

Duilleag Fuaimneachaidh

Iùl Fuaimneachaidh | Pronunciation Guide

The following gives a brief overview of the Gaelic sound system, and can be used as a reference guide throughout the A1 course. This looks at the key differences such as broad and slender sounds, at the start, middle, or at the end of a word.

It is recommended that you take some time to familiarise yourself with IPA, 'International Phonetic Alphabet', which is often given in dictionaries. 'Phonetic' spellings based on English are best avoided. These can be misleading and are dependent on accents. Gaelic also has sounds not used in English, these can't be represented accurately by phonetic spellings.

Aibidil na Gàidhlig | The Gaelic Alphabet

There are only 18 letters in the Gàidhlig alphabet however there are more individual sounds than in English. Some related sounds represented in English by separate letters (**b** and **v**), are shown in Gaelic by the same letter with or without the lenition symbol **h** (**b** and **bh**). Vowels are either 'broad' **a, u, o** or 'slender' **e, i** and this difference changes the pronunciation of consonants, as shown on the following pages. Once you get used to the sounds of Gaelic, you will find Gaelic spelling is more regular than English.

A B C D E F G H I L M N O P R S T U

You can find recordings of the sounds these letters make at the LearnGaelic.scot website here: <https://learngaelic.scot/scottish-gaelic-alphabet.jsp>

Stràcan | Accents

Gaelic also uses **stràcan** 'accents' to show a longer vowel sound. Generally in Gaelic, short vowels are more clipped than ordinary English vowels, and long, accented, vowels are typically longer than long English vowels.

BROAD **SLENDER**
 À Ò Ù È Ì

Fuaimreagan | Vowels

| | ENGLISH EXAMPLE: | Gaelic EXAMPLE: |
|---------|--|-----------------------------------|
| BROAD | a as in <u>cat</u> | b<u>a</u> |
| | à as in dem <u>a</u> nd and comm <u>a</u> nd | b<u>à</u> |
| | ao say <u>cool</u> with a smile! | ca<u>o</u> |
| | o as in b <u>o</u> lt and d <u>o</u> llar | p<u>o</u>ca, b<u>o</u>g |
| | ò as in <u>aw</u> e and d <u>oo</u> r | ò<u>l</u>, mò<u>r</u> |
| | u as in br <u>oo</u> d and t <u>oo</u> k | t<u>u</u>r |
| | ù as in br <u>ew</u> ery and t <u>oo</u> | t<u>ù</u>r |
| SLENDER | e as in b <u>e</u> tter and r <u>a</u> zor | l<u>e</u>, t<u>e</u>th |
| | è long, as in br <u>ea</u> d and br <u>ai</u> d | s<u>è</u>imh, fh<u>è</u>in |
| | i as in d <u>i</u> p and d <u>ee</u> p | s<u>i</u>n, <u>i</u>th |
| | ì long, as in kn <u>ee</u> | sg<u>ì</u>th |

Consain Chaola | Slender Consonants

| | | |
|---------|--|--|
| SLENDER | c as in <u>c</u> ure start of a word, elsewhere in a word, as in German <u>ich</u> kenne | ce<u>ò</u> a<u>i</u>ce |
| | ch as in Scots dre <u>ich</u> , German <u>ich</u> | ch<u>ì</u> |
| | d as in <u>j</u> et at the start of a word, elsewhere in a word as ch in pitch | de<u>i</u>seil car<u>a</u>id |
| | dh as in <u>y</u> et | dh<u>e</u>th |
| | g like arg <u>u</u> e at start of a word, elsewhere as in ne <u>ck</u> | ge<u>a</u> a<u>i</u>ge |
| | gh as in <u>y</u> es | gh<u>e</u>al |
| | l a soft l , as in French <u>le</u> <u>la</u> , or English accent mill <u>i</u> on Will <u>i</u> am | le<u>a</u>bhar, Gàidhe<u>l</u> |
| | n as in <u>n</u> ew | ni<u>g</u>hean |
| | p as p^j as <u>p</u> ure | pe<u>a</u>nn |
| | r between r in t <u>r</u> ee and th in <u>th</u> e | ri<u>a</u>mh, Mà<u>i</u>ri |
| | s as in <u>sh</u> in | si<u>n</u> |
| | t as in <u>ch</u> in at the start of a word, elsewhere preceded by an h sound | te<u>t</u>h cai<u>t</u> [ca^ht] |

