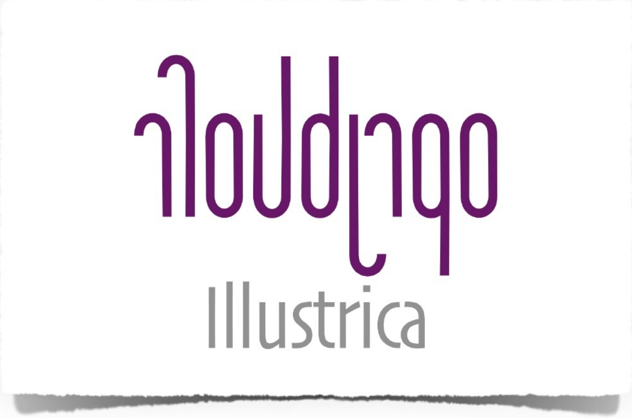
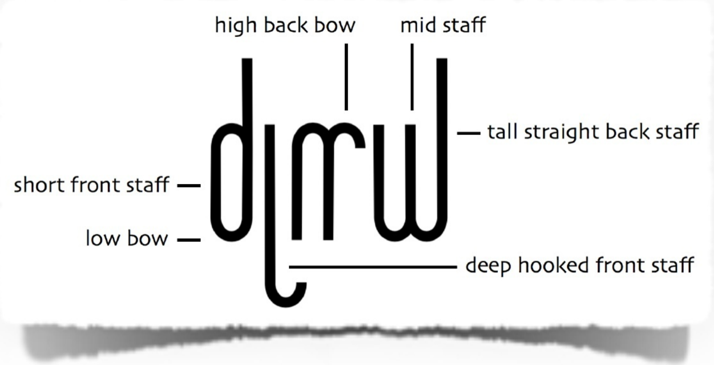


Illustrica is an alphabet created by Aaron Chapman in 2021. It is a featural system, meaning not only that each letter represents a certain sound, but that each component of each letter illustrates a phonetic feature, i.e. a manner or place of articulation. Each letter can be broken down and inter-preted even if it is not known as a whole. The result is that related sounds are graphically similar, and phonological characteristics and processes can be more easily visualized. Illustrica was designed primarily for use with General North American English, but it includes a few non-English characters and can easily be adapted for many other languages.

All letters consist of some combination of long vertical lines (staffs), and short horizontal curves (bows and hooks). Bows can occur at the midline (high bows) or the baseline (low bows). Hooks are like bows but they occur at the ascender line or the descender line. Bows and hooks in the upper positions are convex (ends curving downward), while those in the lower positions are concave (ends curving upward).

Consonants



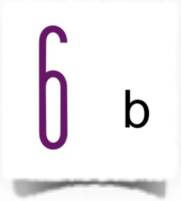
The manner of articulation determines the shape between the baseline and the midline.

For plosives and affricates (p, b, t, d, tʃ, dʒ, k, g), two staffs and two bows form a closed loop, representing a stoppage of airflow.

For fricatives (f, v, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, x, h), two staffs and a single low bow form an open U shape, representing an incomplete stoppage of airflow. Dental and velar fricatives (θ, ð, x) have an additional staff and low bow forming a rounded W shape.

For nasals (m, n, ŋ), two staffs and a single high bow form an inverted U shape, reminiscent of the humps of lowercase n and m.

For liquids (l, r), a single staff forms the body of the letter.



All consonants feature a tall staff (with ascender) or a deep staff (with descender) which is determined by the place of articulation:

- Labials and labiodentals (p, b, f, v, m, w) have a tall front staff (left ascender).
- Dentals and alveolars (t, d, s, z, θ, ð, n, l) have a tall back staff (right ascender).
- Palatals (ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ, j, r) have a deep front staff (left descender).
- Velars and glottals (k, g, h, x, ŋ) have a deep back staff (right descender).

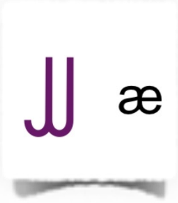
If the consonant is voiced, a hook is added to the tall or deep staff, extending inward towards the other side of the letter (or where that side would be in the case of liquids and semi-vowels).

Vowels

Vowels are written between the baseline and the midline, i.e. they consist of short staffs (no ascenders or descenders):

- A single staff is used for e, o, ɪ, ʊ, ɚ.
- Two staffs are used for i, u, ø, ə, æ, a, ɑ.
- Three staffs are used for y.

Bows are used to indicate the place of articulation. To indicate vowel height:



- High vowels (i, ɪ, u, ʊ) have one or more high bows.
- Low vowels (æ, a, ɑ) have one or more low bows.
- Mid vowels (e, ə, o) have both a high bow and a low bow.

