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The Complete Course
for Beginners

Katherine Macleod Spadaro and
Katie Graham

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Introduction

Gaelic has a long and turbulent history in Scotland. In its original Irish form it probably arrived with Irish settlers (called 'Scotti' by the Romans) between the fourth and sixth centuries AD. Gradually the numbers and influence of these settlers expanded, and from the west coast they and their language spread over the whole country. As a result, Gaelic had become the language of all levels of society in Scotland by about the tenth century. It gradually diverged from the original Irish to become a distinct language. Although the influence of the English language from the south gradually eroded the position of Gaelic, scholars and poets continued to flourish in the west and north of the country.

It was not until the eighteenth century and the Jacobite rebellions that there was a concerted and ruthless effort on the part of a government to eradicate the language completely. Following the Battle of Culloden in 1746 many expressions of Highland culture, including language and music, were severely suppressed. The Highland Clearances of the following century, where thousands of Gaelic-speaking Scots were forced to leave their birthplaces at the whim of wealthy landowners, dealt a further blow to the language. And even during the twentieth century, many Gaelic speakers in the Highlands and Hebrides could recall being punished by their teachers for using Gaelic in school.

Times have changed. The resurgence of a sense of pride in Celtic identity has given new life to the most widely spoken Celtic languages: Scottish Gaelic, Irish Gaelic and Welsh.¹ The first edition of this book was written during a time when the sense of Gaelic renaissance was quite noticeable, and in the interval this sense has gathered strength and momentum. Gaelic is unquestionably enjoying more official support

¹ The other Celtic languages are Manx, Cornish and Breton. All of the Celtic languages are part of the larger Indo-European family, to which English also belongs.

now than it has for centuries. As we write this introduction, an advertising campaign for the recruitment of Gaelic-speaking teachers asserts that Gaelic-medium education is taking place in 60 primary schools and 35 high schools throughout Scotland, with plans for expansion, and strong career opportunities for educators with Gaelic language skills. The output of published books in and about Gaelic continues to be strong, in fields as diverse as contemporary poetry and lexicography (Colin Mark's dictionary, also published by Routledge, being a landmark example), and the proliferation of Gaelic-related resources on the internet, much of it of the highest quality, provides learners with support that could not have been imagined until recently. Many interested adults are learning the language with great success, and it is most interesting to see the significant contribution that non-native speakers are making to the Gaelic landscape.²

We are very grateful to the publishers for the opportunity to put together a second edition of this textbook, to editor Samantha Vale Noya for her vast reserves of patience, and to series editor Gareth King for his helpful comments. We are also grateful to the anonymous reviewers who made suggestions for improvement to the first edition (although for various reasons we have not implemented all of these). Amongst the most obvious changes are the updated orthography, the use of the decimal number system, the inclusion of two new review chapters, the inclusion of a new unit with a strong international focus, and lexical updating where appropriate. As before, we have tried to present the material to give you the greatest opportunity to hear real Gaelic and to use authentic, everyday phrases which can give you a basis for conversational fluency with other Gaelic speakers.

Developing any skill requires an investment of time and concentration, and learning a language is no different. We hope that the investment you make will repay you with new understanding of an ancient culture which has refused to die; indeed, which still has a vital role to play.

Catherine I. (Katie) Graham
Katherine Macleod Spadaro

² Both Colin Mark and Edward Dwelly, an Englishman who compiled an earlier authoritative Gaelic dictionary, learned the language as adults.

English borrowings from Gaelic

achadh	a field	Ach (in place names)
àrd	high, a high place	Ard, Aird (in place names)
baile	a village/town	Bal (in place names)
bàrd	a poet	bard
beinn	a hill	ben
bog	soft, wet	bog
bròg	a shoe	brogue
bùrn	water	a burn, a stream
cabar	a stick, a pole	caber
càrn	a pile of stones	cairn
cèilidh	a get-together	ceilidh
clann	children	clan
claidheamh	a sword	claymore (a big sword)
clàrsach	a harp	clarsach
cnoc	a hillock	knock (in place names)
creag	a rock	craig, crag
dùn	a heap, a hillock	dune
dùn	a fort	Dun (in place names)
gille	a lad, a servant	gillie
gleann	a glen	glen
gu leòr	plenty, enough	galore
loch	a loch, a lake	loch
machair		machair, low-lying ground by the sea-shore
mòr	big	more (in place names)
plaide	a blanket	plaid
Sasannach	an Englishman	Sassenach
seann taigh	an old house	shanty
sluagh ghairm	a call to battle	slogan

sporan	a purse	sporrán
strath	a broad valley	strath
triubhais	trews	trousers
uisge-beatha	water of life	whisky
is math sin	that is good	smashing!

