# Basic Grammatical Terms

This handout is a basic introduction to grammatical terms. It isn't meant to be an exhaustive course on the subject, just a brief overview that will help you get started with learning Gaelic.

Don't allow grammar to scare you away. There is a basic amount of language terminology you must know in order to discuss language topics when they arise. This pamphlet should be enough to get you started with the Gaelic.

## Nouns

**Definition.** The standard definition of a noun is that it's a person, place or thing.

**Articles.** Nouns can have an article.  Two types of articles are indefinite or definite.  The indefinite article in English is "a," for example, "a dog."  The definite article in English is "the," for example, "the dog." In Gaelic the indefinite article is included in the noun, and is not represented by a word or letter as in English. The definite article is represented, and varies by gender and number.  Some examples of definite articles in Gaelic are "an," "am," "a'," "na," "nan," "nam."

**Number.**  Nouns have a quantity associated with them. In English, nouns of a quantity of one are singular. Nouns of a quantity of more than one are plural. In Gaelic, nouns of a quantity of one or two are singular, and nouns of a quantity higher than two are plural.

Examples:
I have one cat. I have two cats.  "s"  is the spelling marker for plurals in English.
Tha cat agam. (I have a (one) cat). Tha trì cait agam. (I have three cats). Just as in English, spelling changes to indicate plurals. Just as in English, there are irregular spelling markers for plurals.

**Gender.**  Gender is a difficult topic for native English speakers because English doesn't express grammatical gender.  English did have it at one time, but has lost it over the ages.  Gaelic maintains gender, as do many, if not most, of the world's other languages.  Gaelic has 2 genders, masculine and feminine.  The terms masculine and feminine are names of the two categories of nouns in Gaelic, and do not necessarily reflect the gender of entity that the noun represents. These categories of nouns behave differently in sentences and it's important to know what gender a noun is so that you can discuss how/why the noun/definite article is behaving or spelled  in a certain way.

**Case.** Case is another difficult topic for native English speakers because English typically represents case by word order in a sentence. The only places English represents case in spelling are in the possessive "'s" ending and in the pronouns (the difference between "I" and "me" is one of case). Case represents the role of the noun in the sentence. If you study many languages, you will find that different languages have different numbers of cases and different names for the same roles. For the purposes of this handout, We're going to use the names of the cases in Gaelic for both Gaelic and English examples. This way you can see the relationship between the two languages.

Before we begin we need to know the names of the common roles that a noun can have. These are subject, object and indirect object.  Subjects are usually the nouns doing the

action of the verb. Direct objects usually are what the subject is acting upon, and the indirect object is the noun that benefits from the action.  For example:

Jane cooked Tim dinner.

Jane is doing the action, so Jane is the subject.
Jane cooked dinner, so dinner is the direct object.
Jane cooked dinner for Tim, so Tim is the indirect object.

Expressing this relationship using case, then, the subject is said to be in <u>nominative</u> case (also called the dictionary form), and the objects are in accusative case.  In Gaelic, the nominative and accusative are the same! This means that we don't have to change the spelling of any of the nouns in these cases.

The next case is called the <u>vocative</u>. This is used whenever addressing someone or something.

The third case is called the <u>genitive</u>. This represents when one noun <u>possesses</u> another noun. In English, it's represented by adding "'s" to the end of a word, or the words "of the."

Example:

The cat's ears were cold.
The ears of the cat were cold.

In both these examples the ears are owned by the cat. Both English and Gaelic have a genitive case.

The fourth case is called the <u>dative</u>. The dative case is used when a noun follows a preposition. A <u>preposition</u> is a word that uses time or place to link words in a sentence, for example, "The sheep is in a hollow log." Examples of prepositions in English include at, on, in, from, about, through, to, and with. In Gaelic, when a preposition and a pronoun work together, they combine to form a <u>prepositional pronoun</u>.  You'll have to master these if you want to know who is doing what to whom.

<u>**Pronoun.**</u>  A pronoun is a noun that refers back to another noun. Pronouns are shorter and by substituting them for other people related nouns, communication is easier.

Example:

John is eating ice cream. He is happy.

He is a pronoun referring back to John.

Types of pronouns include:
<u>Personal Pronouns</u>: I, me, you, he, him, she, her, it, we, us, they and them.
<u>Relative Pronouns</u>: who, whom, whose, which and that.
<u>Possessive Pronouns</u>: mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, and theirs.


# Adjectives

**Definition**.  Adjectives modify or describe nouns. Bright, dark, big, small are all adjectives.

# Verbs

**Definition**. Verbs are action words, or, state that things are. English also has a verb "have," to illustrate possession, which Gaelic doesn't.

**Tense**. Verbs have tenses to show when things happen. Present, Past, and Future are three common tenses. English and Gaelic also have "perfect" tenses (e.g. had eaten, have eaten, will have eaten).

**Voice**. There are two types of voice - active and passive.

Examples:
Active: John ate the ice cream.
Passive: The ice cream was eaten by John.

We will focus on active voice in Gaelic.

**Mood**. There are three moods - indicative, imperative, and conditional (sometimes called subjunctive). Indicative is the basic mood that you use all the time in regular speech. Imperative mood is used to issue commands and conditional refers to situations where something would or could happen if certain criteria would be or could be met. Typically in English they feature words like would or could.

**Verb Forms**. Verbs can take many forms in English and Gaelic. Here are a few that we'll use along the way.

**Verbal Noun**. Nouns made from verbs. In English, usually by adding "-ing" to a verb. Related to the Present Participle, which is an "ing" word used with the verb "to be". Verbal Noun's are nouns, while Present Participles are still doing verb things.

Examples:
Going to the shop is difficult with no car. Going is functioning as a noun. Going ... is difficult. I want to be going to the shop. Going is doing verb things.

**Infinitive.** As the name indicates, a verb with no time association (infinite). In English, verbs with "to" in front might be infinitives. For example in, "John was able to eat the scone." "to eat" is the infinitive form of the verb "eat.'

**Past participle.** Verbs masquerading as adjectives. Usually created in English by adding "-ed" to the end of a verb. For example, "closed" and "opened."

**Root.** The basic form of the verb. It is best to always learn the root and the verbal noun/ present participle because from those two forms, you can build all the other forms of the verb. We will say that the imperative form of the verb is the root for our purposes.

Gaelic Specific Verb Topic.
In Gaelic, each verb comes in two forms. The dependent form and the independent form. These are easy to remember because the independent form is one word and the dependent form is made of two words. In other words, the dependent form depends on having two words, while the independent form is independent enough to get along with just one.

Examples:
Tha mi sgìth.  (I am tired.)  Tha is independent because the verb is represented by just one word.
A bheil mi sgìth? (Am I tired.) A bheil is the same verb as "tha" (to be - present tense) but it is represented by two words.

# Adverbs

**Definition.** Adverbs describe the action that the verb is doing.  In English, they are usually created by adding "-ly" to a noun or adjective.

Examples:
The scone was quickly eaten by John. Quickly describes the way the scone was eaten.
I carefully drove home. Carefully describes the way the driving occurred.

I hope that this review of grammar terms helps you be less fearful of your study of the Gaelic. You'll see these terms as you go along and so you might want to keep this handout handy.