pronounced like “l” in *ladder*
- m ... pronounced like “m” in *man*
- n pronounced like “n” in *nope*
- p pronounced like “p” in *piece*
- p’ ... pronounced like “p” in *piece*, but with more force
- s pronounced in between the “s” in *sock* and “sh” in *shock*
- t pronounced like “t” in *top*
- t’ ... pronounced like “t” in *top*, but with more force
- w ... pronounced like “w” in *win*
- y pronounced like “y” in *yes*

Some of the letters of the SSBMI Nisenan Alphabet correspond to sounds that do not occur in English. For example, the letter “s” is not pronounced exactly like the “s” or “sh” of English, but as a sound intermediate between the two. As you read our alphabet, you may find that you cannot pronounce every letter fluently at first, and that’s okay – you will get better at it with practice.

Length. Any sequence of two identical letters in a row, like “oo” or “ss”, is pronounced exactly the same as the base letter but held longer (e.g. “oo” is pronounced just like “o” but held longer).

Stress. Any vowel that is written with an acute accent “´” above it, like “á” or “úu”, is “stressed”, meaning that it is pronounced with greater emphasis than other vowels within the same word.