How Icelandic sounds Framburður

The trick: Icelandic is read as it's written, once you know a few rules. It has 32 letters: no c, q, w or z, but þ, ð, æ and ö, and six vowels with an accent.

Letters	Sounds like	Example
a e i o	a as in father, e as in bed, i as in sit, o as in hot	**taska / hestur** bag / horse
u, y	u is a loose French u, never the oo in food; y sounds just like i	**hundur / systir** dog / sister
á, ó	á is the ow in cow; ó is the oh in go	**já / sól** yes / sun
é, í, ý, ú	é is the ye in yes; í and ý are both the ee in see; ú is the oo in food	**ég / hús** I / house
æ	the eye in my	**hæ / æði** hi / awesome
ö	the u in fur, with rounded lips, like German ö	**köttur / smjör** cat / butter
au	ö and ee in one breath, close to the eu in French feuille	**auga / haust** eye / autumn
ei, ey	both are the ay in day	**nei / eyja** no / island
þ	the th in thin	**þú / þrír** you / three
ð	the th in this	**maður / með** man / with
ll	like tl, with a breathy l	**bolli / fjall** cup / mountain
hv	kv, as in quick	**hvað / hvar** what / where
f	f at the start; v between vowels; p before l or n inside a word	**hafa / nafn** have / name
pp, tt, kk	a little h slips in first: takk sounds like tahk	**takk / epli** thanks / apple
stress	always on the first syllable	**Ísland / Reykjavík** ÍS-land / REYK-ja-vík

þ · ð

two old letters, both a th

þú you · **það** it · **með** with · **góður** good

á é í ó ú ý æ ö

eight vowels of their own

já yes · **ég** I · **hús** house · **æði** awesome

The accent is not stress: á, é, í, ó, ú and ý are letters of their own, with their own sounds: a and á are as different as a and o. The stress is always on the first syllable, accent or not.

Þ or ð: both are th. Þ, as in thin, mostly starts a word, or the second part of a joined word. Ð, as in this, comes in the middle or at the end, never at the start.

First names for everyone: most Icelanders have no family name. Anna Jónsdóttir is Jón's daughter, and her brother is Jónsson, Jón's son. So people go by first names, even with a teacher or a doctor.

Já and nei: já is yes and nei is no. You'll also hear a breathy já said while breathing in: it still means yes, I'm listening.

How words work Málfræði

The is an ending: Icelandic puts the at the end of the word, and it has no word for a: hestur is a horse, or just horse.

hestur a horse	hesturinn the horse	kona a woman	konan the woman	borð a table	borðið the table

Every noun is masculine, feminine or neuter

masculine

often ends in -ur, -ll or -i; the is -inn, or -nn after -i

hestur, hesturinn, horse
bíll, bíllinn, car
pabbi, pabbinn, dad

feminine

often ends in -a; the is -in, or -n after -a

kona, konan, woman
mamma, mamman, mum
borg, borgin, city

neuter

often no ending at all; the is -ið, or -ð after a vowel

borð, borðið, table
hús, húsið, house
auga, augað, eye

Mostly, not always: bók, book, is feminine, but borð, table, is neuter, and barn, child, is neuter too. On the next pages the noun itself wears its gender colour, so you don't have to guess.

Describing words match the noun

góður maður a good man	góð kona a good woman	gott barn a good child

Three endings: the describing word goes before the noun and takes the noun's gender: góður for a masculine word, góð for a feminine one, gott for a neuter one.

Endings change after little words like á, frá and til

Ísland Iceland	á Íslandi in Iceland	frá Íslandi from Iceland	til Íslands to Iceland

That's the case system: Icelandic has four cases. The start of the word stays, and only the end changes. Learn the dictionary form first; listening brings the rest.

Þú or þið

Hvað segir þú? þú: one person, almost anyone: friends, strangers, your boss, older people	Hvað segið þið? þið: two or more people

Verbs change with the person: vera, to be, and tala, to speak

ég er I am	þú ert you are	hann, hún er he, she is	við erum we are	þið eruð you all are	þau eru they are
ég tala I speak	þú talar you speak	hún talar she speaks (he: hann talar)	við tölum we speak	þið talið you all speak	þau tala they speak

Þú for everyone: Icelandic uses þú with almost everyone, strangers and older people too. They is þeir for men, þær for women and þau for a mix. To say no, put ekki after the verb: ég tala ekki íslensku, I don't speak Icelandic; ég er ekki heima, I'm not at home.

The first 259 words Fyrstu orðin

How: learn five a day, then listen for them in Icelandic films and series. *Pink italics* say how a word is used, not what it means.

