

# Alaric's magic sheet, version 2.0

everything you need to know about Old Norse grammar, on one side of A4!

nouns (most common in bold, with examples with the suffixed definite article in brackets)										adjectives												
strong										weak			strong			weak			possessive adjective (example, strong only)			
masculine					neuter			feminine		masc.	neuter	fem.	masc.	neuter	fem.	masc.	neuter	fem.	masc.	neuter	fem.	
a-plural	i-plural	u-plural	r-plural				ar-plural	ir-plural	r-plural				masc.	neuter	fem.	masc.	neuter	fem.	masc.	neuter	fem.	
N. sg.	<b>fiskr</b> (-inn)	staðr	skjöldr	fótr	<b>land</b> (-it)	kvæði	<b>gjöf</b> (-in)	tíð	bók	<b>bogi</b>	hjarta	<b>saga</b>	N. sg.	langr	langt	lǫng	langi	langa	langa	minn	mitt	mín
A.	<b>fisk</b> (-inn)	stað	skjöld	fót	<b>land</b> (-it)	kvæði	<b>gjöf</b> (-ina)	tíð	bók	<b>boga</b>	hjarta	<b>sögu</b>	A.	langan	langt	langa	langa	langa	lǫngu	minn	mitt	mína
G.	<b>fisks</b> (-ins)	staðar	skjalda	fótar	<b>lands</b> (-ins)	kvæðis	<b>gjafar</b> (-innar)	tíðar	bókar	<b>boga</b>	hjarta	<b>sögu</b>	G.	langs	langs	langrar	langa	langa	lǫngu	míns	míns	minnar
D.	<b>fiski</b> (-num)	stað	skildi	fœti	<b>landi</b> (-nu)	kvæði	<b>gjöf</b> (-inni)	tíð	bók	<b>boga</b>	hjarta	<b>sögu</b>	D.	lǫngum	lǫngu	langri	langa	langa	lǫngu	mínum	mínu	minni
N. pl.	<b>fiskar</b> (-nir)	staðir	skildir	fœtr	<b>lǫnd</b> (-in)	kvæði	<b>gjafar</b> (-nar)	tíðir	bœkr	<b>bogar</b>	hjörtu	<b>sögur</b>	N. pl.	langir	lǫng	langar	lǫngu	lǫngu	lǫngu	mínir	mín	mínar
A.	<b>fiska</b> (-na)	staði	skjöldu	fœtr	<b>lǫnd</b> (-in)	kvæði	<b>gjafar</b> (-nar)	tíðir	bœkr	<b>boga</b>	hjörtu	<b>sögur</b>	A.	langa	lǫng	langar	lǫngu	lǫngu	lǫngu	mína	mín	mínar
G.	<b>fiska</b> (-nna)	staða	skjalda	fóta	<b>landa</b> (-nna)	kvæða	<b>gjafa</b> (-nna)	tíða	bóka	<b>boga</b>	hjärtu	<b>sagna</b>	G.	langra	langra	langra	lǫngu	lǫngu	lǫngu	minna	minna	minna
D.	<b>fiskum</b> (fiskunum)	stǫðum	skjöldum	fótum	<b>lǫndum</b> (lǫndunum)	kvæðum	<b>gjöfum</b> (gjöfunum)	tíðum	bókum	<b>bogum</b>	hjärtum	<b>sögum</b>	D.	lǫngum	lǫngum	lǫngum	lǫngu	lǫngu	lǫngu	mínum	mínum	mínum

