How Irish sounds Fuaimniú

The trick: Irish spelling looks long, but it keeps to its rules. It uses 18 letters, no j, k, q, v, w, x, y or z outside a few borrowed words, plus the fada, the accent on á, é, í, ó and ú. C and g are always hard, as in cat and go.

Letters	Sounds like	Example
a o u, e i	a, o, u are broad: hat, hot, put; e, i are slender: bed, sit	**mac / mise** son / me
á, é	á is the a in father; é is the ay in day	**tá / mé** is / I, me
í, ó, ú	í is the ee in see; ó is the oh in go; ú is the oo in food	**sí / mór** she / big
broad, slender	next to a, o, u: broad; next to e, i: slender, with a little y	**bó / beo** cow / alive
s	s next to a, o, u; sh next to e, i	**solas / sé** light / he
t, d	next to e, i close to ch and j; else tongue on the teeth	**tae / Dia** tea / God
bh, mh	v, or w next to a, o, u (dialects vary)	**bhí / mo mhac** was / my son
ch	the ch in Scottish loch; next to e, i softer, nearer h	**loch / oíche** lake / night
dh, gh	a throaty g, or y next to e, i; often silent inside a word	**dhá / bodhrán** two / the drum, BOW-rawn
th, sh	just h, and often silent at the end of a word	**maith / mo shúil** good (mah) / my eye
fh	silent: the letter just disappears	**an fhuinneog** the window, said an IN-yohg
gc, nG, bhf	a letter added in front: say it and drop the next one	**i gCorcaigh** in Cork
ao	the ee in see (in Munster, the ay in day)	**saor / daor** cheap / dear
ea, ia, ua	ea is the a in hat; ia is ee-a; ua is oo-a	**fear / bia / fuar** man / food / cold
stress	the first syllable (Munster sometimes stresses later)	**Éire / Gaeilge** AIR-eh / GAYL-geh

bh · mh

said v, the spelling that surprises everyone

Siobhán shiv-AWN · **Niamh** NEEV · **Caoimhe** KEE-va

á é í ó ú

the fada makes a vowel long

Seán SHAWN · **Sláinte** SLAWN-cha · **Saoirse** SEER-sha

Caol le caol, leathan le leathan: slender with slender, broad with broad. The vowels on both sides of a consonant always match, so Irish writes some vowels only as signs: in Sláinte, the i just says the n and t are slender.

The fada is not stress: á is a different, longer vowel than a. Leave the fada off and you can get another word: Seán is a name, sean means old.

Letters that change at the start: cara is friend, mo chara is my friend; Corcaigh is Cork, i gCorcaigh is in Cork. To look a word up, take off the h after the first letter, or the letter in front.

Dialects vary: Munster, Connacht and Ulster Irish sound different. This page gives one common way; the spelling is the same everywhere.

How words work Gramadach

The verb comes first: Tá mé tuirseach, I'm tired, is word for word is me tired. Irish has no word for a, so fear is a man, or just man. The is an, and na for more than one.

fear a man	an fear the man	na fir the men	bean a woman	an bhean the woman	na mná the women

Every noun is masculine or feminine

masculine

often ends in a broad consonant, or in -án, -óir or -ín; before a vowel, the is an t-

an fear, the man

an t-uisce, the water

an cailín, the girl

feminine

often ends in a slender consonant, or in -óg or -eog; the is an, and it adds h

an bhean, the woman

an fhuinneog, the window

an oíche, the night

Mostly, not always: cailín, girl, is masculine. On the next pages each noun wears its gender colour, so you don't have to guess.

Lenition: an h that softens the first letter

mo chara my friend	do theach your house	a mháthair his mother	a máthair her mother

Who adds h: mo, do and a (his) add it; a (her) doesn't. An adds h to most feminine nouns: an bhean. Only b, c, d, f, g, m, p, s and t take it. Before a vowel mo drops the o: m'athair, my father.