Pronunciation guide

This guide is only intended to be an introduction to the pronunciation of Gaelic, which is a large and quite complex topic. If you have already heard Gaelic spoken, you will know that both its set of sounds and patterns of stress and intonation are noticeably different from English. Although some of the sounds are difficult at first, there are many successful Gaelic learners who develop excellent pronunciation (a recently published guide to pronunciation has been written by a fluent speaker who started learning Gaelic as an adult).¹

No written description of how to make a sound can compete with listening to the sound being made. There are several reasons for this. Only the international phonetic alphabet (IPA) gives a precise notation for sounds, and few people know it. English speakers from different areas use a range of sounds to convey the same word, so if we try to give English equivalents for Gaelic sounds they cannot equally apply to every English dialect. In using this book your greatest resource in learning pronunciation is unquestionably the audio, and we encourage you to listen over and over again.

Another fact to be aware of is that Gaelic pronunciation does vary (as English does) from district to district. Although these differences can be quite significant, all the dialects of Gaelic are mutually intelligible. There is no one dialect which is considered the ‘standard’, but as Hebridean dialects are most strongly represented in Gaelic broadcast-ing and education, these are the dialects you are most likely to hear.²

¹ *Blas na Gàidhlig: The Practical Guide to Gaelic Pronunciation* by Michael Bauer (Akerbeltz, 2011).

² Even with the category of ‘Hebridean’ dialects, differences in pronunciation can be very noticeable.

The alphabet

The Gaelic language uses a shorter alphabet than the English one, with eighteen letters altogether. They are the vowels **a e i o u** and the consonants **b c d f g h l m n p r s t**.

The letter **h** is mainly used within a word to change the sound of another consonant (e.g. Gaelic **bh** and **mh** sound like English **v**), or it may be retained at the beginning of words borrowed from English.

The remaining letters of the English alphabet – **j k q v w x y z** – are used occasionally in spelling modern words borrowed from English.

The vowels can have accents and their function is to lengthen the sound of the vowel (in the sense of ‘extend’, not change the nature of the sound). Although in older pieces of writing you might see two kinds of accents, acute and grave, the grave accent (e.g. **à**) is the only one now in use.

An important feature of spelling in Gaelic is the distinction between ‘broad’ and ‘slender’ sounds. Broad consonants are flanked by the vowels **a, o** and **u**; slender consonants are flanked by **i** and **e**. Broad consonants are not palatalised, while slender consonants are. An example of the sound difference is the English sound ‘c’ in ‘cut’ (broad, not palatalised), compared to the sound ‘c’ in ‘cute’ (slender, palatalised – the sound is produced with the tongue in contact with the palate). If you have two vowels on either side of a consonant, then both vowels must belong to the same category. For example:

a / o / u – broad consonant – a / o / u

i / e – slender consonant – i / e

What appears to the English reader to be random sprinklings of extra vowels can often be the result of Gaelic spelling conforming to this important rule. (The spelling system of Gaelic is, however, quite logical and consistent once you are used to it.)

In the examples below we have tried to provide examples of common words for the most important sounds, with the focus on regularity rather than exceptions. At this stage, you do not need to focus on the meaning (although many of the words can be found in the glossary). Simply focus on the sounds and concentrate on trying to replicate them. You should do this many times.

