

A Guide to Czech Pronunciation

Czech is a Slavic language and uses the Roman alphabet. To represent sounds in their language that the Romans did not have, the Czechs eventually adopted diacritical marks placed above standard Latin letters. The language is entirely phonetic; each letter has only one sound, unlike English. Stress in Czech is always on the first syllable, and even though some diacritical marks placed above vowels look like accents, they do not alter this stress pattern. The following guide aims only to help an English-speaker pronounce the Czech names and other terms in the text approximately correctly, not to satisfy an expert linguist.

VOWELS

Czech (like other European languages such as Italian) does not shade the primary vowel sounds the way English does. The diacritical marks for length do not change stress, though a long vowel is slightly softened compared to its short counterpart.

a, á	“ah” as in father
e, é	“eh” as in bet
i, í	“ih” as in hit if short, closer to “i” in machine if long
o, ó	“oh” as in home
u, ú, û	“oo” in food
y, ý	as i, í only harder
ě	palatalizes the preceding consonant, pronounced like “ye” in yell.

When vowels are combined they do not become diphthongs; each vowel is sounded equally in succession. Thus -ou- is not “ow” as in “house” but “oh-oo” and so on.

CONSONANTS

Many Czech consonants are pronounced like their English counterparts and are not included here. The ones whose pronunciation differs include the following:

c	“ts” in lets (never the “k” of book)
j	“y” in yell (never the sound of “j” in journey or juice)
č	“ch” as in church
ch	“ch” as in Scottish loch or German Bach
š	“sh” as in show
ž	“s” as in pleasure
ň	palatalized “n” as in tenure
ď, d’	palatalized “d” as in duke (British pronunciation!)
ť, t’	palatalized “t” as in venture
ř	unique to Czech, roughly like English “r” plus the “ž” sound in azure.

R (always pronounced rolled) and L are considered “semivocalic” consonants that can form separate syllables, as in *strč*, *vlk*, *prst*. To the English ear it sounds as though a very short “uh” has been inserted before the r or l.