

Éiridh e is ceannaidh e? or The Future in Gaelic

Ok, let's do the simple bit first. How to form the future tense, that is.

There is just one future tense in Gaelic (unlike German for example which has two) but unfortunately this one future comes in the guise of three different grammatical forms. Basically this means that depending on where or how you use a future verb, its form changes. Why? Because it does - you don't want the long explanation. But not to worry, it's not rocket science.

There are two ways of looking at this. You can either say that the form depends on the grammatical function of the verb - or that the form depends on what goes in front of it. Either works. But to make things easier, here's an example to begin with:

	cuir	
Independent	Relative	Dependent
cuiridh mi	có a chuireas?	an cuir mi
add -(a)idh	prefix a, lenite and add	use the root form of
	-(e)as	the verb
I will put	who will put?	will I put?

Let's start with the first way of looking at it - function. In the first column, **cuiridh** is standing 'independently' as it were, first position in the sentence, nothing in front of it, just making a statement.

In the second column, it has a 'relative' function, it relates two concepts or sentences together (a relative sentence). In English that generally involves a relative pronoun like that or who: 'this is a hawk' and 'it caught a chicken' give us 'this is a hawk who caught a chicken' where who relates two concepts, ties two sentences together. In Gaelic this requires the relative particle **a**. In the third column, we find all the cases which don't go in the first two but in all cases there is a word, or rather particle, coming in front of the verb. The difference of these particles to **a** is that they modify the meaning, forming a question or negative for example. So the verb is 'dependent' on something else, hence the name.

The other way of looking at it is form. If there is nothing whatsoever in front of the verb, you must use the independent form.

If there is any of a group of relative particles (see below) which generally finish with the relative particle **a**, you must use the relative form.

And finally, if there is any other particle coming in front of it, you must use the root form.

Relative Particles		Dependent Particles	
a	relative particle	cha(n)**	not (negation)
bhon a	since (because)	an	question
car son a	why	nach	negative question
ciamar a	how	gus an	until
dé a	what	far an	where (relative)
cuine a	when (question)	càite an	where (question)
có a	who	gun	that (complementiser)
ged a	although	mun	before
nuair a	when (relative)	mur(a)	if not
mar a	as	nan	if (conditional 2)
na	that which (relativiser*)		
ma	if (conditional 1)		

*see the pages on conditional

**lenites

Which is, incidentally, why it makes sense to use a fairly conservative "spelling". If you adopt the "progressive" way of not spelling any silent letters at all, you get sentences like *tha's am có bhuaileas 'n cù!* - which is fair enough in spoken Gaelic but it isn't helpful for the learner (or people trying to make sense of a written text either). And in this particular case, spelling all the original *a*'s makes it very easy to spot which of these are relative and which are dependent particles.

Incidentally, even those who use a "progressive" spelling system, can't completely get away from the *a*, as it re-appears when something interposes itself between the particle and the *a* e.g. *có na daoine a bhuaileas coin?*

Where to next? Vowels and F. Because *a* prefixes *dh'* to verbs beginning with a vowel or F (which gets lenited). The *-as* and *-eas* thing is simply a spelling alteration to obey the broad/slender spelling rule. So here's a few examples of verbs in the future so you'll get the feel of it:

root	independant	relative	dependant
cuir	cuiridh mi	có a chuireas?	an cuir thu?
ceannaich	ceannaichidh mi	nuair a cheannaicheas ...	cha cheannaich!
bruich	bruichidh mi	ged a bhruicheas ...	càite am bruich mi ...?
lorg	lorgaidh mi	ma lorgas mi ...	nan lorg mi ...
sgrìobh	sgrìobhaidh mi	... na sgrìobhas tu* ...	nach sgrìobh mi ...?
òl	òlaidh mi!	cuine a dh'òlas mi?	chan òl mi!
feuch	feuchaidh!	có a dh'fheuchas ...?	am feuch thu ...?
ith	ithidh tu*!	dé a dh'itheas tu*?	mun ith thu ...
iarr	iarraidh e!	... a dh'iarras ...	an iarr e ...?

