

## The Alphabet • Yr Wyddor

The Welsh alphabet is both similar to and different from the English alphabet. When learning the letters and their pronunciations, sometimes it is more helpful to pretend it is a completely different alphabet like Cyrillic (А Б В Г Д Е Ё etc.) or Greek (Α Β Γ Δ Ε Ζ Η etc.) and be delighted by the similarities rather than dismayed by the differences. There are 29 letters in the Welsh alphabet:

A B C CH D DD E F FF G NG H I J L LL M N O P PH R RH S T TH U W Y

Digraphs. The main difference from English is that certain letters are digraphs, one letter alphabetically but composed of two separate characters. The digraphs are CH, DD, FF, NG, LL, PH, RH, and TH, and in Welsh they are alphabetized as a single letter.

### Correct Welsh Alphabetization

ci	'dog'
cyfiethu	'translate'
cyngor	'council'
cyhyr	'muscle'
chi	'you'
dagr	'tear'
danadl	'nettles'
dangos	'show'*
dant	'tooth'
dod	'come'
dŵr	'water'
ddoe	'yesterday'

### English Alphabetization; Incorrect for Welsh

chi	'you'
ci	'dog'
cyfiethu	'translate'
cyhyr	'muscle'
cyngor	'council'
dagr	'tear'
danadl	'nettles'
dangos	'show'*
dant	'tooth'
ddoe	'yesterday'
dod	'come'
dŵr	'water'

\*Note NG in particular, both because it falls between G and H alphabetically and because in a handful of words, such as dangos 'show', what looks like the single letter NG is really two letters, N + G, and so it is alphabetized between danadl 'nettles' and dant 'tooth'.

Other letters. The letters K, Q, V, X, and Z only appear in borrowed words, but when they do they take their usual place in the alphabet. Other combinations are not considered letters even though they make unique sounds (see below): Ngh, Mh, Nh, Si, Ts, and Tsi.

Vowels. There are seven vowels in Welsh. A E I and O are exactly the same as most of the languages that use the Latin alphabet, such as German, Italian, or Spanish. Note that here English is the unusual language! The other three vowels are U, W, and Y. W works exactly like U in most European languages, such as German, Italian, or Spanish. U and Y are discussed below. As in other languages, vowels can be long or short. Welsh uses some accents, primarily the circumflex, which is used to mark long vowels: Â Ê Î Ô Û Ŵ Ŷ.

Accent. Welsh has both a stress accent and a pitch accent, which gives the language its characteristic lilt. The stress accent goes on the penultimate (second-to-last) syllable in almost every word. There are a few exceptions. Cymraeg, yma, yna, and yno are all stressed on the final syllable, as are words with an acute accent (glanháu, 'to clean'). The pitch accent goes on the final syllable, which is spoken at slightly a higher pitch. As English does not have a pitch accent, learners sometimes hear the syllable with the pitch accent as the stressed syllable.

## Welsh Pronunciation

Letter	= English	Similar to English	Different from English / Notes
A		As in father; like Spanish or French A	
B	✓		
C		As English K (cat). <u>Never</u> like S or CH	Technically, this is the unaspirated 'C' as in scat rather than the aspirated 'C' in cat. Hold your hand in front of your mouth as you say both words: you want the one with no little puff of air, as in French or Spanish hard C.
CH			KH as in Scottish loch or German bach
D	✓		
DD		As English TH in then. <u>Never</u> as TH in thin!	See also TH
E		As in bet or ay in day; like Spanish or French E	
F			V. Mnemonic: the English word <u>of</u>
FF	✓		F. Mnemonic: the English word <u>off</u>
G		As English G (get). <u>Never</u> like J or ouGH	
NG		As English singer. <u>Rarely</u> like finger.	The sound in finger is represented with N + G as two letters, but it looks the same when written. Unlike English, NG can begin words.
NGh			As above, pronounced simultaneously with H (unvoiced). In this case, <u>never</u> like finger.
H	✓		
I		As big machine or as Y; like Spanish or French I	As a vowel, like Spanish or French I; as a consonant (usually next to the vowels A, E, or O) like English Y
J	✓		
L	✓		
LL			To make this sound, 1) place your tongue exactly where it goes to make an English L, and 2) hiss (unvoiced)
M	✓		
Mh			As above, pronounced simultaneously with H (unvoiced)
N	✓		