Two ways to say be: tá and is

Tá sé fuar. tá: how or where something is. It's cold.	Is múinteoir é. is: what or who something is. He's a teacher.

Is says what or who: Is mise Anna, I'm Anna. You also like things with it: Is maith liom tae, I like tea, word for word is good with me tea. Its no form is ní: Ní maith liom caife, I don't like coffee.

No word for yes or no

An bhfuil tú réidh? are you ready?	Tá. yes (it means am)	Níl. no (it means am not)

Verbs change with the person: bí, to be, and ól, to drink

tá mé I am	tá tú you are	tá sé, tá sí he is, she is	táimid we are	tá sibh you all are	tá siad they are
ólaim I drink	ólann tú you drink	ólann sí she drinks	ólaimid we drink	ólann sibh you all drink	ólann siad they drink

Answer with the verb: An dtuigeann tú? Tuigim, I do; ní thuigim, I don't. Níl is the no of tá: níl mé tuirseach, I'm not tired. Other verbs take ní: ní ólaim caife, I don't drink coffee. Tú is one person, anyone at all; sibh is two or more.

The first 258 words Do chéad fhocail

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

Greetings and survival

Dia duit
hello *(it means God to you)*

Dia is Muire duit
the answer to Dia duit *(see below)*

Haigh
hi *(casual)*

Maidin mhaith
good morning

Tráthnóna maith
good afternoon, good evening

Oíche mhaith
good night

Slán
bye *(it means safe)*

Slán go fóill
bye for now

Slán abhaile
safe home *(to someone going home)*

Go raibh maith agat
thank you *(to one person)*

Go raibh míle maith agat
thanks a million

Tá fáilte romhat
you're welcome

Céad míle fáilte
a hundred thousand welcomes

Le do thoil
please *(to one person)*

Ba mhaith liom ...
I'd like ... *(how you ask nicely)*

Gabh mo leithscéal
excuse me; also sorry

Tá brón orm
I'm sorry *(it means sorrow is on me)*

Conas atá tú?
how are you?

Tá mé go maith
I'm well, I'm fine *(the answer)*

Is mise ...
I'm ... *(to give your name)*

Cad is ainm duit?
what's your name?

An bhfuil Béarla agat?
do you speak English? *(it means have you English?)*

Ní thuigim
I don't understand

Níl a fhios agam
I don't know

Sláinte!
cheers! *(it means health)*

Question words

cé
who *(Cé hé sin? Who's that?)*

cad
what *(you'll also hear céard and cad é)*

cá
where *(Cá bhfuil sé? Where is it?)*

cad as duit?
where are you from?

cathain
when

cén fáth
why *(it means what reason)*

conas
how

cén
which, what *(Cén t-am é? What time is it?)*

Cé mhéad atá air?
how much is it?

Me and you

mé
I, me

tú
you *(one person, anyone)*

sé / sí
he / she; sé is also it

sinn, muid
we *(both are fine)*

sibh
you all

siad
they

mo
my *(adds h: mo chara, my friend)*

do
your, one person *(do theach, your house)*

seo / sin
this / that *(an fear seo, this man)*

mise
me, I, with weight *(Is mise Anna. I'm Anna.)*

Little words

agus
and *(often just is or 's)*

freisin
also, too

ach
but

nó
or

an-
very *(an-mhaith, very good)*

go leor
plenty, lots *(English galore comes from it)*

beagán
a little *(beagán Gaeilge, a little Irish)*

díreach
just, exactly; also straight

anseo
here

ansin
there; also then

le
with

gan
without

i
in *(i nGaillimh, in Galway)*

mar
because, as

b'fhéidir
maybe

Hello: Dia duit, God to you, is the everyday hello, and the answer adds Mary: Dia is Muire duit. Haigh is the casual hi, and slán, bye, means safe.

Please and thanks: le do thoil is please to one person; to more, say le bhur dtoil. Go raibh maith agat, thank you, means may there be good at you, and the answer is tá fáilte romhat.