To indicate vowel backness:

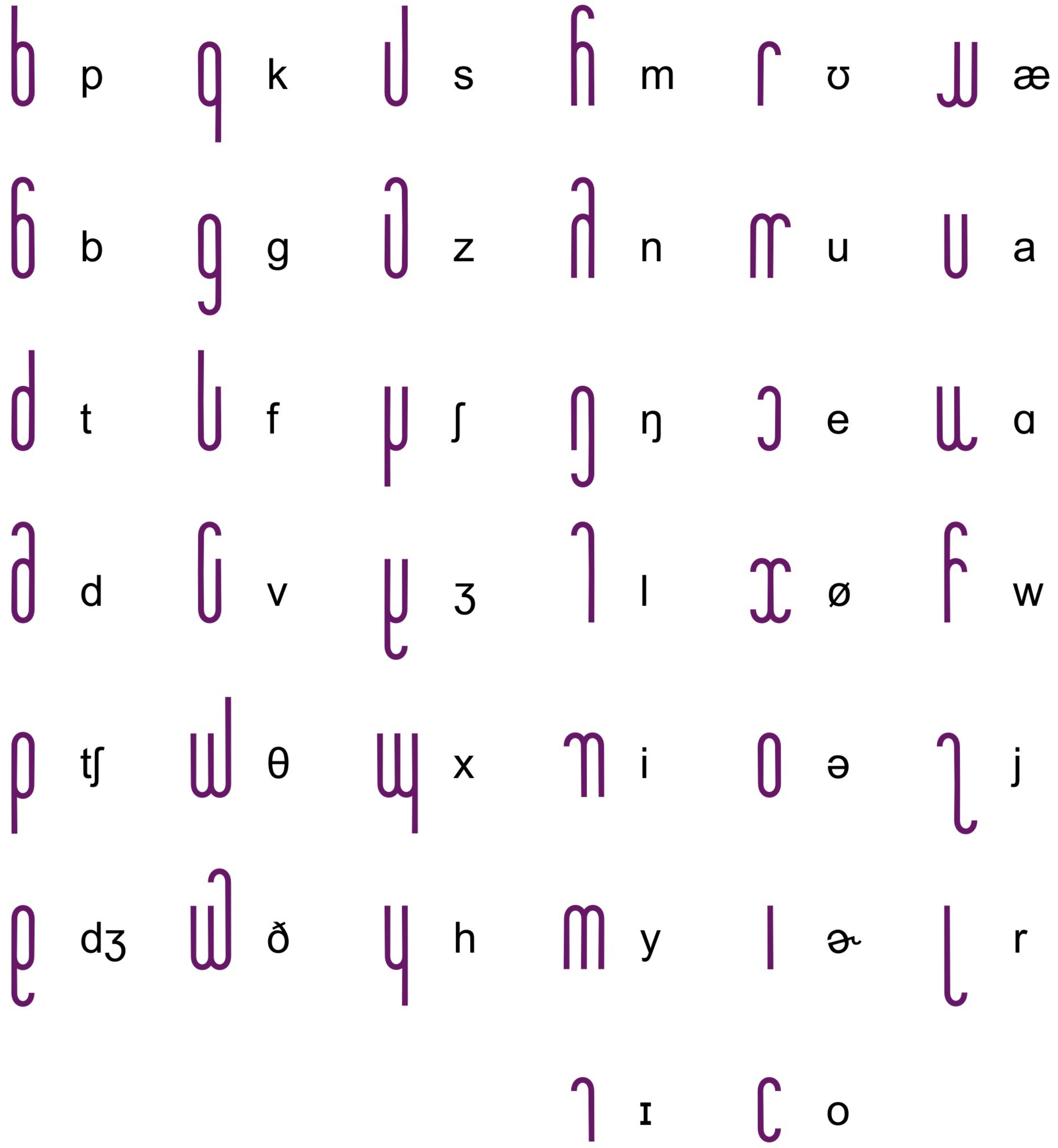
- Front vowels (i, ɪ, e, æ) have one or more front bows (on the left).
- Back vowels (u, ʊ, o, ɑ) have one or more back bows (on the right).

Semi-vowels

Semi-vowels (w, j, r) have the same basic shape as their vowel equivalents (ʊ, ı, ɚ) but with a long hooked front staff (tall for ʊ, deep for ɪ and ɚ).

The Letters of Illustrica

Here are the letters with their equivalent sounds:


