

# All about Adjectives

Here are some important points about how adjectives work in Gaelic.

## Part 1: Adjectives Changing With Nouns

### I. Adjectives usually come after the noun.

Except the ones that don't. They are: ath\* [next], corra\* [occasional, odd], deagh\* [good], droch\* [bad], prìomh\* [prime, chief], sàr\* [complete, great degree, excellent], seann\* [old], a h-uile [all, every], gach [every], and iomadh [much, many].

Note: Seann doesn't lenite d, t, or s.

### II. Adjectives in Gaelic can be attributive or predicative.

Attributive adjectives are attached to nouns (are in the same column as the noun they modify).

Predicative adjectives are separate (separate columns than the noun they modify).

The black cat | is | large.

Tha | an cat dubh | mòr.

Black is attributive, large is predicative. In English it is a bit simpler to see because the verb separates the attributive and predicative adjectives. In Gaelic, they often appear next to each other, which can be confusing until you look at them using the column method.

### III. Sometimes attributive adjectives change if their noun changes.

Singular nouns sometimes need to be lenited or slenderized. If the noun changes, the same change is frequently done to an attributive adjective.

#### Masculine Nouns with Adjectives

Case	Example	Indefinite	Definite	Changes to adj.
<b>Nominative</b>	dubh	cat dubh	an cat dubh	no change
	gòrach	òran gòrach	an t-òran gòrach	no change
	beag	sruth beag	an sruth beag	no change
<b>Dative</b>	dubh	ann an cat dubh	air a' chat dhubh	lenites
	gòrach	ri òran gòrach	ris an òran ghòrach	lenites
	beag	ann an sruth beag	anns an t-sruth bheag	lenites

Case	Example	Indefinite	Definite	Changes to adj.
<b>Genitive</b>	dubh	earball cat dubh	spòg a' chait dhuibh	lenites & slenderizes
	gòrach	ainm òran gòrach	... an òrain ghòraich	lenites & slenderizes
	beag	glugail sruth beag	bruach an t-sruth bhig	lenites & slenderizes

### Feminine Nouns with Adjectives

Case	Example	Indefinite	Definite	Changes to adj.
<b>Nominative</b>	cam	cas cham	a' chas cham	lenites (fem. noun)
	mòr	uinneag mhòr	an uinneag mhòr	lenites (fem. noun)
	dearg	slige dhearg	an t-slige dhearg	lenites (fem. noun)
<b>Dative</b>	cam	le cas cham	leis a' chas cham	lenites
	mòr	fo uinneag mhòr	air an uinneag mhòr	lenites
	dearg	le slige dhearg	leis an t-slige dhearg	lenites
<b>Genitive</b>	cam	... cas cham	... na coise chaime	lenites & slenderizes
	mòr	ri taobh uinneag mhòr	air beulaibh na h-uinneige mòire	lenites & slenderizes
	dearg	àite slige deirge	na slige dheirge	lenites & slenderizes

#### Faclan

cam	[bent, crooked]
slige	[shell]
glugail	[gurgling]
bruach	[bank of a river]

Historically, the feminine nouns in the dative slenderized. This has fallen out of favor (for some) and now the dative operates the same for masculine and feminine nouns (for some).

## IV. Short adjectives change in the plurals

With plural nouns, attributive adjectives don't change based on case or gender, but short adjectives (usually one syllable) add an “-a” to the end.

Taighean beaga, brògan ùra, nigheanan òga.

If the noun forms its plural by slenderisation, then the adjective lenites. How fun!

## Part 2: Comparatives and Superlatives

### I. Adjectives Which Make Regular Comparatives and Superlatives

In English we form comparisons by adding suffixes like -er and -est to adjectives. Just so you know, the -er form is called the comparative form, and the -est form is called the superlative form.

In Gaelic, we have a similar process, although it's not quite as simple as adding a suffix. In Gaelic we have to change some vowels around and add a particle. That should sound very familiar by this point in your study of Gaelic. As always, there are both regular adjectives and irregular adjectives.

I'll be using the same list of adjectives I provided on the “Lenition with Adjectives” sheet in the beginning level.

For regular comparatives:

#### Adjectives that Behave Regularly

adjective	comparative	superlative
fuair	nas fhuaire	as fhuaire
blàth	nas blàithe	as blàithe
caol	nas caoile	as caoile
brèagha	nas brèagha	as brèagha
grannda	nas grannda	as grannda
toilichte	nas toilichte	as toilichte
brònach	nas brònaiche	as brònaiche
snog	nas snoige	as snoige

We can glean some rules from these examples.

- 1) Adjectives that end in a vowel don't change.
- 2) If the last vowel is a slender vowel, don't add another. Do add an 'e' to the end, please.

sgìth	nas sgìthe	as sgìthe
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3) Otherwise, insert an ‘i’ after the last broad vowel, and add an ‘e’ to the end.

4) Adjectives which begin with ‘f + vowel’ are lenited.

## II. Adjectives Which Use Irregular Forms When Making Comparatives and Superlatives

adjective	comparative	superlative
teth	nas teotha	as teotha
math	nas fheàrr (watch out! This is not the same as the ‘prefer’ or ‘had better’ constructions)	as fheàrr
dona	nas miosa	as miosa
reamhar	nas reamhra	as reamhra
mòr	nas motha*	as motha
beag	nas lugha / nas bige	as lugha / as bige
fliuch	nas fliche	as fliche
tioram	nas tiorama	as tiorama

## III. When Does One Use Nas Versus As?

When do you use ‘as’ instead of ‘nas’?

Good question. Basically, if the adjective is directly modifying a definite noun, use ‘as.’ Another time you use ‘as’ is if the nearest verb is the ‘Is’ verb.

Tha an taigh-bidh seo an taigh-bidh as fheàrr. / This restaurant is the best restaurant.  
'S e am baile as motha a th' ann Glaschu. / Glasgow is the biggest town.

## IV. Making Comparisons

The format used when comparing is “nas...na... .”

Tha an piseag gheal nas lugha na piseag dhubh.  
/ The white kitten is smaller than the black kitten.

Tha an taigh agamsa nas motha na taigh agadsa.  
/ My house is bigger than your house.

\* Idiomatically, 'nas motha' can mean 'either.' Chan eil mi ag iarraidh currain ithe an-diugh nas motha. / I am not wanting carrots to eat today either.

## **Sources and Further Reading:**

- Black, Ronald, Cothrom Ionnsachaidh, 1997, pp. 100-101 (adjectives which precede the noun), pp. 100-105 (changes to attributive adjectives), pp. 181-184 (comparisons).
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- Byrne, Michel, Gràmar na Gàidhlig, 2002, pp 46-48 (changes to attributive adjectives), p. 49 (adjectives which precede the noun), pp. 51-52 (comparisons).
- Cànan, Speaking Our Language, Series 1, Book 2, 1993, p. 40 (changes to attributive adjectives).
- Cànan, Speaking Our Language, Series 3, 1994, pp. 114-115 (comparisons).
- Christie, Emma, Ceumannan 1, 2009, Modal 3, Aonad 1, pp. 94-100 & pp. 348-349 (changes to attributive adjectives).