

Alaric's magic sheet

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

nouns (most common in bold , with examples with the definite article)												
	strong									weak		
	masculine				neuter		feminine			masc.	neuter	fem.
	a-plural	i-plural	u-plural	r-plural			ar-plural	ir-plural	r-plural			
N. sg.	fiskr (-inn)	staðr	skjöldr	fótr	land (-it)	kvæði	gjöf (-in)	tíð	bók	bogi	hjarta	saga
A.	fisk (-inn)	stað	skjöld	fót	land (-it)	kvæði	gjöf (-ina)	tíð	bók	boga	hjarta	sögu
G.	fisks (-ins)	staðar	skjaldar	fótar	lands (-ins)	kvæðis	gjafar (-innar)	tíðar	bókar	boga	hjarta	sögu
D.	fiski (-num)	stað	skildi	fœti	landi (-nu)	kvæði	gjöf (-inni)	tíð	bók	boga	hjarta	sögu
N. pl.	fiskar (-nir)	staðir	skildir	fœtr	lond (-in)	kvæði	gjafar (-nar)	tíðir	bœkr	bogar	hjörtu	sögur
A.	fiska (-na)	staði	skjöldu	fœtr	lond (-in)	kvæði	gjafar (-nar)	tíðir	bœkr	boga	hjörtu	sögur
G.	fiska (-nna)	staða	skjalda	fóta	landa (-nna)	kvæða	gjafa (-nna)	tíða	bóka	boga	hjärtu	sagna
D.	fiskum (fiskunum)	støðum	skjöldum	fótum	londum (londunum)	kvæðum	gjöfum (gjöfunum)	tíðum	bókum	bogu m	hjörtum	sögum

adjectives									
	strong			weak			possessive adjective (example, strong only)		
	masc.	neuter	fem.	masc.	neuter	fem.	masc.	neuter	fem.
N. sg.	langr	langt	lǫng	langi	langa	langa	minn	mitt	mín
A.	langan	langt	langa	langa	langa	lǫngu	minn	mitt	mína
G.	langs	langs	langrar	langa	langa	lǫngu	míns	míns	minnar
D.	lǫngum	lǫngu	langri	langa	langa	lǫngu	mínum	mínu	minni
N. pl.	langir	lǫng	langar	lǫngu	lǫngu	lǫngu	mínir	mín	mínar
A.	langa	lǫng	langar	lǫngu	lǫngu	lǫngu	mína	mín	mínar
G.	langra	langra	langra	lǫngu	lǫngu	lǫngu	minna	minna	minna
D.	lǫngum	lǫngum	lǫngum	lǫngum	lǫngum	lǫngum	mínum	mínum	mínum

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

sound-changes

u-mutation: a when followed by *u* becomes *ø* (when stressed) or *u* (when unstressed). Thus *saga* 'saga', but *sögu* '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 *lond* '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 > ø*; *u > y*; *ú > ý*; *au > ey*.

classes of strong verbs: main patterns

infinitive, 3rd sg. present, 3rd sg. past, 3rd 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, hétu, heitit

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

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

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'

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

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 *ríðu* 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 tellt 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 *töldum 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!).