verbs												
strong					weak					to be		
infinitive	<b>-a</b>	grafa 'dig'			<b>-a</b>	telja 'count'				<b>vera</b>		
imperative	-	graf 'dig!'			-	tel 'count!'				<b>ver</b>		
pres. part.	<b>-andi</b>	grafandi 'digging'			<b>-andi</b>	teljandi 'counting'				<b>verandi</b>		
past part.	<b>-it</b>	grafit 'dug'			<b>-it</b>	telit 'counted'				<b>verit</b>		
present												
		indicative		subjunctive		indicative (classes 1/2/3)			subjunctive		indic.	subj.
1 <sup>st</sup> sg.	-	gref	-a	grafa	<b>-/a/-i</b>	tel	-a	telja	<b>em</b>	sé		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	<b>-r</b>	grefr	-ir	grafir	<b>-r/-ar/-ir</b>	telr	-ir	telir	<b>ert</b>	sér		
3 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>-r</b>	grefr	-i	grafi	<b>-r/-ar/-ir</b>	telr	-i	teli	<b>er</b>	sé		
1 <sup>st</sup> pl.	<b>-um</b>	gröfum	-im	grafim	<b>-um</b>	teljum	-im	telim	<b>erum</b>	sém		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	<b>-ið</b>	grafið	-ið	grafið	<b>-ið</b>	telið	-ið	telið	<b>eruð</b>	séð		
3 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>-a</b>	grafa	-i	grafi	<b>-a</b>	telja	-i	teli	<b>eru</b>	sé		
past												
1 <sup>st</sup> sg.	-	gróf	-a	grœfa	<b>-ða/-da/-ta</b>	talða	-ða/-da/-ta	telða	<b>var</b>	væra		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	<b>-t</b>	gróft	-ir	grœfir	<b>-ðir/-dir/-tir</b>	talðir	-ðir/-dir/-tir	telðir	<b>vart</b>	værir		
3 <sup>rd</sup>	-	gróf	-i	grœfi	<b>-ði/-di/-ti</b>	talði	-ði/-di/-ti	telði	<b>var</b>	væri		
1 <sup>st</sup> pl.	<b>-um</b>	grófum	-im	grœfim	<b>-ðum/-dum/-tum</b>	tölðum	-ðim/-dim/-tim	telðim	<b>várum</b>	værim		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	<b>-uð</b>	grófuð	-ið	grœfið	<b>-ðuð/-duð/-tuð</b>	tölðuð	-ðið/-dið/-tið	telðið	<b>váruð</b>	værið		
3 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>-u</b>	grófu	-i	grœfi	<b>-ðu/-du/-tu</b>	tölðu	-ði/-di/-ti	telði	<b>váru</b>	væri		

**glossary to nouns and adjectives:** *fiskr* 'fish'; *staðr* 'place'; *skjöldr* 'shield'; *fótr* 'foot, leg'; *land* 'land'; *kvæði* 'poem'; *gjöf* 'gift'; *tíð* 'time'; *bók* 'book'; *bogi* 'bow'; *hjarta* 'heart'; *saga* 'story, history'; *langr* 'long'; *minn* 'my, mine'

**sound-changes**

**u-mutation:** a when followed by *u* becomes *ø* (when stressed) or *u* (when unstressed). Thus *saga* 'saga', but *sögur* 'sagas'; *gamall* 'old (masculine nominative singular)', but *gömul* 'old (feminine nominative singular)'. Sometimes the *u* has been lost, but its effects remain, as in *land* 'land', but *lǫnd* 'lands' (< \**landu*).

**i-mutation:** when followed by an *i* or *j*, usually now lost, vowels changed thus: *a* > *e*; *á* > *æ*; *e* > *i*; *o* > *e* (occasionally *ø*, *y*); *ó* > *æ*; *u* > *y*; *ú* > *ý*; *au* > *ey*.

**classes of strong verbs: main patterns**

infinitive, 3<sup>rd</sup> sg. present, 3<sup>rd</sup> sg. past, 3<sup>rd</sup> pl. past, past participle

I. *bíta* (bite), *bítr*, *beit*, *bitu*, *bitit*  
 II. *bjóða* (offer), *býðr*, *bauð*, *buðu*, *boðit*  
 III. *bresta* (burst, break), *brestr*, *brast*, *brustu*, *brostit*  
 IV. *bera* (bear), *bar*, *báru*, *borit*  
 V. *gefa* (give), *gefr*, *gaf*, *gáfu*, *gefit*  
 VI. *fara* (go, travel), *ferr*, *fór*, *fóru*, *farit*  
 VII. *heita* (to be called; command), *heitr*, *hét*, *héту*, *heitt*