(Audio 1; 02)



Vowels	Gaelic words
a	ad, aran, bata
à	bàta, àrd, àite
e	e, le, teth
è	tè, cèic <i>and also</i> glè, an-dè, cèilidh
i	sin, is, cidsin <i>and also</i> tig, ise, idir
ì	ìm, mile, chì
o	snog, don, dona
ò	bròg, pòcaid, dòchas <i>and also</i> bò, cò, mòr
u	rud, cus, gruth
ù	cù, bùth, bùrn

Main vowel combinations (Audio 1; 03)



(Remember that the number of vowels in the spelling need not correspond to the number of vowel sounds which are pronounced in the word. **Ao**, for example, signifies a single vowel sound.)

ao	aon, gaoth, aosta
aoi	raoir, naoi <i>and also</i> aois
ea	eadar, fear, beachd
eu	ceud, feur, feuch
ia	iar, iad, iasg
io	bior, fios, iomadh
ìo	mìos, sìos, fion <i>and also</i> fìor, pìos, sgriobh
iu	tiugh, fliuch, piuthar
ua / uai	fuair, uair, fuaim

Vowels before consonants (Audio 1; 04)



Sometimes vowels followed by **m** or the double consonants **ll** or **nn** are pronounced differently.

Listen to these pairs and repeat them:

càl	call
sin	sinn
tro	trom



Consonants (Audio 1; 05)

As described above, some of the consonants have two slightly different versions: ‘broad’ and ‘slender’. Generally the slender consonants have a more palatalised quality: the difference is similar to the difference between ‘putt’ and ‘pew’ in English.

Broad version

Slender version

b bàn, bochd, bòrd (often more like ‘p’ after/ between vowels): abair, obair	b beul, beò, beannachd
c coma, càise, caora	c cearc, ceann, ciamar
d do, dorch, daor (your tongue should be in approximately the same place as for ‘th’ in English: then try to say ‘d’) (often more like ‘t’ after/between vowels): ad, rud, stad	d deich, deoch, diofar (more like ‘j’ as in ‘jeer’)
g gu, gunna, gach (often more like ‘c’ after/ between vowels): agam, òg	g geal, geansaidh, gèam
l làr, latha, luath	l lit, leabaidh, litir
ll balla, fallas	ll gille, seillean
n nursa, naoi, not	n nì, nead, nighean
nn annam, beannachd, beanntan	nn uinneag, glainne, stocainn
r rabaid, rathad, ruadh	r rinn, ris, reic (may sometimes sound like a voiced ‘th’, as in ‘other’, in parts of the Hebrides)
s socair, saor, suas	s sibh, sia, seall

t tarbh, taigh, tuil

(your tongue should be in approximately the same place as for 'th' in English: then try to say 't')

t tinn, tìr, tè

(more like 'ch' as in 'chin')

Note that a 'sh' sound is often inserted between **r** and **t** – e.g. **ceart**, **dòirt**.

Consonants + h (Audio 1; 06)*Broad version**Slender version***bh bha, bhos** (like 'v')

and also **dubh, leabhar**
(not pronounced)

ch cho, chuala, chunnaic**dh dhaibh, dhomh, fiadh**

and also **adhar, cròdh, cofaidh** (not pronounced)

fh fhuair, fhathast, chan

fhaod, mì-fhortanach
(‘h’ sound in **fhuair, fhathast**, otherwise not pronounced)

gh ghoint, ghlas, a’ ghaoth

and also **brèagha, teaghlach, tiugh**

mh sàmhach, Samhain, riamh

(like ‘v’)

ph phàigh, a phoca, phòs

(loan words normally use **f**, e.g. **fòn**)

sh shuas, Oidhche Shamhna,

air a shocair

(pronounced as ‘h’)

th tha, thall, thairis, athair

(‘h’ sound or not pronounced)

blàth, pathadh

bh bheil, do bheatha

and also **a bhiadh, mo bheul**

ch chì, ri chèile, fichead**dh buidhe, cruaidh, co-dhiù**

and also **an-uiridh, bruidhinn** (not pronounced)

fh fhèin, an fheadhainn,

an fheasgar (‘h’ sound in **fhèin**, otherwise not pronounced)

gh faigh, uighean, a-muigh

and also **maighstear, nighean**

mh deimhinn, a mheatag,

co mheud

ph lethphinnt, mo phiuthar,

phinc

sh shìos, an ath-sheachdain,

a Shine (pronounced as ‘h’)

th ithe, thiug, thig

(may not be pronounced)

a-rithist



'Missing' vowels – elision (Audio 1; 07)

You will often note that when two vowels are next to each other they seem to merge into a single sound (this happens in English too). Sometimes this is evident in the spelling – e.g. **m' òrdag** ('my thumb' – **mo òrdag**).



