How Danish sounds Udtale

The trick: Danish is spelled one way and said softer. Letters melt together, endings get swallowed, and d and g often go soft. It has three extra letters, æ, ø and å, at the end of the alphabet.

Letters	Sounds like	Example
æ	e in bed, a little longer	**æble / være** apple / be
ø	like ur in British fur, lips rounded	**øl / smør** beer / butter
å	o in more, with round lips	**på / år** on / year
a	often bright, close to a in cat; darker next to r	**kat / far** cat / father
o	long, close to oo in food; short, like o in hot	**sol / ost** sun / cheese
u	oo in food, lips pushed out	**hus / ud** house / out
y	say ee, then round your lips tightly	**by / syv** town / seven
r	soft, from the throat; after a vowel it melts into it	**rød / mor** red / mother
hv, hj	the h is silent	**hvad / hjem** what / home
j	y in yes	**ja / jul** yes / Christmas
silent d	after l, n or r, the d is usually silent	**mand / bord** man / table
-e, -er	swallowed: -e is a short uh, -er a soft ah	**kage / lærer** cake / teacher
stød	a little catch in the voice; you're understood without it	**hund / hun** dog / she
jeg, mig, dig, og	jeg sounds like yai, mig and dig like my and die, og like o	**jeg / og** I / and
stress	usually on the first syllable; loanwords often on the last	**lørdag / station** Saturday / station

The soft d

blød d: often d after a vowel

mad food · **gade** street · **rød** red · **hedder** is called

A soft, lazy th, as in the, with the tongue resting behind the lower teeth. Say it gently and you'll be close.

The soft g

often g after a vowel

dag day · **pige** girl · **kage** cake · **sige** say

Often silent, or a soft glide like y or w: pige sounds like pee-eh. At the start of a word, g is a normal g: god, gade.

Long or short: one consonant after a vowel often means a long vowel, two mean a short one. Kage, cake, has a long a. Komme, come, has a short o.

Fast and soft: even Norwegians and Swedes, who read Danish easily, find spoken Danish fast. That's normal, not you. Subtitles help a lot: you see the full word while you hear the soft one.

How words work Grammatik

Every noun is an en or et word

en
most nouns, about three in four
en bil, a car · en dreng, a boy · en stol, a chair

et
the rest
et hus, a house · et barn, a child · et æble, an apple

No reliable rule: you can't tell from the word, so learn the article with it: en bil, et hus. If you guess, guess en: you'll be right most of the time.

For "the", the article goes on the end

en bil
bilen
the car

en pige
pigen
the girl

et hus
huset
the house

et æble
æblet
the apple

With a describing word: the goes in front instead: den store bil, the big car; det store hus, the big house.

Plurals: learn them with the word

Ending	One	Many	Often for
-er	en bil	biler cars	many en words
-r	en pige	piger girls	words ending in -e
-e	en stol	stole chairs	many short words
no change	et år	år years	some short et words

Patterns, not rules: some words change inside, like en mand, to mænd, and et barn, to børn. When you learn a noun, say its plural too: en bil, biler.

Verbs stay the same for everyone

jeg er
I am

du er
you are

hun er
she is

vi er
we are

One form: whoever is talking, the verb doesn't change. Most present forms end in -r: jeg taler, du taler, de taler.

The verb comes second

I dag
today

drikker
drink

jeg
I

kaffe
coffee

Second place: in a normal sentence the verb is the second thing. Start with I dag, today, and the verb jumps ahead of jeg: I dag drikker jeg kaffe, never I dag jeg drikker. It's the same as Jeg drikker kaffe i dag.

The first 235 words De første ord

How: learn five a day, then hunt for them in Kitsumi subtitles. *Pink italics* say how a word is used, not what it means.

Greetings and survival

Hej
hi, hello *(with anyone)*

Hej hej
bye! *(cheerful; sometimes hi)*

Farvel
goodbye

Vi ses
see you

God morgen
good morning

God aften
good evening

Godnat
good night

Tak
thanks

Mange tak
thanks a lot

Tusind tak
thank you so much *(it means a thousand thanks)*

Selv tak
you're welcome; thank you too

Tak for mad
thanks for the food *(said after a meal)*

Værsgo
here you are; help yourself *(when you give something)*

Undskyld
excuse me; sorry

Ja
yes

Nej
no

Ja tak / Nej tak
yes please / no thanks

Hvordan går det?
how are you? *(how's it going)*

Godt, tak
fine, thanks

Jeg hedder ...
my name is ...