Greetings and survival

Halló
hello

Hæ
hi *(casual)*

Góðan daginn
good morning, hello *(it means good the day)*

Gott kvöld
good evening

Góða nótt
good night

Bless
bye

Bæ
bye *(casual)*

Sjáumst
see you

Takk
thanks

Takk fyrir
thank you

Það var ekkert
you're welcome *(it means it was nothing)*

Má ég fá ...?
can I have ...? *(how you ask nicely)*

Gjörðu svo vel
here you are; help yourself

Afsakið
excuse me

Fyrirgefðu
sorry

Já
yes

Nei
no

Hvað segirðu?
how's it going? *(it means what do you say?)*

Allt gott
all good, fine *(the answer)*

Ég heiti ...
my name is ... *(it means I'm called)*

Gaman að kynnast þér
nice to meet you

Talar þú ensku?
do you speak English?

Ég skil ekki
I don't understand

Ég veit það ekki
I don't know

Skál!
cheers!

Question words

hver
who

hvað
what

hvar
where

hvaðan
where from *(Hvaðan ertu? Where are you from?)*

hvenær
when

af hverju
why

hvernig
how

hvaða
which, what *(Hvaða dagur er í dag? What day is it?)*

Hvað kostar þetta?
how much is this?

Me and you

ég
I

þú
you *(one person, almost anyone)*

hann / hún
he / she

það
it; also that

við
we

þið
you all

þeir / þær / þau
they *(men / women / a mix)*

minn, mín, mitt
my, after the word: bíllinn minn, my car

þinn, þín, þitt
your *(one person)*: mamma þín, your mum

þetta
this *(Þetta er Anna. This is Anna.)*

Little words

og
and

líka
also, too

en
but

eða
or

mjög
very

rosalega
really, so *(rosalega gott, so good)*

smá
a little *(smá kaffi, a little coffee)*

bara
just, only

enn
still, yet

hér
here

þarna
there

með
with

án
without

af því að
because

kannski
maybe

Please and thanks: Icelandic has no everyday word for please. Ask with má ég fá ...?, can I have ...?, and add takk, thanks. Takk fyrir is thank you, and the answer is það var ekkert: it was nothing.

Hello and bye: hæ and halló are casual and fine almost anywhere. Góðan daginn is the polite hello in the morning and daytime. Bless and bæ both mean bye.

People and time Fólk og tími

Family

mamma
mum

móðir
mother

pabbi
dad

faðir
father

bróðir
brother

systir
sister

sonur
son

dóttir
daughter

amma
grandma

afi
grandpa

frændi
uncle; also a cousin, any male relative

frænka
aunt; also a cousin, any female relative

foreldrar
parents *(plural)*

fjölskylda
family

barn
child *(börn, children)*

People

maður
man; also person, husband

kona
woman; also wife

strákur
boy, lad

stelpa
girl

vinur
friend *(a woman: vinkona)*

kærasti
boyfriend *(a girlfriend: kærasta)*

nágranni
neighbour

læknir
doctor

kennari
teacher

fólk
people *(one word for many)*

Things

sími
phone

bók
book

peningar
money *(plural)*

lykill
key

bíll
car

gluggi
window

hurð
door

miði
ticket

taska
bag

veski
wallet, purse

When

í dag
today

á morgun
tomorrow

í gær
yesterday

núna
now

seinna
later

alltaf
always

aldrei
never

morgunn
morning

kvöld
evening

nótt
night

dagur
day

tími
time; also hour, lesson

klukka
clock *(klukkan tvö, two o'clock)*

vika
week

mánuður
month

ár
year

Days of the week

mánudagur
Monday *(moon day)*

þriðjudagur
Tuesday *(third day)*

miðvikudagur
Wednesday *(midweek day)*

fimmtudagur
Thursday *(fifth day)*

föstudagur
Friday *(fast day)*

laugardagur
Saturday *(bath day)*

sunnudagur
Sunday *(sun day)*

Getting around

strætó
bus *(the town bus)*

rúta
coach, long-distance bus

flugvél
plane

flugvöllur
airport

til vinstri / til hægri
to the left / to the right

beint áfram
straight on

Numbers

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	20
núll	einn	tveir	þrír	fjórir	fimm	sex	sjö	átta	níu	tíu	ellefu	tólf	þrettán	tuttugu

21	30	40	100	1,000
tuttugu og einn	þrjátíu	fjörutíu	hundrað	þúsund

One to four change: 1, 2, 3 and 4 follow the gender of the noun: einn, ein, eitt is one. When you just count, you say them as above. Time uses the neuter: klukkan tvö, two o'clock. 21 is tuttugu og einn, twenty and one.

Days are small: days take no capital letter, and they all end in dagur, day, so they're all masculine. On Monday is á mánudaginn.