p
k
s
m
ʊ
æ
b
g
z
n
u
a
t
f
ʃ
ŋ
e
ɑ
d
v
ʒ
l
ø
w
tʃ
θ
x
i
ə
j
dʒ
ð
h
y
ɚ
r
ɪ
o

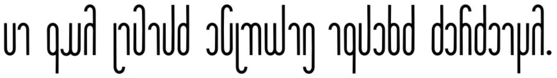
Sound and Letter Descriptions

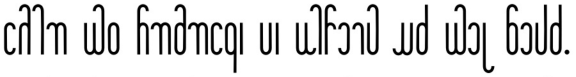
p (as in **p**o**p**)	tall straight front staff, short back staff, high bow and low bow
b (as in **b**i**b**)	tall hooked front staff, short back staff, high bow and low bow
t (as in **t**o**t**)	short front staff, tall straight back staff, high bow and low bow
d (as in **d**a**d**)	short front staff, tall hooked back staff, high bow and low bow
tʃ (as in **ch**ur**ch**)	deep straight front staff, short back staff, high bow and low bow
dʒ (as in **j**u**dg**e)	deep hooked front staff, short back staff, high bow and low bow
k (as in **k**i**ck**)	short front staff, deep straight back staff, high bow and low bow
g (as in **g**i**g**)	short front staff, deep hooked back staff, high bow and low bow
f (as in **f**i**f**e)	tall straight front staff, short back staff, low bow
v (as in **v**er**v**e)	tall hooked front staff, short back staff, low bow
θ (as in **th**in)	short front staff, short mid staff, tall straight back staff, two low bows
ð (as in **th**en)	short front staff, short mid staff, tall hooked back staff, two low bows
s (as in **s**au**c**e)	short front staff, tall straight back staff, low bow
z (as in **z**oo**s**)	short front staff, tall hooked back staff, low bow
ʃ (as in **sh**u**sh**)	deep straight front staff, short back staff, low bow
ʒ (as in bei**g**e)	deep hooked front staff, short back staff, low bow
x (as in lo**ch**)	short front staff, short mid staff, deep straight back staff, two low bows
h (as in **h**igh)	short front staff, deep straight back staff, low bow
m (as in **m**o**m**)	tall hooked front staff, short back staff, high bow
n (as in **n**oo**n**)	short front staff, tall hooked back staff, high bow
ŋ (as in si**ng**)	short front staff, deep hooked back staff, high bow
l (as in **l**u**ll**)	tall hooked back staff

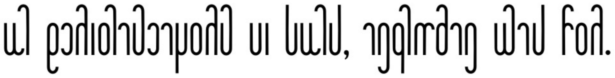
i (as in p**i**zza)	two short staffs, high front bow and high mid bow
y (as in déja v**u**)	three short staffs, two low bows
ɪ (as in **i**n)	short back staff, high bow
ʊ (as in l**oo**k)	short front staff, high bow
u (as in r**u**le)	two short staffs, low mid bow and low back bow
e (as in **e**gg)	short back staff, high bow and low bow
ø (as in d**eu**x)	short mid staff, two high bows, two low bows
ə (as in **u**s)	two short staffs, high bow and low bow
ɚ (as in **ear**th)	short staff
o (as in **o**ld)	short front staff, high bow and low bow
æ (as in **a**s)	two short staffs, low front bow and low mid bow
a (as in **a**re)	two short staffs, low bow
ɑ (as in **a**ll)	two short staffs, low mid bow and low back bow

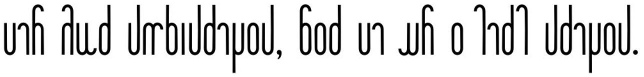
w (as in **w**e)	tall hooked front staff, high bow
j (as in **y**ou)	deep hooked front staff, high front bow
r (as in **r**ed)	deep hooked front staff

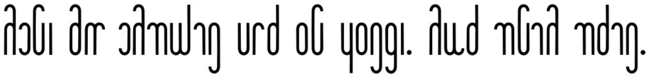
Examples

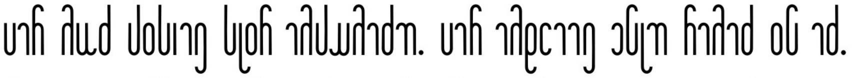

I can resist everything except temptation.

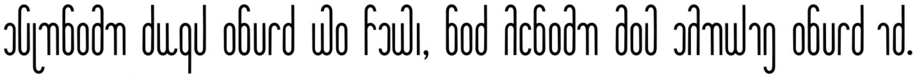

Only the mediocre are always at their best.

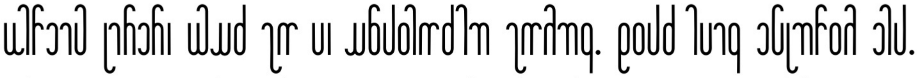

All generalizations are false, including this one.

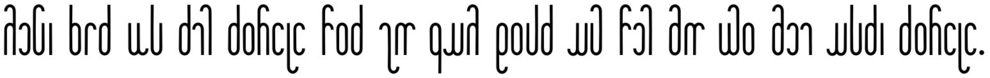

I'm not superstitious, but I am a little stitious.

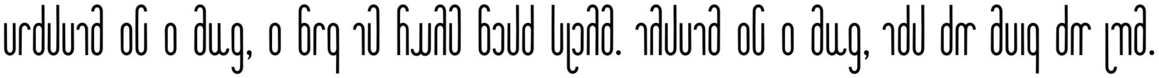

Never do anything out of hunger. Not even eating.

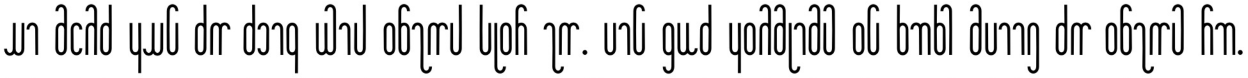

I'm not suffering from insanity. I'm enjoying every minute of it.


Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it.


Always remember that you are absolutely unique. Just like everyone else.


Never put off till tomorrow what you can just as well do the day after tomorrow.


Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog. it's too dark to read.


I don't have to take this abuse from you. I've got hundreds of people dying to abuse me.