

Basic Czech Diction

Vowels

- Whether a vowel is short (left column) or long (right) is crucial when spoken, less when sung.
- In diphthongs prolong the first vowel.
- A double vowel merely lengthens it, and does not change the quality.
Exception: In compound words and before prefixes, separate a double vowel with a glottal stop.

written	sung	equivalent
a	[a]	“ah”
e, ě	[ɛ]	“eh”
ě	[jɛ]	for bě, fě, pě, vě
i	[ɪ]	“ih”
	[ɪ̯]	before vowel
o	[ɔ]	as in British “hot”
u	[u]	“oo”
y	[ɪ̯]	“ih”

written	sung	equivalent
á	[a]	“ah”
é	[ɛ]	“eh”
í	[i]	“ee”
ó	[ɔ]	as in British “hot”
ú, ů	[u]	“oo”
ý	[i̯]	“ee”

Consonants

- Consonants are never aspirated or palatized.
- *Assimilation.* Become voiced or unvoiced. *Caveats:* ¹ or end of word; ² except l, m, n, ň, r, v.

b	[b] — [p] before unvoiced consonant ¹
c	[ts] — [dz] before voiced consonant ²
č	[tʃ], as in “church” — [dʒ] before voiced consonant ²
ch	[x], as in German “ach”, but not as far back — [ħ] before voiced consonant ²
d	[d] — [t] before unvoiced consonant ¹ — [ɟ], an alveolar [d], before ě, i, í, ’, or ˇ
f	[f] — [v] before voiced consonant ²
g	[g] — [k] before unvoiced consonant ¹
h	[ɦ], a voiced [h] — [x] before unvoiced consonant ¹ , or in “sh” at start of word
j	[j], as in “yes” — [i] after vowel at end of word; before consonant at start of word; before “i” or “y”
k	[k] — [g] before unvoiced consonant ²
l	[l] — [əl] when vowel, sustaining [l]
m	[m] — [ɱ] in mě
n	[n] — [ɲ], an alveolar [n], for ně, ni, ní — but ng, nk = [ŋ], as in “sing”

ň	[ɲ], an alveolar [n], as in Italian “sogno”
p	[p] — [b] before voiced consonant ²
q	[k] — “qu” is [kv]
r	[r], flipped — [ər] when vowel, sustaining [ə]
ř	[ř], like simultaneous [r] and [ʒ] — unvoiced before <i>or after</i> unvoiced consonant ¹
s	[s] — [z] before voiced consonant ²
š	[ʃ], as in “shy” — [ʒ] before voiced consonant ²
t	[t] — [c], an alveolar [t], before ě, i, í, ’, or ˇ — [d] before voiced consonant ²
v	[v] — [f] before unvoiced consonant ¹
w	[v]
x	[ks] — [gz] before voiced consonant ²
z	[z] — [s] before unvoiced consonant ¹
ž	[ʒ], as in “treasure” — [ʃ] before unvoiced consonant ¹

Words

- Word stress is always the initial syllable.
- Add a glottal stop before any word that starts with a vowel.
- The words “v” and “z” change to [f] and [s] when followed by a word that begins with a vowel.