

When to Pronounce Final h

You're in for a shock here I'm afraid - the rule is simple. But seriously, it can be quite confusing at first glance to explain when a final [ʰ] (usually represented by **th** in the spelling) is pronounced and when not. The surprisingly simple rule is that when you have a final letter (like **th**) indicating a final [ʰ], you pronounce it if it is at the end of a word which is monosyllabic - that is, if it has only one syllable and if the preceding vowel is short. Remember that a diphthong counts as a long vowel!

Note that even if the [ʰ] is pronounced it tends to be relatively weak and often disappears in normally fast speech, but more of that later.

So ... let's look at some contrasting examples:

cath >	ka ^h
bùth >	bu:
gath >	gá ^h
bàth >	ba:
tuath >	tuə
mòrghath >	mo:rɣa

Having a longer word ending in **-th** is actually very rare, so the issue of counting syllables goes away for the most part anyway.

Ok, someone asked whether that doesn't mean that **bàth** 'to drown' and **bà**, the genitive of 'cow' aren't pronounced the same way and make life confusing. Actually, yes and no. Yes in the sense that they **are** pronounced the same way. No in the sense that it doesn't make life complicated. For one thing English has much more of the same - think of [naɪt] and [naɪs]. You tell me whether those two are 'night' and 'gneiss' or 'knight' and 'nice'! And the other two reasons are word order and context. In Gaelic you'll never get the word [ba:] 'cow' in the same position as you might get the word [ba:] 'to drown' as the first is a noun and the second a verb. Plus there is always the ever helpful thing called context which usually clears up any confusion. No language has no ambiguity because we couldn't pun otherwise!

So what was that about fast speech? Well, this final [ʰ] is just one of those things that tend to disappear when you speak normally. There's more on fast speech to be found [here](#).