

Gaelic Pronunciation Guide

I have selected the following words as a guide to Gaelic pronunciation because they are either cognates, loanwords or very similar sounding to the English. Hopefully that will help ease your way into having the Gàidhlig!

Remember, Gàidhlig does not use the letters j, k, q, v, w, x, y, z. However, we use letter pairings to represent the sounds in Gàidhlig that English uses for these letters.

Note: For the most comprehensive discussion of pronunciation, The Gaelic-English Dictionary, by Colin Mark (2004) has about 18 pages of pronunciation guide.

Basic Sounds [MP3](#)

See the next section for a description of what lenition is.

a - ad	[hat] (unlenitable)
b - ball	[ball]
c - cat	[cat] ('c' is always hard, like 'k')
d - dotair	[doctor] (usually like a 't' when not the initial letter.)
e - eilean	[island] (one of the two Evll vowels, which can change the sound of the consonants around it!) (unlenitable)
f - fòn	[phone]
g - gunna	[gun] (usually like a 'k' when not the initial letter.)
h - hamstair	[hamster] (not a 'Gaelic' letter, used for lenition and borrowed words, except 'Na Hearadh' - Isle of Harris.) (unlenitable)
i - iarunn	[iron] (the other Evll vowel!) (unlenitable)
l - lampa	[lamp] (usually thick when initial, maybe thin elsewhere.) (unlenitable!)
m - muncaidh	[monkey]
n - nurs	[nurse] (unlenitable!)
o - oifis	[office] (unlenitable!)
p - peata	[pet]
r - rùm	[room] (unlenitable!) (r's are usually rolled in Gaelic)
s - stoirm	[storm] (sg, sm, sp, st are unlenitable)
s - sòfa	[sofa]
t - tràin	[train]
u - uncail	[uncle] (unlenitable)

Lenition [MP3](#)

Lenition is the insertion of an 'h' into the second position in a word due to specific grammatical reasons. You will see lenited consonants elsewhere in words, but these remain lenited at all times.

One thing that causes lenition is the word 'mo*' which means 'my' in Gàidhlig. When 'mo' precedes vowels, the 'o' is dropped and replaced with an apostrophe. There is another way to express possession which might be more appropriate for some of these items, but for our purposes just now, this will do.

m' ad	[my hat]
mo bhall	[my ball], this is how we get the English 'v' sound.
mo chat	[my cat], this is always pronounced like 'loch,' never English 'ch' (angry cat noise)

mo dhotair	[my doctor], this is like 'ch' in 'loch' but voiced
m' eilean	[my island]
mo dh'fhòn	[my phone], 'fh' is silent
mo ghunna	[my gun], this is like 'dh', voiced 'ch'
mo hamstair	[my hamster]
m' iarunn	[my iron]
mo lampa	[my lamp]
mo mhuncaidh	[my monkey], this is another way to make 'v'
mo nurs	[my nurse]
m' oifis	[my office]
mo pheata	[my pet], 'ph' is pronounced as 'f'
mo rùm	[my room]
mo shòfa	[my sofa] ('sh' is pronounced as 'h')
mo thrèan	[my train] ('th' is pronounced as 'h')
m' uncail	[my uncle]

With Evil (Slender) Vowels [MP3](#)

A, O, and U are BROAD vowels and don't really change any of the sounds of consonants around them. E and I are SLENDER vowels, and do change the sounds of consonants around them. This is why they are Evil!

d - dìnnear	[dinner] ('d' + evil vowel is pronounced as 'j')
dh - mo dhìnnear	[my dinner] ('dh' + evil vowel is pronounced as 'y')
g - gille	[boy, gille]
gh - mo ghille	[my boy, my gille] ('gh' + evil vowel is pronounced as 'y')
s - siùcar	[sugar] ('s' + evil vowel is pronounced as 'sh')
sh - mo shiùcar	[my sugar]

Alas, I have not found a word that is similar in English and Gàidhlig which follow the pronunciation rules (all the loanwords cheat and act English-y). So we'll use a Gàidhlig word:

t - tinn	[sick] ('t' + evil vowel is pronounced as 'ch' in English)
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Other things to remember

r's are rolled

'ao' has a specific sound - no lips, please

d and t meet in the middle with spit

initial L's are usually thick

'nn' usually goes through your nose and is nasal

'ch' is always as in 'loch' (angry cat)

'chd' is always like angry cat with a 'k' on the end

In my dialect,

'rd' and 'rt' get an 's' sound in the middle

'idh' or 'aidh' are pronounced like 'eeee'

'adh' or 'aidh' are pronounced like 'ooooo'