

Spelling the vowels

There are five short vowels.

Single Vowel	Jamaican Word	English Translation
i	sik	'sick'
e	bel	'bell'
a	ban	'band'
o	kot	'cut'
u	kuk	'cook'

The vowel *o* above is sometimes pronounced a bit differently when it comes before the sound *r*, as in *vorzhan* 'version'. The sound of *o* before *r* is made with the lips spread rather than round as is the case for its other pronunciation.

There are three long vowels.

Long Vowel	Jamaican Word	English Translation
ii	tii	'tea'
aa	baal	'ball'
uu	shuut	'shoot'

There are four double vowels.

Double Vowels	Jamaican Word	English Translation
ie	kiek	'cake'
uo	gruo	'grow'
ai	bait	'bite'
ou	kou	'cow'

There is one vowel marker, which is a letter which comes after the vowel in certain words and is used to mark such vowels as nasalized.

Vowel Marker	Jamaican Word	English Translation
hn	kyaahn	'can't, want'

Have you ever wondered how to write the funny sound that comes at the end of sentences as *Im fuul iihn* "He is foolish, isn't he!?" You now know how to. That sound is a nasalized *ii*. We mark it as nasalized by using the double consonant *hn* vowel marker after the vowel to produce *iihn*.

Spelling the Consonants

There are 22 consonants, made of 18 single and 4 double consonants.

Consonant	Jamaican Word	English Translation
b	biek	'bake'
d	daag	'dog'
ch	choch	'church'
f	fuud	'food'
g	guot	'goat'
h	(see below)	
j	joj	'jugde'
k	kait	'kite'
l	liin	'lean'
m	man	'man'
n	nais	'nice'
ng	sing	'sing'
p	piil	'peel'
r	ron	'run'
s	sik	'sick'
sh	shout	'shout'
t	tuu	'two'
v	vuot	'vote'
w	wail	'wild'
y	yong	'young'
z	zuu	'zoo'
zh	vorzhan	'version'

In the above list, *h* has a peculiar status. For some speakers of Jamaican, notably those in the western and central areas of the country, this is a sound which is used purely for emphasis. For these speakers, the form *hen* with the *h* is simply an emphatic version of *en* 'hen, end, the letter *n*'. For many speakers in Western Jamaica, however, *hen* can only mean 'hen', with *en* meaning 'end or the letter *n*'. Writers should use the letter *h* in writing according to the manner in which they use it in their speech.