'Extra' vowels (Audio 1; 08)

Conversely, sometimes an unstressed vowel sound is inserted between consonants for ease of pronunciation. These are labelled 'epenthetic' vowels. Examples are the second vowel *sound* in these words, which you can hear although it is not indicated in the spelling:

balgam	('mouthful')
tarbh	('bull')
lorg	('search for')

Stress and intonation

Although there are exceptions, the typical pattern is for the first syllable of a word to be most heavily stressed. Normally, most utterances, including many questions, are said with a falling intonation. Keep listening to the audio to absorb as much as you can of the 'music' of the spoken language.

Unit One

A bheil Gàidhlig agad?

Do you speak Gaelic?

In this unit you will learn

- how to address people in Gaelic, both informally and formally
- how to introduce yourself
- word order in Gaelic
- how to say that you can speak a language
- how to use Gaelic names
- the verb 'to be', present tense



Dialogue 1



Gabhaibh mo leisgeul! (Audio 1; 09)

Excuse me!



Mairi MacLeod, a young tourist from Australia, arrives at a bus depot in Inverness. She approaches a lady who is also waiting for a bus.

MÀIRI: Gabhaibh mo leisgeul. A bheil Gàidhlig agaibh?

SÌNE: Tha Gàidhlig agus Beurla agam.

MÀIRI: O, is math sin.

Is mise Màiri NicLeòid.

SÌNE: Halò, a Mhàiri. Ciamar a tha thu?

MÀIRI: Tha mi gu math, tapadh leibh. Ciamar a tha sibh fhèin?

SÌNE: Tha mi gu math, tapadh leat.

- Is mise Sine Chaimbeul.
- MAÌRI: Tha mi toilichte ur coinneachadh, a Shine.
- MAIRI: *Excuse me. Do you speak (have) Gaelic?*
- JEAN: *I speak (have) Gaelic and English.*
- MAIRI: *O, that's good.*
I'm Mairi MacLeod.
- JEAN: *Hello, Mairi. How are you?*
- MAIRI: *I'm well, thank you.*
How are you (yourself)?
- JEAN: *I'm well, thank you. I'm Jean Campbell.*
- MAIRI: *I'm pleased to meet you, Jean.*
-



Language points

Thu/sibh

Like many other European languages, Gaelic has two different words for 'you'. **Thu** is used in informal situations, to children, younger people, family members, friends, and other people you know quite well. **Sibh** is used for more formal situations when you want to express a level of respect. It is also used to mean 'you' in a plural sense. In this dialogue you can see that Sine, who is older, says **Ciamar a tha thu?** 'How are you?' to the younger tourist, while Màiri says more formally, **Ciamar a tha sibh fhèin?** 'How are you yourself?' Several of the useful expressions from the dialogue come in two versions: one for speaking to people of the same or lower status, and one which is used to show respect or to speak to more than one person. If in doubt it is probably better to use the **sibh** form.

thu

Ciamar a tha thu?
Gabh mo leisgeull!
Tapadh leat!

sibh

Ciamar a tha sibh?
Gabhaidh mo leisgeull!
Tapadh leibh!



Exercise 1

Which of the above expressions would you use if you wanted to:

- 1 Thank your sister for bringing you a cup of tea?
- 2 Excuse yourself as you squeeze past a stranger in a crowded place?
- 3 Ask after the health of your elderly grandmother?
- 4 Thank a group of work colleagues who have bought you a birthday present?
- 5 Ask your best friend how he is?

Word order

The usual structure of a simple English sentence is: subject–verb–object. For example: I (*subject*) saw (*verb*) you (*object*). (Sometimes, of course, an object is not included – e.g. ‘He smiled’.) One of the major differences between Gaelic and English is that a Gaelic sentence reverses the order of the subject and verb. Normally, the Gaelic order is verb–subject–object.

So, ‘I saw you’ becomes:

Chunnaic – mi – thu

saw I you

This might seem a little confusing at first, because placing a verb in front of a subject is one way of forming questions in English (e.g. ‘he is here’/‘is he here?’). In Gaelic, though, questions are formed differently, as you will see later.

Here are two more examples from the dialogue to explain the word order:

Tha mi gu math

I am fine

Tha mi toilichte

I am happy

The word **tha** is part of the verb ‘to be’, and is translated ‘am’, ‘is’ or ‘are’. So **tha mi** means ‘I am’, and **gu math** and **toilichte** are the adjectives for ‘fine’ and ‘happy’.