personal pronouns										
first and second person					third person					
		sg.	dual	pl.			masc.	neuter	fem.	reflexive
N	1st	ek	vit	vér	s.	hann	þat	hon	-	
A		mik	okkr	oss		hann	þat	hana	sik	
G		mín	okkar	vár		hans	þess	hennar	sín	
D		mér	okkr	oss		honum	því	henni	sér	
N	2nd	þú	(þ)it	(þ)ér	pl.	þeir	þau	þær	-	
A		þik	ykkar	yðr		þá	þau	þær	sik	
G		þín	ykkar	yðar		þeir(r)a	þeir(r)a	þeir(r)a	sín	
D		þér	ykkar	yðr		þeim	þeim	þeim	sér	

demonstrative pronouns							
		it/that/those			this/these		
		masc.	neuter	fem.	masc.	neuter	fem.
N sg.	sá	þat	sú	sjá, þessi	þetta	sjá	
A	þann	þat	þá	þenna	þetta	þessa	
G	þess	þess	þeir(r)ar	þessa	þessa	þessar	
D	þeim	því	þeir(r)i	þessum	þessu	þessi	
N pl.	þeir	þau	þær	þessir	þessi	þessar	
A	þá	þau	þær	þessa	þessi	þessar	
G	þeir(r)a	þeir(r)a	þeir(r)a	þessa	þessa	þessa	
D	þeim	þeim	þeim	þessum	þessum	þessum	

## Extra help for English-speakers

**What is case?** Cases are the different forms that nouns, pronouns and adjectives take in some languages when their grammatical function changes. In English, nouns don't really have cases—but pronouns do. Take an English sentence, substitute the third person masculine pronoun for a noun phrase, and you'll find yourself automatically changing the case of the pronoun, depending on whether it's a subject, object or possessive!

case and number	1 <sup>st</sup> person pronoun	3 <sup>rd</sup> person pronoun	function	modern English examples	Old Norse examples
nominative singular	I	he	the subject (the thing that does the verb)	<b>I</b> ate a fish. <b>Óláfr</b> ate a fish. <b>Óláfr</b> and <b>the dog</b> ate a fish.	<b>Ek</b> át fisk. <b>Óláfr</b> át fisk. <b>Óláfr</b> ok <b>hundrinn</b> átu fisk.
accusative singular	me	him	the object (the thing the verb is done to)	The fish ate <b>me</b> . Óláfr ate <b>a fish</b> . Óláfr ate <b>a fish</b> and <b>the dog</b> .	Fiskrinn át <b>mik</b> . Óláfr át <b>fisk</b> . Óláfr át <b>fisk</b> ok <b>hundinn</b> .
genitive singular	my	his	a noun/pronoun in the genitive possesses another noun	<b>His</b> sword was black. He ate <b>the dog's</b> fish. The history <b>of the dog</b> was long.	<b>Hans</b> sverð var svart. Hann át fisk <b>hundsins</b> . Saga <b>hundsins</b> var löng.
dative singular	(to, from, with, by, etc.) me	(to, from, with, by, etc.) him	various things, principally: indirect objects, words after a preposition, words taking the role of a preposition.	I gave <b>him</b> a name. He was on <b>the land</b> . <i>Hon er þökð <b>gulli</b></i> 'she is thatched <b>with gold</b> '	Ek gaf nafn <b>honum</b> . Hann var á <b>landinu</b> . Hon er þökð <b>gulli</b> .
nominative plural	we	they	the subject (the thing that does the verb)	<b>They</b> ate Óláfr. <b>Giants</b> eat people.	<b>Þeir</b> átu Óláf. <b>Þotnar</b> éta menn.
accusative plural	us	them	the object (the thing the verb is done to)	The Vikings wounded <b>them</b> . The dog ate <b>giants</b> .	Víkingarnir særðu <b>þá</b> . Hundrinn át <b>þotna</b> .
genitive plural (almost always ends in -a in Old Norse!)	our	their	a noun/pronoun in the genitive possesses another noun	<b>Our</b> dogs ate <b>their</b> fish. I broke <b>Vikings'</b> bones. The bones <b>of the Vikings</b> broke.	<b>Várir</b> hundar átu <b>þeirra</b> fisk. Ek braut <b>víkingsa</b> bein. Bein <b>víkingsa</b> brutu.
dative plural (almost always ends in -um in Old Norse!)	(to, from, with, by, etc.) us	(to, from, with, by, etc.) them	various things, principally: indirect objects, words after a preposition, words taking the role of a preposition.	He gave <b>them</b> names. He lived with <b>giants</b> . <i>Keyrðu þeir <b>sporum</b></i> 'they drove <b>with their spurs</b> '.	Hann gaf nǫfn <b>þeim</b> . Hann bjó með <b>þotnum</b> . Keyrðu þeir <b>sporum</b> .