People and time Daoine agus am

Family

máthair
mother

athair
father

mam
mum

daid
dad

deartháir
brother

deirfiúr
sister

mac
son

iníon
daughter

seanmháthair
grandmother *(it means old mother)*

seanathair
grandfather

uncail
uncle

aintín
aunt

tuismitheoirí
parents *(plural)*

teaghlach
family, household

páiste
child

People

fear
man; also husband

bean
woman; also wife

buachaill
boy; also boyfriend

cailín
girl; also girlfriend *(a masculine word!)*

cara
friend

dochtúir
doctor

múinteoir
teacher

garda
police officer *(na Gardaí, the police)*

duine
person

daoine
people *(plural)*

Things

fón
phone

leabhar
book

airgead
money; also silver

eochair
key

carr
car

fuinneog
window

doras
door

ticéad
ticket

mála
bag

sparán
purse, wallet

When

inniu
today

amárach
tomorrow

inné
yesterday

anois
now

níos déanaí
later

i gcónaí
always

maidin
morning

tráthnóna
afternoon, evening

oíche
night

lá
day

am
time

uair
time, once *(uair an chloig, an hour)*

clog
clock *(a dó a chlog, two o'clock)*

seachtain
week

mí
month

bliain
year

Days of the week

Dé Luain
Monday *(moon day)*

Dé Máirt
Tuesday *(Mars day)*

Dé Céadaoin
Wednesday *(first fast)*

Déardaoin
Thursday *(between the fasts)*

Dé hAoine
Friday *(fast day)*

Dé Sathairn
Saturday *(Saturn day)*

Dé Domhnaigh
Sunday *(the Lord's day)*

Getting around

bus
bus

traein
train

eitleán
plane

aerfort
airport

ar chlé / ar dheis
on the left / on the right

díreach ar aghaidh
straight on

Numbers

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
náid	a haon	a dó	a trí	a ceathair	a cúig	a sé	a seacht	a hocht	a naoi	a deich	a haon déag

12	13	20	21	30	40	100	1,000
a dó dhéag	a trí déag	fiche	fiche a haon	tríocha	daichead	céad	míle

Counting and nouns: to count, put a first: a haon, a dó, a trí. Before a noun, two is dhá, and the noun stays singular: dhá chat, two cats. Time: a dó a chlog, two o'clock. 21 is fiche a haon, twenty one.

Days take a capital: Dé Luain is Monday, and also on Monday: Feicfidh mé Dé Luain thú, I'll see you on Monday.