Introducing yourself

The Gaelic version of ‘What is your name?’ is:

Dè an t-ainm a tha ort? (*lit.* ‘What name is on you?’)

Dè an t-ainm a tha oirbh? is the formal/plural **sibh** version.

To identify yourself, say:

Is mise . . . I am . . .

Mairi says **Is mise Màiri Nicleòid**. Practise saying this phrase with your own name. If your name is a Scottish one you might find out below that it has a special Gaelic version.

Speaking languages

A useful expression is:

Tha Gàidhlig agam I can speak Gaelic (*lit.* ‘I have Gaelic’)

Tha Beurla agam I can speak English

Other languages you might know are **Fraingis** (French), **Gearmailtis** (German) or **Spàinnis** (Spanish).



Dialogue 2



An ticeard (Audio 1; 12)

The ticket

The bus arrives and Mairi speaks to the driver.

MÀIRI:	Tha mi a’ dol gu Port Rìgh, mas e ur toil e.
AN DRÀIBHEAR:	Glè mhath!
MÀIRI:	Dè a’ phris a tha ticeard gu Port Rìgh?
AN DRÀIBHEAR:	Deich notaichean, mas e do thoil e.
MÀIRI:	Deich notaichean! Tha sin daor!
AN DRÀIBHEAR:	Tha, ach tha Port Rìgh fad as, nach eil?
MÀIRI:	Tha sin ceart. Tapadh leibh.

MAIRI:	<i>I'm going to Portree, please.</i>
DRIVER:	<i>Very good!</i>
MAIRI:	<i>How much does a ticket to Portree cost?</i>
DRIVER:	<i>Ten pounds, please.</i>
MAIRI:	<i>Ten pounds! That's expensive!</i>
DRIVER:	<i>Well, Portree's a long way off, isn't it?</i>
MAIRI:	<i>That's true. Thank you.</i>

Language points



Mas e do thoil e and **mas e ur toil e** both mean 'please'. The first is the less formal **thu** version, and the second is for the formal/plural **sibh**. The Gaelic expressions for 'please' are not used as often in everyday conversation as the equivalent in English.

Tha mi duilich ('I'm sorry') is another very useful expression for apologising or commiserating. **Glè mhath**, literally 'very good', is often used to mean 'that's fine' or 'okay'. You can also use it if somebody asks after your health.

Nach eil corresponds to 'isn't it' in English. It is part of the verb 'to be' which will be described a little later in the unit. This is a useful little phrase to add on to sentences, in much the same way as you do in English.

It's a long way, isn't it?

Money

Dè a' phrìs a tha . . . ? What is the price of . . . ?

Another way of saying the same thing is: **Dè na tha . . . ?** 'How much is . . . ?' With the word **seo** ('this'), and a point, you can ask the price of almost anything!

Dè a' phrìs a tha seo? Dè na tha seo?

How much is this?

airgead

money

not

a pound (i.e. a pound note)

notaichean

pounds (plural)

sgillinn

daor

saor

pence

expensive

cheap



Exercise 2

- 1 What would you say if you trod on someone's foot?
- 2 What do you call the contents of your wallet or purse?
- 3 How would you ask the price of something?
- 4 What polite expression could you add to a request to a stranger?



Dialogue 3



Air a' bhus (Audio 1; 15)

On the bus

Mairi and Jean find their seats on the bus.

SÌNE: Tha mi sgith, a Mhàiri.

MÀIRI: Tha mise sgith cuideachd!

SÌNE: Co às a tha thu, a Mhàiri?

MÀIRI: Tha mi à Astràilia.

SÌNE: Mo chreach, tha Gàidhlig agad!

MÀIRI: Tha beagan Gàidhlig agam.

SÌNE: Glè mhath!

JEAN: *I'm tired, Mairi.*

MAIRI: *I'm tired, too!*

JEAN: *Where are you from, Mairi?*

MAIRI: *I'm from Australia.*

JEAN: *My goodness, you speak Gaelic!*

MAIRI: *I speak a little bit.*

JEAN: *Very good!*

Language points (Audio 1; 16)



Where do you come from?

Co às a tha thu?

I come from Australia.

