MUNHAN

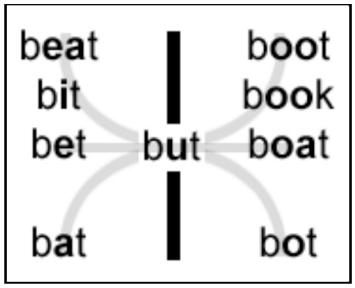
Munhan is a new, attractive, logical writing system that is very easy to learn to read and write.

The word **Munhan** comes from the Somish words *mun* (mouth) and *han* (hand). The name reflects the fact that when we write a symbol in Munhan, we are creating an abstract picture of what is actually going on in the mouth when the sounds are pronounced. The result is concise and attractive and much easier to learn than most other writing systems.

Each separate Munhan symbol represents a **syllable**, and the elements that make up the symbol represent **phonemes** (individual sounds). The symbols are read from **left to right**, and the sounds within each symbol are read from **bottom to top**. Symbols should be written within an approximately square-shaped field (i.e. not too tall and not too wide).

Vowels

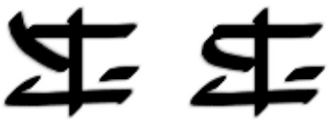
A vowel is the core of a syllable. Syllables are generally built around a vowel. Munhan shows this graphically. Every vowel in Munhan consists of a vertical line or **stem** that forms the inner core of the symbol upon which the rest of the syllable is built. We then draw a curving stroke from the centre of this line to the position that indicates a specific vowel.



These positions represent the approximate positions in the mouth for which the tongue reaches when pronouncing vowels. The left side of a Munhan symbol represents the front of the mouth, and the right side represents the back of the mouth.

The neutral vowel or **schwa** (the first sound in the word "about") as well as the vowel in "but" are pronounced in the centre of the mouth. We show this by drawing a short horizontal stroke intersecting the stem at the centre.

Note that the vowel in "bit" is very similar to the vowel in "beat". The stroke for "bit" reaches in the same direction as for "beat", but ends lower. The stroke for "beat" reaches all the way to the top of the symbol. The vowels in "book" and "boot" behave in the same way, but on the right side of the symbol.



Note that not every syllable has a vowel. Sometimes a consonant acts like a vowel and forms the core of the syllable. Such a syllable in Munhan simply has no stem.

Diphthongs

A **diphthong** is a sound made by pronouncing two vowels together in the same syllable. These are written by placing both component vowels together to form the syllable core. Sometimes this requires two stems in the same symbol.

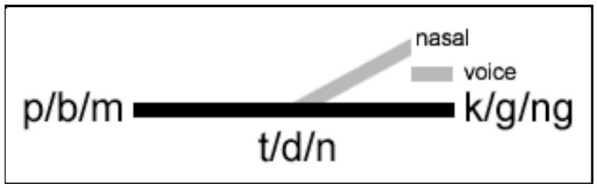
day pie boy now

Consonants

Consonants can be divided into three types: **stops**, **fricatives** and **liquids**.

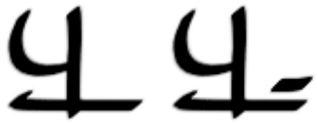
Stops

A **stop** is a sound that is formed by cutting off the airflow in the mouth using the tongue or lips. In Munhan, a stop is represented by a horizontal line that intersects with the stem.



There are three places in the mouth where we can cut off airflow: at the lips, behind the teeth and at the soft palate. We modify the horizontal line accordingly to indicate these positions. A small **hook** is added to the left end of the line to show a sound pronounced at the lips (**p**, **b** and **m**). Similarly, a hook is added to the right end of the line for sounds pronounced in the back of the mouth. For **t**, **d** or **n** which are pronounced behind the teeth, we just leave the line without hooks.

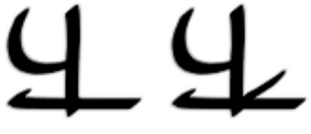
pea tea key

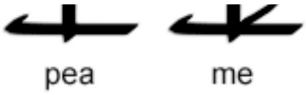


pea bee

To distinguish between a **voiceless** and a **voiced** sound (eg. **p** vs. **b**), a short stroke is added near the back of the line for voiced sounds. This is called a **voicer** and it represents the vocal folds in the larynx that vibrate for voiced sounds.

Sometimes we make sounds by blocking airflow in the mouth and diverting it through the nose. These are called **nasals** (**m**, **n**, **ng**). In addition to adding the

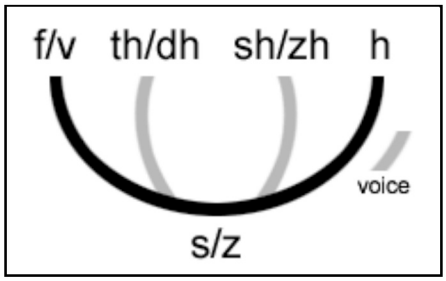




appropriate hook to show the position, a stroke is drawn from the centre of the line upwards and to the right. This represents the diverted airflow to the nose. Since nasals are voiced, the voicer is not used.

Fricatives

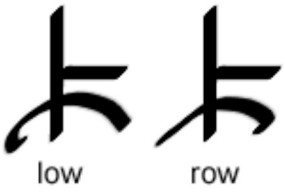
A **fricative** is like a stop except that the airflow through the mouth is not completely blocked, but only restricted. The result is a kind of hissing sound.



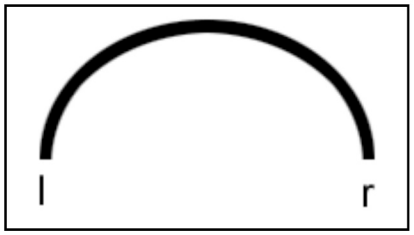
Fricatives are represented by a **bowl-shaped** curve. There are five positions in the mouth where airflow is restricted: (1) between the upper teeth and lower lip, (2) between the tongue and teeth, (3) behind the teeth, (4) at the hard palate and (5) in the throat. The positions are represented respectively on the bowl shape by (1) a hook continuing from the left end of the curve, (2) a stroke from near the centre of the bowl curving upwards towards the left, (3) no modification, (4) a stroke from near the centre of the bowl curving towards the right and (5) a hook continuing from the right end of the curve.

As with stops, a voicer is placed near the back end of the fricative to show a voiced sound.

Liquids

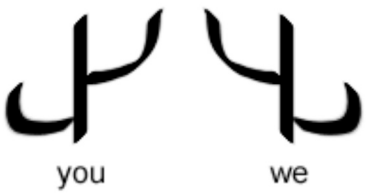


The **liquids**: **l** and **r** are represented by a **hill-shaped** curve. A hook on the left side shows and **l** and a hook on the right side shows an **r**.



Glides or Semi-vowels

Glides or **semi-vowels** (**y** and **w**) are neither consonants nor vowels. They sound very much like vowels, and are, in fact, pronounced in the same way, but, like consonants, they form the periphery of syllables rather than the core. In Munhan, we simply write them with the same strokes as their vowel counterparts (**i** and **u**), but in consonant positions along the stem rather than coming from the centre as vowels do.



Flexibility and artistic license

dog dog dog

As with most writing systems, Munhan offers a great deal of flexibility to its users. As long as the distinctions between the various phonemes are respected, a writer can deviate considerably from the norm and still produce legible text.

Users are especially encouraged to let context guide the forms of each stroke. Munhan favours harmony and accord between the various elements within a symbol. For instance, when choosing the angles and directions of hooks or the character and placement of voicers, the surrounding curves and angles will usually dictate a certain aesthetic choice.

leaf flower