Hyggeligt at møde dig
nice to meet you

Jeg forstår ikke
I don't understand

Jeg ved det ikke
I don't know

Skål!
cheers!

Question words

hvad
what *(said va)*

hvem
who

hvor
where

hvornår
when

hvorfor
why

hvordan
how

hvor meget
how much

hvor mange
how many

hvilken
which

hvad for en
which one; what kind of

Me and you

jeg
I *(said yai)*

du
you *(to anyone: the normal you)*

I
you all *(always a capital I)*

han
he

hun
she

den / det
it *(en word / et word)*

vi
we

de
they *(said di)*

mig / dig
me / you *(said like my / die)*

min / mit
my *(en word / et word)*

din / dit
your *(en word / et word)*

Little words

og
and *(said o)*

men
but

eller
or

ikke
not

også
also, too *(said osse)*

meget
very; a lot

lidt
a little

bare
only, just

allerede
already

her
here

der
there

med
with

uden
without

for
for; too *(for varmt, too hot)*

fordi
because

måske
maybe

Du is for everyone: Danes say du to almost anyone, a boss or a doctor too. I, always with a capital, is for more than one person.

No word for please: Danes add tak, thanks: En kaffe, tak. A coffee, please. Kan jeg få, can I have, is the polite way to ask.

People and time Mennesker og tid

Family

en mor
mother, mum

en far
father, dad

en bror
brother

en søster
sister

en søn
son

en datter
daughter

en forælder
parent *(forældre, parents)*

søskende
brothers and sisters

en familie
family

en mand
man; husband

en kone
wife

People

et menneske
person, human

en kvinde
woman

et barn
child *(børn, children)*

en pige
girl

en dreng
boy

en ven
friend *(venner, friends)*

en kæreste
boyfriend or girlfriend

en nabo
neighbour

en lærer
teacher

en kollega
colleague

When

i dag
today

i morgen
tomorrow

i går
yesterday

nu
now

senere
later

en morgen
morning

en eftermiddag
afternoon

en aften
evening

en nat
night

en dag
day

en time
hour *(not time: that's tid)*

en uge
week

en weekend
weekend

en måned
month

et år
year

klokken
o'clock: klokken tre, at three

Days of the week

mandag
Monday

tirsdag
Tuesday

onsdag
Wednesday

torsdag
Thursday

fredag
Friday

lørdag
Saturday

søndag
Sunday

Mum's side, dad's side

Mum's side: mor

en mormor	en morfar	en moster	en morbror
grandma	grandpa	aunt	uncle

Dad's side: far

en farmor	en farfar	en faster	en farbror
grandma	grandpa	aunt	uncle

Mor is mother and far is father, and Danish just glues them: mormor is mum's mum, farfar is dad's dad. You'll also hear bedstemor and bedstefar, grandma and grandpa, and tante and onkel for any aunt or uncle.

Numbers

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
nul	en or et	to	tre	fire	fem	seks	syv	otte	ni

10	20	21	30	40	50	60	70	80	90
ti	tyve	enogtyve one and 20	tredive	fyrre	halvtreds 2½ × 20	tres 3 × 20	halvfjerds 3½ × 20	firs 4 × 20	halvfems 4½ × 20

Counting in twenties: from 50 to 90, Danish counts in twenties: tres is three twenties, and halvtreds is two and a half. Danes just learn them as words, and so can you. 100 is hundrede.

Days are small: days and months take no capital letter: mandag, januar. On Monday is på mandag. One is en or et, like the article.