Co às a tha sibh?

Tha mi à Astràilia.



Some other countries are:

Alba (Scotland); **Sasainn** (England); **Eirinn** (Ireland);

Ameireaga (America); **Canada** (Canada).

Mo chreach! – similar in function to ‘my goodness!’ – is a useful expression for any time that you feel surprised or impressed.

Names (Audio 1; 17)



Some common feminine names in Gaelic are:

Anna (Anna, Ann)

Barabal (Barbara)

Cairistiona (Christine)

Catriona/Caitriona (Catherine)

Ealasaid (Elizabeth)

Eilidh (Helen)

Iseabail (Isabella, Isobel)

Mairead (Margaret)

Màiri (Mary, Mairi)

Mòr, Mòrag (Marion, Morag)

Peigi (Peggy)

Seonag (Joan)

Seònaid (Janet)

Sine (Jean)

Sometimes the name (or noun) changes slightly when you directly address the person (the ‘vocative case’). There is no change for feminine names which begin with a vowel (e.g. **Ealasaid** and **Anna**). But some other feminine names are ‘lenited’, which means that a sound change takes place. This is shown in writing by an extra ‘h’ inserted after the first consonant (so **Catriona** becomes **Chatriona**). Normally **a** is also said in front of those names.

So if you were calling out to the people listed above you would say: (Audio 1; 18)



Anna

a Bharabal (bh = v)

a Chairistiona

a Chatriona

Ealasaid

Eilidh

Iseabail

a Mhairead (mh = v)

a Mhàiri (mh = v)

a Mhòrag (mh = v)

a Pheigi (ph = f)**a Sheònaid** (no 's' sound)**a Sheonag** (no 's' sound)**a Shine** (no 's' sound)Here are some common masculine names in Gaelic: **(Audio 1; 19)****Ailean** (Alan)**Aonghas** (Angus)**Calum** (Malcolm)**Daibhidh** (David)**Donnchadh** (Duncan)**Iomhar** (Ivor)**Peadair** (Peter)**Seumas** (James)**Tormod** (Norman)**Alasdair** (Alexander)**Cailean** (Colin)**Coinneach** (Kenneth)**Dòmhnall** (Donald)**Iain** (John)**Murchadh** (Murdo)**Seòras** (George)**Tòmas** (Thomas)**Uilleam** (William)

Like the feminine names, masculine nouns or names also change in the direct address or vocative form. Like the feminine names, masculine names beginning with a consonant are lenited. Additionally, the masculine names have their last consonant slenderised, if this is possible. Slenderisation means that the letter 'i' is added before the final consonant, which usually causes it to be pronounced with a more 'palatalised' sound. So, if you wanted to call to the men named above,

you would say: **(Audio 1; 20)****Ailein****Aonghais****a Chaluim****a Dhaibhidh****a Dhonnchaidh****Iomhair****a Pheadair** (ph = f)**a Sheumais** (no 's' sound)**a Thormoid** (no 't' sound)**Alasdair****a Chailein****a Choinnich****a Dhòmhnail****Iain****a Mhurchaidh** (mh = v)**a Sheòrais** (no 's' sound)**a Thòmais** (no 't' sound)**Uilleim**(Note that **a Sheumais** is the source of the name 'Hamish'.)Some common surnames are: **(Audio 1; 21)****Caimbeul** (Campbell)**Friseal** (Fraser)**MacAoidh** (MacKay)**MacChoinnich** (MacKenzie)**Camshron** (Cameron)**Greum** (Graham)**MacAonghais** (MacInnes)**MacDhòmhnail** (MacDonald)

Mac a' Ghobhainn (Smith)	MacIlleathain (MacLean)
MacIomhair (MacIver)	MacLeòid (MacLeod)
Mac a' Phì (MacPhee)	Stiùbhard (Stewart)

If you have a **Mac** name in English, it remains the same for every member of the family. But in Gaelic, **Mac** (which means 'son of') changes to **Nic** (short for 'daughter of') when it is used in female names. So,

John MacLeod = **Iain MacLeòid**

Mairi MacLeod = **Màiri NicLeòid**

If you are a woman and your surname does not start with **Mac**, it may instead lenite (have an initial sound change) with an extra 'h' added after the first consonant. So,

Jean Campbell = **Sine Chaimbeul**

Exercise 3



Can you translate these?