*Oh joy, another footnote. This one is on the personal pronouns. With future forms, just use your normal *mi*, *e*, *i*, *sinn*, *sibh* and *iad* - except for *thu* which switches back to its original form of *tu*. Why oh why? Because of the all pervasive [homo-organic](#) rule. Because the independant

future always ends in **-dh** (which used to be a dental way back when it was pronounced as a dental fricative [ð]) and because the relative future always ends in **-s** (another dental), the lenition of **tu** to **thu** was blocked by these endings. Wonderful stuff, eh? It's so predictable.

Is that it? No, not quite. There is something else. "Something elusive, Master."

Show of hands, who knows what Syncope is? Contrary to common belief in the editorial staff room, it's not a multiplied image of a sin ... but Greek for "falling together". Gaelic has inherited this wonderful habit of collapsing syllables when it feels there's too many of them (which actually a lot of languages do, but Gaelic does it a lot). This is relevant to this page because it explains forms like **fosglaidh**, when you might be expecting ***fosgailidh**.

What happens is that whenever you get a verb with 2 or more syllables ending in a liquid (**-n**, **-ng**, **-nn**, **-l**, **-ll**, **-r**, **-rr**), the second syllable collapses when you add the future endings **-(a)idh** and **-(e)as**. Oh, and **-nn** and **-ng** change to **-n**. Incidentally, even though they contain two syllables, words like **falbh** [faɫʰav] do not qualify for this because their second syllable is due to secondary articulation. Meaning that it's not historic but due to the way our mouth works.

Because of the verbal ending **-(a)ich** taking over, verbs of this nature aren't all that plentiful, but some of them are very common, so you have to know them. Here's a list of some of them:

root	independant	relative
bruidhinn	bruidhnidh	a bhruidhneas
fosgail	fosglaidh	a dh'fhosglas
foghain	fóghnaidh	a dh'fhóghnas
tachair	tachraidh	a thachras
tarraing	tàirnidh*	a thàirneas*
freagair	freagraidh	a dh'fhreagras
tagair	tagraidh	a thagras
bagair	bagraidh	a bhagras

*short for **tairngidh** and **tàirngeas** which (similar to **ingne > ine**) both shorten **-rng-** to [rŋ].

There are some apparent exceptions which aren't exceptions. Words like **tuirling** and **fulaing** don't do this kind of thing because the resulting consonant clusters are not permitted in Gaelic. **Tuirling** would yield ***tuirlingidh** and **fulaing** would give ***fulingidh**, but both **-ring-** and **-lng-** are impossible combinations (in Gaelic). Which is why understanding phonology is important.

Ok, here's the last leg: there are one or two oddballs. These are words like **innis** and **éirich**. **Innis** is simply odd and has **innsidh** and **a dh'innseas** as future forms.

Éirich is more interesting because it has **éiridh** and **a dh'éireas**. So how is that interesting? Because it is a form frozen in time. Those of you who have Irish whill know that the root form of verbs in Irish end in **-igh** such as **éirigh** (**éirich**), **giorraigh** (**giorraich**), **dealraigh** (**dealraich**) and so on. Which is what it used to be in Common Gaelic and Old Irish.

So you would have formed the future by making forms like **éirighfidh** (**-idh** is short for **-fhidh**). But we're digressing. In Common Gaelic (the predecessor of modern Scottish Gaelic) verbs ended in **-igh** too, but at some point Gaelic began to devoice final consonants (see [final devoicing](#)) so **-igh** [iɲ] became the more familiar **-ich** [-ix].

But now something interesting happens. Many languages undergo final devoicing at some stage, German for example where Tod "death" and tot "dead" are both pronounced the same: [tʰo:t], because Tod has undergone final devoicing. But when we add a suffix, for example a genitive ending, the d suddenly is voiced again Todes 'of death' [to:dəs]. Anyway, back to Gaelic. The same thing happens or rather used to happen here too.

So éirigh became éirich but reverted back to éirigh- when you stuck something onto it giving you éirighidh which then shortened to éiridh. Similarly, you would have heard a lot of forms like ceannaich + idh > ceannaidh and so on some time back - but that has since virtually disappeared, giving way to the regularised ceannaichidh. Except in a few cases where we get frozen forms like éiridh.

And that's it really.