Food, places, verbs Mad, steder, verber

Food and drink

et vand
water

en kaffe
coffee

en te
tea

en mælk
milk

en øl
beer

en vin
wine

et brød
bread

et rugbrød
dark rye bread

et smørrebrød
open sandwich on rye bread

en ost
cheese

et kød
meat

en kylling
chicken

en fisk
fish

et æg
egg

et æble
apple

en pølse
sausage, hot dog

en kage
cake

et wienerbrød
Danish pastry

en morgenmad
breakfast

en frokost
lunch *(not breakfast!)*

en aftensmad
dinner

Places

et hus
house

hjemme
at home

et sommerhus
summer house, holiday cottage

en skole
school

et job
job, work

en restaurant
restaurant

et toilet
toilet

en butik
shop

en by
town, city

en gade
street

en strand
beach

Danmark
Denmark

København
Copenhagen

Verbs: dictionary form / present

være / er
be

have / har
have

gå / går
go, walk

tage / tager
take; go *(tage til, go to a place)*

komme / kommer
come

spise / spiser
eat

drikke / drikker
drink

se / ser
see

gøre / gør
do, make

sove / sover
sleep

tale / taler
speak, talk

forstå / forstår
understand

vide / ved
know *(a fact)*

kende / kender
know *(a person)*

ville / vil
want

kunne / kan
can

kunne lide / kan lide
like *(jeg kan lide kaffe)*

elske / elsker
love

bo / bor
live *(somewhere)*

købe / køber
buy

hedde / hedder
be called

Describing words

god / dårlig
good / bad

stor / lille
big / small

varm / kold
warm / cold

ny / gammel
new / old

dyr / billig
expensive / cheap

nem / svær
easy / hard

glad / ked af det
happy / sad

træt
tired

sød
sweet; kind, nice

lækker
delicious; lovely *(casual)*

Two forms: the dictionary form comes with at, like to in English: at tale, to speak. The present adds -r: taler. Learn the odd ones by heart: være, er; vide, ved; ville, vil; kunne, kan.

Describing words change a little: add -t for an et word and -e for many: en stor bil, et stort hus, store huse.

Show words Ord fra serier

Reactions

Hva?
what? huh? *(short for hvad)*

Hold da op!
wow! oh my! *(surprise)*

Hyggeligt
cosy, nice, lovely *(from hygge, see below)*

Fedt!
great! cool!

Nå
well; oh; so *(it fits almost anywhere)*

Okay
OK

Præcis
exactly

Sgu
really, truly *(a filler that adds force: det er sgu koldt, it's really cold)*

Pyt
never mind, let it go *(see below)*

Jo
yes *(to a question with not in it)*

Altså
I mean; well *(a filler)*

Ikke?
right? isn't it?

Øv!
oh no, bummer

Åh nej!
oh no!

Klart
sure, of course

Det er fint
it's fine, no worries

The big scenes

Jeg elsker dig
I love you *(strong: for partners and family)*

Jeg savner dig
I miss you

Lad mig være
leave me alone

Hjælp!
help!

Pas på!
watch out!

Stop!
stop it!

Hvor var du i nat?
where were you last night?

Det var ikke mig
it wasn't me

Hvad sker der?
what's going on? what's up?

What to call people

skat
darling, honey *(it means treasure)*

min ven
my friend

makker
mate, buddy; a police partner too

søde
sweetie *(to a child or partner)*

drenge / piger
guys! / girls! *(to a group)*

Hygge and hyggeligt: hygge is warm time together: candles, coffee, a blanket, people you like. Hyggeligt is anything that feels that way, a dinner, a chat or a whole evening. Det var hyggeligt! That was lovely.

Pyt: pyt means never mind, let it go. Spilled your coffee? Pyt. Danes say it to shrug off the small stuff, to others and to themselves.

Swear words are strong: Danish has strong swear words, and you'll hear them a lot in crime series. Recognise them, but don't say them. Sgu only adds force, and nå, hold da op and øv are fine in front of anyone.

Practice Øvelse

How: cover the grey lines with a strip of paper. Read the Danish out loud, then slide it down to check. Can you read every line without peeking? You've got it.

Questions: for a yes or no question, put the verb first: Taler du engelsk? Do you speak English?

Saying no: put ikke after the verb: Jeg drikker ikke kaffe. I don't drink coffee.

Read these sentences

1. Hej, jeg hedder Freja.
   Hi, my name is Freja.

2. Hvad hedder du?
   What's your name?

3. Hvor er toilettet?
   Where is the toilet?

4. Hvad koster det?
   How much is it?

5. Kan jeg få en kaffe, tak?
   Can I have a coffee, please?

6. Jeg taler lidt dansk.
   I speak a little Danish.

7. I dag er det meget koldt.
   It's very cold today.

8. I morgen tager jeg til Aarhus.
   Tomorrow I'm going to Aarhus.

9. Det her rugbrød er virkelig godt!
   This rye bread is really good!

10. Tak for i aften, det var hyggeligt!
    Thanks for tonight, it was lovely!

Meet a word you don't know? In Kitsumi, hover any word in Danish subtitles to see what it means.