Food, places, verbs Ith, téigh, déan

Food and drink

uisce
water

caife
coffee

tae
tea

bainne
milk

beoir
beer

fíon
wine

bia
food

arán
bread

cáis
cheese

feoil
meat

iasc
fish

anraith
soup

úll
apple

práta
potato *(prátaí, potatoes)*

arán sóide
soda bread

stobhach
stew *(stobhach Gaelach, Irish stew)*

bricfeasta
breakfast

lón
lunch

dinnéar
dinner

Is maith liom ...
I like ... *(it means ... is good with me)*

Tá ocras orm
I'm hungry *(it means hunger is on me)*

Tá tart orm
I'm thirsty

Places

teach
house

sa bhaile
at home

scoil
school

siopa
shop

bialann
restaurant

caifé
café

ospidéal
hospital

cathair
city

baile
town; also home

sráid
street

leithreas
toilet

teach tábhairne
pub

farraige
sea

sliabh
mountain

abhainn
river

trá
beach

Éire
Ireland *(in Ireland: in Éirinn)*

Baile Átha Cliath
Dublin *(town of the hurdle ford)*

Gaeilge
Irish, the language

Gaeltacht
an area where Irish is spoken every day

Verbs, in the dictionary form

bí
be

déan
do, make

téigh
go

tar
come

ith
eat

ól
drink

feic
see

féach
look, watch

oibrigh
work

codail
sleep

labhair
speak

abair
say

tuig
understand

faigh
get

ceannaigh
buy

léigh
read

scríobh
write

foghlaim
learn

cónaigh
live *(somewhere)*

éist
listen

fan
wait, stay

Describing words

maith / olc
good / bad

mór / beag
big / small

te / fuar
hot / cold

nua / sean
new / old

daor / saor
expensive / cheap; saor is also free

éasca / deacair
easy / hard

sona / brónach
happy / sad

álainn
beautiful

tuirseach
tired

The dictionary form: Irish lists a verb the way you'd give an order: ól! drink! The present adds an ending: ólaim, I drink; ólann tú, you drink; ólann siad, they drink.

Most describing words come after the noun: fear mór, a big man; lá fuar, a cold day. After a feminine noun they add h: bean mhór, a big woman; oíche mhaith, good night.

Show words Focail ón teilifís

Reactions

Dáiríre?
really? seriously?

Go hiontach!
great! wonderful!

Ar fheabhas!
excellent!

Maith thú!
well done! good for you!

Ceart go leor
all right, OK

Go breá
fine, grand

Ar ndóigh
of course

Cinnte
sure, definitely

Go díreach
exactly

Comhghairdeas!
congratulations!

Is dócha
probably, I suppose

Ní dóigh liom
I don't think so

Bhuel
well, so *(see below)*

Muise
well now, indeed *(see below)*

A thiarcais!
oh my goodness!

The big scenes

Tá grá agam duit
I love you *(it means I have love for you)*

Braithim uaim thú
I miss you

Bí cúramach!
be careful!

Éirigh as!
stop it! give it up!

Cabhair!
help!

Cad a tharla?
what happened?

Ná bí buartha
don't worry

Beidh sé ceart go leor
it'll be all right

Fan go fóill!
hang on! wait a bit!

Tar anseo!
come here!

Déan deifir!
hurry up!

Cad atá ar siúl agat?
what are you up to?

Ádh mór!
good luck!

What to call people

a chara
friend *(also Dear ... at the top of a letter)*

a stór
darling *(it means my treasure)*

a ghrá
love, my love

a mhic
son, lad *(to a boy or man)*

a dhaoine uaisle
ladies and gentlemen

Bhuel and muise: bhuel is well, and muise is well now, indeed. They open a sentence, fill a pause and soften a no: Bhuel, níl a fhios agam. Well, I don't know.

How are you, three ways: Conas atá tú? is the Munster way. In Connacht you'll hear Cén chaoi a bhfuil tú? and in Ulster Cad é mar atá tú? All three are right.

Calling someone: put a before the name and add h where it can go: Máire, a Mháire; Pádraig, a Phádraig; Niamh stays a Niamh. A chara also opens a letter, like Dear.

Practice Cleachtadh

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

Questions: put an in front, and it adds a letter where it can: Tá tú tuirseach. An bhfuil tú tuirseach? Are you tired? An ólann tú tae? Do you drink tea?

Saying no: tá turns into níl, and other verbs take ní: Ólaim tae. Ní ólaim caife. I don't drink coffee.

Like and would like: Is maith liom tae. I like tea. Ba mhaith liom tae. I'd like some tea. Ar mhaith leat tae? Would you like tea?

Read these sentences

1. Dia duit, is mise Anna.
   Hello, I'm Anna.

2. Is as Corcaigh mé.
   I'm from Cork.

3. Gabh mo leithscéal, cá bhfuil an leithreas?
   Excuse me, where is the toilet?

4. Cé mhéad atá ar an ticéad?
   How much is the ticket?

5. Cupán tae, le do thoil.
   A cup of tea, please.

6. Tá beagán Gaeilge agam.
   I speak a little Irish.

7. Tá sé an-fhuar inniu.
   It's very cold today.

8. Rachaimid go Gaillimh amárach.
   We're going to Galway tomorrow.

9. Tá an stobhach seo go hiontach!
   This stew is great!

10. Ná bí buartha, tá am againn.
    Don't worry, we have time.

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