Food, places, verbs Borða, fara, gera

Food and drink

vatn
water; also lake

kaffi
coffee

te
tea

mjólk
milk

bjór
beer

vín
wine

matur
food

brauð
bread

ostur
cheese

kjöt
meat

fiskur
fish

súpa
soup

epli
apple

skyr
skyr, a thick, mild dairy food, like yoghurt

kjötsúpa
lamb soup with vegetables

harðfiskur
dried fish, a snack with butter

pylsa
hot dog; also sausage

kleina
a twisted fried doughnut

morgunmatur
breakfast

hádegismatur
lunch

kvöldmatur
dinner

Ég er svangur
I'm hungry *(a woman says svöng)*

Places

hús
house

heima
at home

skóli
school

búð
shop

veitingastaður
restaurant

kaffihús
café

sjúkrahús
hospital

borg
city

bær
town; also farm

gata
street

klósett
toilet *(signs often say WC)*

sundlaug
swimming pool *(every town has one)*

sjór
sea

fjall
mountain

á
river

foss
waterfall

jökull
glacier

eldfjall
volcano *(it means fire mountain)*

Ísland
Iceland *(íslenska, Icelandic)*

Reykjavík
the capital *(it means smoky bay)*

Verbs, in the to-form

vera
be

hafa
have

fara
go

koma
come

borða
eat

drekka
drink

sjá
see

horfa
watch, look

vinna
work; also win

gera
do, make

sofa
sleep

tala
speak, talk

skilja
understand

vita
know *(a fact)*

vilja
want

lesa
read

skrifa
write

búa
live *(somewhere)*

kaupa
buy

læra
learn, study

þurfa
need

Describing words

góður / slæmur
good / bad

stór / lítill
big / small

heitur / kaldur
hot / cold

nýr / gamall
new / old

dýr / ódýr
expensive / cheap

auðveldur / erfiður
easy / hard

fallegur
beautiful *(falleg, fallegt with f and n words)*

þreyttur
tired

skemmtilegur
fun

The to-form: verbs are listed the way a dictionary gives them: tala, to speak. Most join another verb with að: ég þarf að fara, I need to go. A few, like vilja, don't: ég vil fara, I want to go.

Describing words agree: the list shows the masculine form. The ending changes with the noun: fallegur bíll, a beautiful car; falleg borg, a beautiful city; fallegt hús, a beautiful house.

Show words Orð úr þáttum

Reactions

Í alvöru?
really? *(it means in earnest)*

Frábært!
great!

Æði!
awesome!

Snilld!
brilliant! genius!

Flott!
cool! nice!

Allt í lagi
all right, OK

Ókei
OK

Jæja
well, so, right then *(see below)*

Ekkert mál
no problem

Auðvitað
of course

Einmitt
exactly

Til hamingju!
congratulations!

Ha?
huh? what? *(casual)*

Já, já
yeah, yeah *(it can sound bored)*

Ó nei!
oh no!

The big scenes

Ég elska þig
I love you

Ég sakna þín
I miss you

Láttu mig í friði
leave me alone

Passaðu þig!
careful! watch out!

Hættu!
stop it!

Hjálp!
help!

Hvað gerðist?
what happened?

Þetta reddast
it'll all work out *(see below)*

Engar áhyggjur
don't worry, no worries

Bíddu!
wait!

Komdu!
come on! come here!

Drífðu þig!
hurry up!

Hvað ertu að gera?
what are you doing?

What to call people

elskan
darling, love *(to anyone dear)*

ástin mín
my love

félagi
mate, buddy

krakkar
kids, guys *(to a group)*

strákar / stelpur
lads / girls *(to a group)*

Jæja, the word you'll hear most: well, so, right then. It opens a chat, ends one and fills every pause. Jæja, eigum við að fara? Well, shall we go?

Þetta reddast: it'll all work out. Icelanders say it when the weather or the plans go wrong, and they mean it.

Swear words are strong: Icelandic has strong swear words, and you'll hear them in films and series. They hit harder than the subtitles show: recognise them, but don't say them. Frábært and snilld are fine in front of anyone.

Practice Æfingar

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

Questions: put the verb first: Þú talar ensku. Talar þú ensku? Do you speak English? In speech þú often joins the verb: talarðu, ertu, segirðu.

Saying no: ekki goes after the verb: Ég drekk kaffi. Ég drekk ekki kaffi. I don't drink coffee.

Read these sentences

1. Hæ, ég heiti Anna.
   Hi, I'm Anna.

2. Hvað heitir þú?
   What's your name?

3. Afsakið, hvar er klósettið?
   Excuse me, where is the toilet?

4. Hvað kostar miðinn?
   How much is the ticket?

5. Eitt kaffi, takk.
   One coffee, please.

6. Ég tala smá íslensku.
   I speak a little Icelandic.

7. Það er mjög kalt í dag.
   It's very cold today.

8. Á morgun förum við til Akureyrar.
   Tomorrow we're going to Akureyri.

9. Skyrið er rosalega gott!
   The skyr is really good!

10. Ekkert mál, við höfum tíma.
    No problem, we have time.

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