Consain Leathann | Broad Consonants

SOUND: ENGLISH EXAMPLE:

GAELIC EXAMPLE:

BROAD

| | | |
|-----------|--|--|
| b | as in b ank at the start of a word, elsewhere in a word as p in cap <u>p</u> tive | b ata c ab |
| bh | as v in v ent at the start of a word, elsewhere in a word, as f/v or w | b ha ab <u>b</u> hainn |
| c | as c in c up at the start of a word, elsewhere in a word, like chk in Loch K atrine | c ù ma <u>c</u> [ma ^x k] |
| ch | as ch in l och | l och |
| d | as d in d rew at the start of a word, elsewhere in a word, as t in cat <u>t</u> le | d ubh a d |
| dh | as gh , a mix of g + voiced eh often silent in middle of a word | d ha bo <u>dh</u> ar |
| f | as in f ar | f ada |
| fh | silent - has no sound these exceptions as English h ad | f hada f hathast, f huair, f hèin |
| g | as in g ale at the start of a word, elsewhere in a word, as k in an <u>k</u> le | g abh ada <u>g</u> |
| gh | a mix of g + voiced eh , same as dh | g habh |
| h | as in h at | h ama |
| l | similar to pu <u>l</u> led | l atha |
| m | as in m atter | m ath |
| mh | as Gaelic bh or v in v ent | m hath |
| n | dental similar to ki <u>n</u> dred | a- n ochd |
| p | as in p ot at start of a word elsewhere in a word preceded by an h sound | p òg ro <u>p</u> a [ro ^h pa] |
| ph | as in p heasant | p heann |
| r | as in r un | r opa |
| s | as in English s ee | s olas |
| sh | as in h ad, s is silent | s holas |
| t | as in t en at start of a word, elsewhere preceded by an h sound as in English h ad | t ana ca <u>t</u> [ca ^h t] |
| th | as in h ad, t is silent | t ha |

Ro-analachadh | Preaspiration

In Gaelic there is a feature of pronunciation called pre-aspiration. This means that an h-like sound is made before certain consonants; **t**, **c** and **p**, following a stressed vowel, are usually pre-aspirated in Gaelic. Here are some examples with IPA pronunciation:

cat /kaht/

tapadh leat /tahbəy Lɛhd/

mac /mahk/

Sèimheachadh | Lenition

Lenition, **sèimheachadh**, is one of the most important sound changes in Gaelic, it consists of the softening of a consonant sound, shown in writing by the letter **h**. Consonant sounds that can't be softened, that don't lenite, are **sg**, **sm**, **sp**, **st**. Three consonants that are never followed by an **h** are **l**, **n** and **r**. There are different structures that cause lenition, and as you progress in your learning, these will become clearer. The first instance of lenition in this course is the vocative case, **an tuiseal gairmeach**, and we saw that both male and female names lenite, where possible.

Màiri /ma:ri/



a Mhàiri /va:ri/

Caolachadh | Slenderisation

Another important sound change in Gaelic pronunciation and grammar is known as slenderisation, **caolachadh**. We saw this in lesson one with masculine names in the vocative case. As seen above, consonants in Gaelic have a broad sound and a slender sound depending on the nearest vowel, **a**, **o**, **u** for broad, **e**, **i** for slender. **Caolachadh** is a shift from a broad final consonant sound to a slender one.

Dòmhnall /dɔ̃:.əL/
Seumas /ʃe:məs/



a Dhòmhnaill /ɣɔ̃:.aiL/
a Sheumais /he:mɪʃ/

Caol ri caol | Slender to slender

Gaelic has a consistent spelling rule based on broad and slender vowels. The vowel either side of a consonant, or consonant group, must match; **leathan ri leathan, caol ri caol** 'broad to broad, slender to slender'.

madainn /madɪNj/

feasgar /fɛsgər/

oidhche /ɔ̃ĩçə/