

# The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2017



Inuktitut is a language spoken by the Inuit people in the north of Canada which has an interesting writing system that was invented by missionaries in the nineteenth century. As you will see from the examples, each character tends to stand for a syllable rather than for a single consonant or vowel sound.

Inuktitut writing	sounds	meaning	Inuktitut writing	sounds	meaning
ᑭᐅ	miki	'Mickey'	ᐃᓄᐆᑎᑕ <sup>c</sup>	inuktitut	'Inuktitut'
ᓴᓴ	sara	'Sarah'	ᐃᓄᐃ <sup>c</sup>	inuit	'Inuit'
ᓴ <sup>L</sup>	sam	'Sam'	ᓴᓇᓴ <sup>ᓴᓇ</sup>	qayaq	'kayak'
ᓴᑦ	sami	'Sammy'	ᐃ <sup>L</sup> ᓵ	iglu	'igloo'
ᐃᓇ	ana	'Anna'	< <sup>c</sup>	_____	1
ᐃᓇ	una	'Una'	ᓚᓚ	_____	2
ᑕ <sup>L</sup>	tam	'Tam'	ᓵᓴ	_____	3
ᑎ <sup>L</sup>	tim	'Tim'	4	qalupalik	Qalupalik <sup>1</sup>
ᓇᓄᓴ <sup>ᓴᓇ</sup>	nanuq	'Nanook'	5	kigatilik	Kigatilik <sup>2</sup>
ᓴᓚ	sali	'Sally'	6	tariaksuq	Tariaksuq <sup>3</sup>
ᐱ <sup>c</sup>	pit	'Pitt'	7	_____	Tom
ᓵᓇᓴ	lukas	'Lucas'	8	_____	Anne
ᑦᐃ	mia	'Mia'	9	_____	Leela
ᐃᓴ	ava	'Ava'	10	_____	Dan
ᓄᓇᓶ <sup>c</sup>	nunavut	'Nunavut'	11	_____	Jess

<sup>3</sup> An invisible humanoid creature

Your name:

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## Solution and marking.

Scoring: max 25

- #1-3: 2 points for each correct cell. 1 for half right (e.g. ...at, Lu...)
- #4-10: 1 point for each correct character or explanation (e.g. 'no O').
  - Some characters are compounds, with a superscript. Treat as a single character.
  - Strictly speaking, the answer to #8 is a single character but we can assign a separate point for the the superscript.
- #11: by mistake, this was blank in early versions of the test paper, so give everyone 1 point, regardless of performance.
- Score positively – 1 for each target word, ignore extra non-target words
- Score generously – if different scores are possible, choose the highest.
- Accept
  - any size of Inuktitut characters
  - non-English spellings e.g. Lili.

Inuktitut	sounds	meaning	Inuktitut	sounds	meaning	points
ᑭᑭ	miki	'Mickey'	ᐃᐅᑎᑕᑦ	inuktitut	'Inuktitut'	
ᓴᓴ	sara	'Sarah'	ᐃᐅᐃᑦ	inuit	'Inuit'	
ᓴᑦ	sam	'Sam'	ᓴᑕᓴᑕ	qayaq	'kayak'	
ᓴᑭ	sami	'Sammy'	ᐃᑦᑕ	iglu	'igloo'	
ᐃᐅ	ana	'Anna'	ᐃᑦ	_____	1 Pat	2
ᐃᐅ	una	'Una'	ᑕᑕ	_____	2 Lily	2
ᑕᑦ	tam	'Tam'	ᑕᑕ	_____	3 Lucy	2
ᑎᑦ	tim	'Tim'	4 ᓴᑕᑕᑕᑕᑕ	qalupalik	Qalupalik	4
ᐅᐅᓴᑕ	nanuq	'Nanook'	5 ᑕᑕᑕᑕᑕᑕ	kigatilik	Kigatilik	4
ᓴᑕ	sali	'Sally'	6 ᑕᑕᑕᑕᑕᑕᑕ	tariaksuq	Tariaksuq	4
ᐃᑦ	pit	'Pitt'	7 no O	_____	Tom	1
ᑕᑕᓴᑕ	lukas	'Lucas'	8 ᐃᑦ	_____	Anne	2
ᑭᑕ	mia	'Mia'	9 ᑕᑕ	_____	Leela	2
ᐃᑕ	ava	'Ava'	10 no D	_____	Dan	1
ᐅᐅᑕᑕ	nunavut	'Nunavut'	11 no J or E	_____	Jess	1

Your name:

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## Commentary

Here's a convenient summary of the Inuktitut writing system (from Omniglot.com):

		p [p]	t [t]	k [k]	g [ɣ]	m [m]	n [n]	s [s]	l [l]	j [j]	v [v]	r [ʁ]	q [q]	ng [ŋ]	+
i [i]	△	∧	∩	ρ	ρ	┐	σ	┐	┐	┐	∧	∩	ϣ	ϣ	┐
ii/ī [i:]	△̇	∧̇	∩̇	ρ̇	ρ̇	┐̇	σ̇	┐̇	┐̇	┐̇	∧̇	∩̇	ϣ̇	ϣ̇	┐̇
u [u]	▷	>	⊃	δ	└	└	⊖	┐	┐	┐	⊃	⊃	ϣ	ϣ	┐
uu/ū [u:]	▷̇	>̇	⊃̇	δ̇	└̇	└̇	⊖̇	┐̇	┐̇	┐̇	⊃̇	⊃̇	ϣ̇	ϣ̇	┐̇
a [a]	◁	<	⊂	б	└	└	⊖	┐	┐	┐	⊃	⊃	ϣ	ϣ	┐
aa/ā [a:]	◁̇	<̇	⊂̇	б̇	└̇	└̇	⊖̇	┐̇	┐̇	┐̇	⊃̇	⊃̇	ϣ̇	ϣ̇	┐̇
		<	⊂	б	└	└	⊖	┐	┐	┐	<	⊃	ϣ	ϣ	┐
	-h	-p	-t	-k	-g	-m	-n	-s	-l	-j	-v	-r	-q	-ng	-+

As you can see, there's a great deal more to the system than competitors need to discover in order to solve the problem:

- It's basically a syllabary, so most characters correspond to a consonant followed by a vowel.
- There's a very limited range of consonants and vowels: 14 consonants and three vowels (which can be either long or short).
- The long vowels are shown by a raised dot which doesn't appear in any of the test words.
- Each consonant has a different shape which appears consistently in all syllables. (Exceptionally, k and n have the same shape but in different orientations.)
- Vowels are distinguished by the orientation of this shape.
- When a consonant is at the end of a syllable, without a following vowel, it is written as a superscript (shown in the bottom rows).
- When a vowel has no preceding consonant, it is shown as a triangle (as in the second column).