- 1 I am Catherine MacDonald.
- 2 I am James Smith.
- 3 I am Anna MacKay.

If your name is of Gaelic origin, practise introducing yourself the Gaelic way.

The verb 'to be'

There were several examples of the Gaelic verb 'to be' in the dialogues above – a very important verb. In order to make a present tense sentence using **bi** (the Gaelic version of the verb 'be'), you simply use the word **tha** (pronounced 'ha').

For example:

Tha sin ceart

That is right

Tha an ticeard daor

The ticket is expensive

Tha mi duilich

I am sorry



Tha is used in the present tense for any person or thing, masculine or feminine, singular or plural. So you have: **(Audio 1; 23)**

Tha mi	I am	Tha sinn	we are
Tha thu	you are	Tha sibh	you are (plural/polite sing.)
Tha e	he (or it) is	Tha iad	they are
Tha i	she (or it) is		

In Gaelic all nouns are masculine or feminine, so there is no exact equivalent of the word 'it'. (The Glossary tells you whether a particular noun is masculine or feminine.)

The word **e** is the pronoun for masculine nouns, and **i** is the pronoun for feminine nouns.

e.g. Tha an ticeard daor	Tha i daor
The ticket is expensive	It is expensive

If you want to make a negative statement you use the phrase **chan eil** in front of the pronoun or name. Here is the pattern:

Chan eil mi	I am not
Chan eil thu	you are not
Chan eil e	he (or it) is not
Chan eil i	she (or it) is not
Chan eil sinn	we are not
Chan eil sibh	you are not (plural/polite sing.)
Chan eil iad	they are not
e.g. Chan eil sin ceart!	That's not right!
Chan eil mi sgìth.	I'm not tired.



Adjectives (Audio 1; 24)

Here are some of the adjectives you have already encountered in this lesson, followed by a few new ones:

gu math ¹	fine, well	sgìth	tired
toilichte	happy	duilich	sorry/sad

¹ Technically, **math** is the adjective and **gu math** the adverb, but **gu math** is normally used to talk about health.

aosta old
reamhar fat

òg young
caol thin



Exercise 4

Make as many sentences as you can, using the present tense and the above adjectives, about the following people.

- 1 Yourself
- 2 Your spouse or a close friend
- 3 A neighbour
- 4 Someone you work or study with

e.g. **Tha e caol** He's thin
Chan eil i toilichte She's not happy

You can use a proper name instead of a pronoun – for example:

Tha e reamhar or **Tha Iain reamhar**

Questions

To make questions with the verb 'to be', you use the phrase **a bheil** ...? So the pattern is as follows:

A bheil mi	am I	A bheil sinn	are we
A bheil thu	are you	A bheil sibh	are you (plural/ polite sing.)
A bheil e	is he/it	A bheil iad	are they
A bheil i	is she/it		

e.g. **A bheil thu sgith?** Are you tired?
A bheil iad gu math? Are they well?

Negative questions

In Dialogue 1 we had the question **Tha Port Rìgh fad air falbh, nach eil?**

The pattern is as follows:

nach eil mi	am I not
nach eil thu	are you not

nach eil e	is he/it not
nach eil i	is she/it not
nach eil sinn	are we not
nach eil sibh	are you not (plural/polite sing.)
nach eil iad	are they not

Present tense of other verbs

The verb 'to be' is very versatile because it can combine with other verbs to say what people are doing at the present time.

e.g. **Tha i ag ionnsachadh Gàidhlig**

She is learning Gaelic

Tha mi a' leughadh

I am reading

The word in the middle, **ag**, (shortened to **a'** before a consonant), means 'at', so a literal translation of the example above would be 'She is at learning Gaelic.'



Here is a list of some of the most commonly used verbs.
(Audio 1; 27)

a' bruidhinn	speaking
a' cèilidh	visiting
a' cluich	playing
a' coiseachd	walking
a' dèanamh	doing
a' gàireachdainn	laughing
ag òl	drinking
ag ionnsachadh	learning
ag ithe	eating
a' leughadh	reading
a' pòsadh	marrying
ag ràdh	saying
a' ruith	running
a' seinn	singing
a' tighinn	coming

Exercise 5



Take a look at the pictures below. How would you describe what the people are doing?