**How should I put sentences together?** There are basically two strategies for translating Old Norse into English:

1. Translate each word as it comes without worrying about its grammatical function, and, if necessary, shuffle them about afterwards until they seem to make sense. Much of the time this will produce a correct translation, because the word-order of Old Norse and English is similar.

2. Work out the grammatical function of each word and build the translation up from there.

Both methods have their place, but the second is much more reliable:

\* *Fisk át Óláfr* looks at first sight like it should mean 'a fish ate Óláfr'. But *fisk* is accusative and *Óláfr* is nominative, so it must actually mean 'Óláfr ate a fish'.

\* *Hann drápu dýr* looks like it should mean 'he killed an animal/animals'. *Hann* **could** be a nominative singular, and *dýr* (a

strong neuter noun) **could** be an accusative (singular or plural), so this looks plausible. But the verb *riðu* is plural. *Hann* can be an accusative singular but not a nominative plural: the only word which can be a nominative plural is *dýr*. So the sentence must mean 'animals killed him'.

\* *Langan hundr át fisk* looks like it should mean 'a long dog ate a fish'. But *langan* is accusative, so it must agree with *fisk* (accusative), not *hundr* (nominative). So the sentence means 'a dog ate a long fish'.

When reading grammatically, try following this checklist. It looks complicated, but soon becomes automatic:

- Find the main verb (i.e. a verb which is not an infinitive). Is it singular or plural?
  - If the verb is first or second person, you automatically know that the subject must be 'I/we' or 'you' respectively. Bonus!
- Find a noun or pronoun, of the same number as the verb, which could be a nominative. Hopefully there's only one! This is the subject.

## What do the terms in the verbs box mean?

**Strong verbs** indicate tense by changing their root-vowel, while **weak verbs** indicate tense by adding an ending. Strong verbs in English include *I ride, I rode, I have ridden*; weak verbs include *I count, I counted, I have counted*. Strong and weak verbs have no connection with strong and weak nouns!

Unlike normal verbs, the **infinitive** doesn't change its form according to person or tense: in *I want to run, he wants to run, I wanted to run*, the main verb *want* changes, but the infinitive *run* stays the same. As in that sentence, infinitives always depend on other verbs.

**Imperatives** are commands like *get out! kill the viking bastards!* etc.

**Participles** are verbs that have been turned into adjectives, and have different forms depending on whether they refer to the **present** or the **past**—as in *the breaking bridge* (cf. *the bridge breaks*, present), *the broken bridge* (cf. *the bridge broke*, past). Past participles turn up a lot, in English and Old Norse, with the verb *to have/hafa*, in constructions like *ek hef brostit brúna* 'I have broken the bridge', *þeir hafa telit fiskana* 'they have counted the fish'.

In Old Norse, **indicative** verbs are basically ordinary verbs, used when what you say is a simple statement of the truth. **Subjunctives** are used in uncertain or hypothetical situations, in phrases like 'if I were rich, I would buy Alaric presents', 'may you shrivel and die', 'I would do that if I could'.

2a. Two singular subjects require a plural verb: *Óláfr ok Egill tölðu gjafar* 'Óláfr and Egill counted gifts'.

2b. If you can't find a nominative noun or pronoun, look for a nominative adjective: these can stand in for nouns, as in *The sick should be sent home*.

2c. If there isn't a subject at all, add in a pronoun corresponding in number and person to the verb. Thus *tölðum gjafar* means '**we** counted gifts'; *þótti mér undarligt* means '**it** seemed strange to me'.

3. If the sense of the verb allows it to have an object (e.g. 'I killed **him**'), contrast with 'I died'), look for nouns and pronouns in the accusative.

3a. Some evil verbs turn their objects into genitives or datives. If so, the glossary/dictionary will tell you, and you should look for one of these instead of an accusative.

4. If there are any adjectives around, match them up with nouns or pronouns of the same number, gender and case.

5. You've now got the core of the sentence in place. Slotting in prepositions, indirect objects, and adverbs ought now to be pretty intuitive (hopefully!).