Nh			As above, pronounced simultaneously with H (unvoiced)
O		As in dog bone; like Spanish or Italian O	
P	✓		Technically, this is the unaspirated 'P' as in spot rather than the aspirated 'P' in pot. Hold your hand in front of your mouth as you say both words: you want the one with no little puff of air, as in French or Spanish P.
PH	✓		Exactly the same as FF.
R			A rolled R, as in Scots English or Spanish RR.
RH			As above, pronounced simultaneously with H (unvoiced)
S	✓		Some dialects pronounce S as SH in some positions.
Si			As English SH; sometimes written Sh.
T	✓		Technically, this is the unaspirated 'T' as in stop rather than the aspirated 'T' in top. Hold your hand in front of your mouth as you say both words: you want the one with no little puff of air, as in French or Spanish T.
Ts			As English TS or (when final) CH
Tsi			As English CH
TH		As English TH in thin. <u>Never</u> as TH in then!	See also DD
U			South Wales: Just like I North Wales: Just like Y <sub>2</sub> (most dialects)
W			As a consonant, just like English; as a vowel, like English u in put when short and oo in food when long.
Y	Y <sub>1</sub> In final syllables and monosyllables (one-syllable words)		South Wales: Just like I. North Wales: An unrounded high central vowel; as French U is to English OO, so Welsh Y is to English I
	Y <sub>2</sub> Elsewhere, and in the words common words dy, fy, y, yng, ym, yn, and yr, and the rare words yd and ys		The schwa vowel [ə] as in English uh or the a in about or the u in puzzle.

Diphthongs	Sounds Similar to English	Sounds Different from English / Notes
AE	as English eye	
AI	as English eye	
AU	as English eye	Except as a plural ending, where it is like A in North Welsh and E in South Welsh
AW	as ou in English house	
EI		Close to i in night, the schwa sound uh (ə) plus ee
EU		Close to i in night, the schwa sound uh (ə) plus ee
EW		e in pet plus oo in moose
IW		i in pit plus oo in moose
OE	As oy in toy	
OI	As oy in toy	
OU	As oy in toy	
OW	As o in phone	This is more like the English long o, with a final w glide, while Welsh long O is more like Spanish, and Italian.
UW		i in pit plus oo in moose (North: Welsh U + Welsh W)
WY <sub>1</sub>		As Spanish uy in muy, oo + ee; sometimes written wŷ
WY <sub>2</sub>	As English we	Sometimes written wŷ
YW <sub>1</sub>		i in pit plus oo in moose
YW <sub>2</sub>		The schwa sound uh (ə) plus oo

In general, North Welsh U and Y retain their values, and in South Welsh they merge with I. For further reference, this [Wikipedia page](#) give the International Phonetic Alphabet symbols, and you can hear those symbols pronounced [here](#).

Mutations. The dictionary form of a Welsh word can change in three ways:

- 1) By adding endings, as in English: cath 'cat' becomes cathod, 'cats'
- 2) By changing the middle vowels, as in English: troed 'foot' becomes traed 'feet'. (Less common.)
- 3) Unlike English, Welsh changes the beginning of words through a series of changes called mutations. Cath can be gath, chath, or nghath depending on the grammatical environment. A table of these mutations is below, followed by a reverse listing to help you look up mutated words.

Root Consonant	Lenition / Soft Mutation	Nasal Mutation	Aspiration	Mixed
P	B	Mh	PH	PH
T	D	Nh	TH	TH
C	G	NGh	CH	CH
B	F	M	no mutation	F
D	DD	N	no mutation	DD
G	— (the G is dropped)	NG	no mutation	— (dropped)
M	F	no mutation	no mutation	F
LL	L	no mutation	no mutation	L
RH	R	no mutation	no mutation	R

If you see a word beginning with:

A  
B  
C  
CH  
D  
DD  
E  
F  
FF  
G  
NG  
H  
I  
J

Look in the dictionary under:

A-, GA-  
B-, P-  
C-, CH-  
C-, G- (only for gan)  
D-, DD-, T-  
D-, DD-  
E-, GE-  
B-, F-, M-  
FF-  
C-, G-  
C-, G-,  
EH-, H-  
GI-, I-  
J-

If you see a word beginning with:

L  
M  
N  
O  
P  
PH  
R  
RH  
S  
T  
TH  
U  
W  
Y

Look in the dictionary under:

GL-, L-, LL-  
B-, M-, P-  
D-, N-, T-  
GO-, O-  
P-  
P-, PH-  
GR-, R-, RH-  
RH-  
S-, YS-  
T-  
T-, TH-  
GU-, U-  
GW-, W-  
GY-, Y-