

Irish Gaelic Pronunciation Guide

How to Speak

PRONUNCIATION: GENERAL

Pronunciation is one of the most important aspects in the communication of the Irish Gaelic language. Irish Gaelic focuses on a lot of lenition (aspiration) and eclipses (nasalation), which changes the sounds of various words. In order to understand, more in depth, how the pronunciation works in Irish Gaelic, one would have to understand the importance of such mutations as lenition and eclipses.

Pronunciation

There is no standard pronunciation in Irish because there are many variations. There are 3 dialects in Irish: Ulster (Uladh), Connacht (Chonnacht), and Munster (Mumhan). The pronunciation is slightly different for each dialect. Here is one example of a pronunciation guide, but keep in mind that it may vary due to the different dialects.

Short Vowels

a ~ like 'a' in 'father', but shorter
ai ~ as a, often like 'a' in 'hat'
ea ~ as a
e ~ like 'e' in 'get'
ei ~ like e
i ~ like 'i' in 'hit'
io ~ like i
ui ~ like i
o ~ like 'o' in 'go'.
oi ~ like o
eo ~ like o before 'ch' and in 'seo', 'anseo', elsewhere like ó
u ~ like 'oo' in 'look'
iu ~ like u
a,o,u,e,i ~ like 'a' in 'sofa', 'about'. This is the pronunciation in all unaccented syllables.

Long Vowels and Diphthongs

á ~ like 'a' in 'father'
ái ~ like á
eái ~ like á
ae ~ like é
ao ~ like í [é is a common alternative]
aoi ~ like í
é ~ like 'ey' in they, but no following 'ee' sound as there is in English
éa ~ like é
éi ~ like é
eo ~ like ó
eoi ~ like ó
í ~ like 'ee' in 'see'
ia ~ í followed by short a
iai ~ like ia
íó ~ like í
iú ~ like ú
iúi ~ like ú
ó ~ like 'ow' in 'know' but no following 'oo' sound as there is in English
óí ~ like ó
ú ~ like 'oo' in 'moon'
ua ~ ú followed by short a
uai ~ like ua
úi ~ like ú
uí ~ like í

Diphthongs In stressed syllables

abh, eabh, amh, eamh, omh, ogh ~ like 'ow' in 'cow'
adh, agh, aidh, aigh, eidh, eigh ~ like 'igh' in 'sigh'
eidh, eigh ~ like 'eigh' in 'neigh' when final
igh, idh ~ like í

Consonants Broad

b ~ like English 'b'

bh ~ like English 'v', but made with both lips. 'w' is a common alternative. Usually silent after o or u in the middle of a word.

c ~ like English 'k'

ch ~ like 'ch' in Scottish 'loch'; make a 'k', but the tongue does not touch the roof of the mouth.

d ~ like English 'd', but with the tip of the tongue touching the upper teeth.

dh ~ a voiced 'ch'; make a 'g', but the tongue does not touch the roof of the mouth. Silent when not at the beginning of a word.

f ~ an 'f' made with both lips

fh ~ silent

g ~ like English 'g'

gh ~ like dh

h ~ like English 'h'.

l ~ like English 'l' in 'hall'.

ll ~ like l [when distinguished from 'l', it is dental and tensor]

m ~ like English 'm'

mh ~ like bh. [Some speakers nasalise this sound]

n ~ like 'n'

nn ~ like n [when distinguished from 'n', it is dental and tensor]

ng ~ like English 'ng' in 'song'

p ~ like English 'p'

ph ~ like f

r ~ like English 'r'.

s ~ like English 's'

sh ~ like h

t ~ like English 't', but with the tip of the tongue touching the upper teeth

th ~ like h

Slender Consonants

b ~ like English 'b'

bh ~ like English 'v', but made with both lips.

c ~ like English 'k' in 'king'

ch ~ like 'h' in 'huge'; make a 'k', but the tongue does not touch the roof of the mouth

d ~ like English 'd' in 'din'. A sound like English 'j' is a common alternative.

dh ~ like English 'y'

f ~ an 'f' made with both lips

fh ~ silent

g ~ like English 'g' in 'begin'

gh ~ like dh

h ~ like English 'h'.

l ~ like English 'l' in 'leaf', or as English 'ly'

ll ~ like l [when distinguished from 'l', it is dental and tensor]

m ~ like English 'm'

mh ~ like bh. Some speakers nasalise this sound.

n ~ like English 'n' in 'need', or like 'ny',

nn ~ like n [when distinguished from 'n', it is dental and tensor]

ng ~ like English 'ng' in 'sing'

p ~ like English 'p' in 'pin'

ph ~ like f

r ~ like English 'r', but the tip of the tongue is placed behind the lower teeth. Almost like 'sh' and 'r' combined.

s ~ like English 'sh'

sh ~ like h

t ~ like English 't'. A sound like English 'ch' is a common alternative

th ~ like h