

A Beginner's Guide to Old Norse Pronunciation,

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Pronunciation Guide

Old Norse is an extinct language, & all examples of pronunciation are only hypothetical approximations. E.g. the sound of *v* might not have been exactly that of English *v* (a voiced labiodental fricative), but was probably at least something impressionistically similar, like a voiced bilabial fricative or a voiced labiodental approximant. As a rule, Old Norse words were stressed on the first syllable.

letter	IPA	ON example	rough Western American English (or other modern language) example
A/a	a	<u>a</u> llr (all)	<u>g</u> ot
Á/á	ɔ:	á (on; owns)	<u>o</u> ar (note: not the same sound as short <i>a</i> ; resembles a New Yorker asking for <i>coffee</i>)
B/b	b	<u>b</u> átr (boat)	<u>b</u> oat
D/d	d	<u>d</u> auðr (dead)	<u>d</u> ead
Ð/ð	ð	fa <u>ð</u> ir (father)	fa <u>th</u> er
E/e	ɛ	<u>e</u> k (I)	<u>s</u> et
É/é	ɛ:	réttr (right)	<u>sai</u> d (the same vowel as in <i>set</i> , but longer)
F/f ₁	v	a <u>f</u> (of)	<u>o</u> f
f ₂	f	fa <u>ð</u> ir (father)	fa <u>th</u> er (pronounced [f] only at the beginning of a word, or when doubled)
G/g	ɣ	saga (saga)	Spanish <i>Argentina</i> (like [g], but tongue doesn't hit the roof of mouth)
g ₂	g	g <u>a</u> nga (go)	<u>g</u> o (pronounced [g] only at the beginning of a word, or when doubled)
H/h	h	<u>h</u> ár (high)	<u>h</u> igh
I/i	i	t <u>i</u> l (to)	<u>f</u> ee <u>t</u>
Í/í	i:	tí <u>l</u> ð (time)	<u>f</u> ee <u>d</u> (the same vowel as in <i>feet</i> , but longer)
J/j	j	j <u>ö</u> rð (earth)	<u>y</u> es
K/k	k	<u>k</u> irkja (church)	<u>k</u> ick
L/l	l	<u>l</u> esa (read)	<u>l</u> ess
M/m	m	<u>m</u> ál (words)	<u>m</u> uch
N/n	n	<u>n</u> ótt (night)	<u>n</u> ight
O/o	o	f <u>o</u> rn (ancient)	Spanish <i>rojo</i> (or a Wisconsin English pronunciation of <i>wrote</i>)
Ó/ó	o:	Ó <u>ð</u> inn (a god)	the same vowel but longer, like a Wisconsin pronunciation of <i>road</i>
P/p	p	<u>u</u> pp (up)	<u>u</u> p
R/r	r	r <u>í</u> sa (rise)	Spanish <i>rojo</i> (a trill like Spanish <i>r</i> , or the <i>r</i> in Scots)
S/s	s	r <u>í</u> sa (rise)	ri <u>ce</u> (never pronounced [z] like in English <i>rise</i>)
T/t	t	t <u>e</u> lja (count)	<u>t</u> ell
U/u	u	<u>u</u> nz (till, until)	<u>s</u> oup
Ú/ú	ú	þ <u>ú</u> (you)	y <u>ou</u> (the same vowel as in <i>soup</i> but longer)
V/v	v	<u>v</u> ér (we)	<u>v</u> ery
v ₂	w	sw <u>a</u> nr (swan)	sw <u>a</u> n (pronounced [w] only after another consonant: <i>hvat</i> , <i>kyð</i> , <i>svá</i> , <i>tvá</i>)
X/x	ks	sex <u>x</u> (six)	<u>s</u> ix
Y/y	y	y <u>f</u> ir (over)	French <i>tu</i> (or a Galloway Scots pronunciation of <i>about</i> , but shorter)
Ý/ý	y:	ý <u>r</u> (new)	the same vowel but longer, like a Galloway pronunciation of <i>about</i>
Z/z	ts	be <u>z</u> tr (best)	ba <u>ts</u> (never pronounced [z] like in English <i>zoo</i>)
Þ/þ	θ	þ <u>ó</u> rr (a god)	<u>th</u> under
Æ/æ	æ:	m <u>æ</u> kir (sword)	<u>b</u> ad
Q/q	ɔ	o <u>r</u> n (eagle)	<u>o</u> r (note: the short version of the vowel sound represented by <i>á</i>)
Ø/ø	œ	k <u>ø</u> mr (comes)	French <i>creux</i> (or roughly like the <i>i</i> in <i>dirt</i>)
Ó/ó	œ:	b <u>ó</u> kr (books)	the same vowel but longer, roughly like the <i>i</i> in <i>bird</i>

- The diphthongs are pronounced as sequences of the two vowels included: *au* is a+u (like English *house* or Norwegian *auga*), *ei* is e+i (like English *rain*), *ey/øy* is ø+y (like Norwegian *øy* or German *äu*, or extremely roughly like English *gluey*).

Seven Main Points to Remember

1. **á** or **o** = **o** in New York
2. **ð** = the **th** in **then**
3. **ei** = the **ai** in **rain**
4. **ey** = Norwegian **øy** or German **äu**; similar to English **boy**
5. **f** = **v** unless 1st letter
6. **j** = like **y** in **year**
7. **þ** = the **th** in **thin**