

A) PRONUNCIATION

The only way to acquire a genuine pronunciation of Maori is to hear plenty of it spoken by those to whom it is their mother tongue, and try to imitate the way they pronounce words, stress the syllables, phrase their sentences, and so on.

These notes on pronunciation are therefore just an outline of the main points, to give you a start.

Maori spelling is totally phonetic – every letter in every word is pronounced.

Maori has only 15 sounds:

5 vowels **a e i o u**
10 consonants **h k m n ng p r t w wh**

The vowel sounds may be short or long.

Many lesson books and dictionaries nowadays use macrons to indicate long vowels
eg. ā ē ī ō ū

PRONOUNCE THE VOWELS AS FOLLOWS:

a as in **about**

ā as in **father**

e as in **bet**

ē as in **there**

i as in **hit**

ī as in **machine**

o as the short ‘or’ sound in **ordain**

ō as the long ‘or’ sound in **door**

u as in **put**

ū as in **rule**

Vowels often come in pairs eg.

pae, meamea, kai, ahau, moeteatea, koutou, maunga, kieke, tae, tai

Each vowel is still given its individual sound.

(Actually, long vowels are really just paired identical vowels eg.

ā = aa tāhuna = taahuna and so on.

Sometimes the word will be written that way, rather than using a macron.)

PRONOUNCE THE CONSONANTS AS FOLLOWS:

Pronunciation of the consonants is pretty much as in English for most of them, but never as sharp.

The Maori 'r' is not trilled or rolled.

'ng' is the same as in English words eg. as in singer, hunger, king, etc.

'wh' is closer to English 'f' in English than anything else, but it is a 'Maori f' – a soft breathed out sound without the top teeth touching the lower lip which gives the sharp English 'f'.

Accentuation or stress on syllables in words, as a general rule –

- Lightly stress the first long vowel, eg. kaumātua , tāwahi
- If no long vowel or vowels in the word, stress the first pair of vowels
eg. tamaiti , Rotorua
- If no long vowel or no paired vowel, stress the first vowel
eg. wahine , mahara , tapu

(Note the 'a' in tapu is a short vowel. A common Pakeha mistake is to make it a long vowel.)