

Short Version **Pronunciation of Wamba Wamba Vowels and Consonants**

- based on - 'WembaWemba Dictionary': Hercus L.A., 1992, pages 5 - 8

(select  icons to listen to recorded examples)

Wamba Wamba is one of over 500 Indigenous Languages spoken through Australia. It is one of a group of languages of South West and North West Victoria and South West New South Wales. Like all Indigenous Languages it has different rules of pronunciation and grammar from English. See - <https://culture.yarkuwa.org.au/> for more information.

Standard Wamba Wamba Vowels

'a' as in 'path' or 'car'	- 'kālī'  (dog), 'kanāk'  (heel), 'kakat' (white ibis), '
'e' as in 'pet' or 'shed'	- 'ken'  (frilled neck lizard), 'kepin'  (one), 'kena' (to tie up),
'i' as in 'sit' or 'pit'	- 'kiki'  (here, now), 'mityuk'  (skin), 'kiluwity' (today),
'u' as in 'put' or 'foot'	- 'kurruluk'  (magpie), kapel-kup  (river mint), 'mum' (bottom)
'o' as in 'on'	- 'kolety'  (Edward R.), 'poty' (grass), nongwe (yes), 'mowe' (nest)
'ə' a neutral vowel as in 'the'	- 'kapəl'  (river), 'withən' (feather), 'wilək-wilek' (galah),

Vowel Variations (& other variations) (not as common as the standard vowel sounds)

'a' 1 - when 'a' follows an initial 'w' and is followed by an 'r', 'm', 'ng', 'ny', or 'n',

the 'a' is pronounced as in 'water' or 'war'

eg 'waripa' (to dance), 'warrangga' (to sing), 'wanap' (fire), 'wam' (idiot), 'wanggel' (cumbungi), 'wany' (egret), 'wan' (boomerang)

(the second or third 'a' in each of the words above is pronounced 'a' as in 'path')

- as well, this 'a' as in 'water' sound variation may also be optionally used in those words where an 'a' just follows a 'w' eg in 'watha' (brown sand goanna) the first 'a' can be the standard 'a' as in 'path' or the 'a' as in 'water'. The second 'a' in 'watha' is always the standard 'a' sound ('a' as in 'path')

2 - when 'a' is followed by 'w'

the 'a' is pronounced as the diphthong 'au' sound as in 'ground' or 'owl'.

eg 'tawa' (to hit) is 'taou-wah', 'kawenda' (to crawl) is 'kaou-wend-ah'

(the second 'a' is pronounced 'ah' or the 'a' as in 'path')

3 - when 'a' is followed by 'y' and another vowel esp. 'a'

the 'a' is pronounced as the diphthong 'ai' sound as in 'ice' or 'buy'

eg 'telkaya' (to be well) is 'tel-kai-ah', 'kalaya' (to ask a question) is 'kal-ai-ah', 'paraya' (to hunt)



(last 'a' in all three examples is a short standard 'a' as in path)

4 - 'a' as in 'man' or 'bat' variation (was recorded)

eg 'mayomanda' (over there) is 'mai-o-man-dah'. This less common variation can be heard from tape 998A with Nancy Egan speaking with Louise Hercus. Nancy Egan pronounces 'mayomanda' with three 'a' variations - the diphthong 'ai', 'a' as in 'man' and finally the standard short 'a' as in 'path'.


'e' 1 - when 'e' is followed by 'l' or 'r'

the 'e' is pronounced as in 'fern' (or the last sound in 'apple')

eg 'kapel-kuk'  (river mint), 'pert-pert'  (needle), 'Perəpaperəpa'

2 - when 'e' is followed by a nasal consonant eg 'm', 'ng', 'ny', 'n' in the same syllable

the 'e' is long and slightly nasalised

eg 'wemba' (no), 'pembengguk'  (children), 'peng' (man), 'weny-weny' (clothes), 'pen' (hollow tree)

'i' 1 - when 'i' follows a 'p' an 'm' or a 'w' and is followed by 'r', 'rn' or 'rt' (not a 'rr')

the 'i' is rounded off like 'tu' in French. (top of the tongue touches the back of the palate)

- 'mirnuk' (his eye) is pronounced 'moorn-uk', 'pirma' (appear, to rise) is pronounced 'poorn-ah'

Vowel Sounds to Avoid

'a'	avoid - 'a' as in 'pay'	'e'	avoid - 'e' as in 'she' or 'e' as in 'hey'
'i'	avoid - 'i' as in 'hi'	'o'	avoid - 'o' as in 'oh' or 'go'
'u'	avoid - 'u' as in 'bucket' or 'putt'		

Wamba Wamba Consonant Sounds¹

The 17 main consonant sounds are:

- p, k, th, ty, t, rt	(stops)
- m, ng, ny, n, rn	(nasals)
- l, rl	(laterals)
- w, y	(semivowels)
- rr, r	(r-sounds)

The single letter consonants above are pronounced similar to the English consonants.

The double letter consonants, eg 'th', 'ty' or 'ny', are quite different to the English.

Keep the 'ty', 'ny' and 'ng' together as one sound.

- 'rr' - roll or trill double 'rr's (if you can) but not single 'r',

- 'ty' is a palatal stop - say 'ty' with your tongue touching your palate (e.g. Pirndetty, Koleyty.) (If you are having trouble with the 'ty' sound then 'tch' as in 'fetch' is close.)

(As Hercus says 'the final of the word 'purtity' (cumbungi root) is **not** pronounced as in the English word 'purity', but as 'ty'. This is closer to the final of the English 'stitch' though by no means identical to it. Similarly the final of 'katty-katty' (evil magic) is **not** pronounced as in 'Cathy', but more like the final of 'mugh', though not identical to it.)

- 'ny' is a palatal and nasal sound. It is made by touching the top of the tongue to the top of the mouth behind your teeth and adding some nasal vibration while saying 'ny'. Eg Nyakili

- 'th' is a hard sound like the English 'd' eg kuthanganda (say kuud-ahn-gahndah)

- 'ng' is a soft sound as in the English 'song'

- 'ngg' soft 'ng' followed by a hard 'g'

In our pronunciation assistance guides words will be spelt phonetically to encourage English speakers to pronounce the sounds more like Wamba Wamba. Eg 'uu' is used instead of 'u' to encourage the long, soft 'u' sound as in 'put'. 'ah' is used to encourage the 'a' as in 'car' or 'path' and 'ii' to encourage the 'i' as in 'sit'. Underlining indicates which syllables to emphasise - usually the first. *Italics indicate sounds that need care* - such as 'ty', 'ng', 'ny' and 'rr'. The hyphen is included to emphasise where the syllable break occurs.

Emphasis

In normal Wamba Wamba speech, we usually place the emphasis on the first and third syllables with the first being strongest. In day to day speech, traditional fluent speakers speak and pronounce sounds quite quickly and don't normally draw out sounds.

All languages take time and practice to learn. You can get some help at: ['Wamba Wamba Verbs and Sentences'](#) and the ['Plain English Version of the List of Bound Forms'](#). **Don't forget to use the Word Search on Wurrekangurr - Wamba Wamba website.** [Learning Lists](#) are also available.

This pronunciation guide will continue to be updated as more research, learning and resources become available. (Vers. Short - Jan 2024)

¹ (See pages 5,6,7 in 'WembaWemba Dictionary', Hercus: L.A., 1992)