

## Déan Moch-Éirigh Mhór or The Gender of Verbal Nouns

**Tha mi ag éirigh** - I'm getting up. I'm sure that is no obstacle to any of you. Nice and easy, a verb, subject and verbal noun. Very similar to the English structure which has a subject followed by a (present) participle. No big deal and they work in very similar ways in both languages.

So why use two different terms to describe them? Good question. It's a matter of perspective I suppose. In both languages you take a verb, add a suffix and you get a participle/verbal noun. The main difference is small - in Gaelic what you get after you add the suffix is strictly speaking simply a noun: **éirich** > **éirigh** 'a rising'. It is only by putting the preposition **a/ag** in front of it that it turns into a participle, whereas in English there is no need for this. You could call the verbal noun a noun and refer to anything with **a/ag** in front of it as a participle. It's just one of those things you have to accept.

Anyway. The more interesting question that poses itself once we have learnt that **éirigh** is a noun is what gender this noun has. In English this question doesn't arise for two reasons. For one thing, gender is almost entirely based on the actual gender of living things - a cat is either he or she depending on whether it's a boy cat or a girl cat. In any other circumstance you can always use the copout and refer to it as <it>. And the tiny number of nouns which are assigned a gender - boats are generally considered to be 'female'. Other than that, it's irrelevant. No lenition to look out for, no slenderisation after feminine nouns asnd all that.

But in Gaelic all nouns need their gender because you need to lenite after feminine nouns, slenderise in the dative and so on. So our verbal nouns need one too. Luckily, it's quite straightforward.

99% of verbal nouns follow the **caol = boireann, leathann = fireann** "rule" - so almost all verbal nouns ending in a slender vowel are feminine and almost all verbal nouns ending in a broad vowel are masculine. Looking at the suffix in question can help too, but since they generally conform with the **caol & leathann** rule, it's easier to simply memorise that rule.

Verb	Verbal Noun (masculine)	Verb	Verbal Noun (feminine)
leugh	a' leughadh	gabh	a' gabhail
buail	a' bualadh	ràn	a' rànaich
sgriobh	a' sgrìobhadh	tog	a' togail
smaoinich	a' smaoineachadh	leag	a' leagail
fàs	a' fàs	ràn	a' rànaich
sguir	a' sguir	itealaich	ag itealaich
rach	a' dol	saoil	a' saoilinn
feith	a' feitheamh	cluinn	a' cluinntinn
caith	a' caitheamh	faic	a' faicinn
déan	a' déanamh	buidhinn	a' buidhinn
abair	ag ràdh	seall	a' sealltainn
ceangail	a' ceangal	seinn	a' seinn
tuit	a' tuiteam	ruith	ag ruith
ceannaich	a' ceannach	éirich	ag éirigh
òl	ag òl	iomain	ag iomain
falbh	a' falbh	laigh	a' laighe*

cuir	a' cur	leig	a' leigeil
fuirich	a' fuireach	-	a' suirghe
iasgach	ag iasgach	bi	bith
caill	a' call	obair	ag obair
at	ag at	tarraing	a' tarraing
gluais	a' gluasad	labhair	a' labhairt
teagaisg	a' teagasg	thoir	a' toirt

Oddballs and exceptions? A few.

Verb	Verbal Noun (masculine)	Verb	Verbal Noun (feminine)
ith	ag ithe(adh)	éigh	ag éigheach
guidh	a' guidhe		ag éigheachd
suidh	a' suidhe	creach	a' creach
nigh	a' nighe	éisd	ag éisdeachd
laigh	a' laighe*	ceannaich	a' ceannachd
innis	ag innse(adh)	marcaich	a' marcachd
thig	a' tighinn		
beir	a' beirsinn		
iarr	ag iarraidh		

It's not as bad as it looks. Verbal nouns ending in **-(e)achd** are feminine, presumably because the the "gender strength" of suffixes overrides that of the **caol/leathann** rule. As in, if there is a gender marking suffix, the noun will have that suffix. Hence **Éisdeachd & Co.** are feminine.

**Creach** as a verbal noun perhaps is feminine because the corresponding noun is - anyway, one of those things that just have to be memorised. The masculine one's are a bit more tricky. The last three, **tighinn**, **beirsinn** and **iarraidh** are simply odd. Maybe there is a reason, but we don't know. Vocabulary work.

The others are even stranger. It *\*seems\** like most verbal nouns ending in **-e** are masculine, but there seems to be exceptions like **a' suirghe** and confused ones like **a' laighe** which can be either. Seeing there aren't that many of them, they are perhaps best learnt as vocabulary too.

So when or how do you use verbal nouns as nouns? They actually show up surprisingly often (or perhaps not so surprisingly, think of English expressions such as <drinking is a serious problem> <sleeping rough can cause headaches> and suchlike. Also, Gaelic sometimes uses verbal nouns where English uses a different construction as in the first example below:

rinn e moch éirigh mhór	he got up very early
bha éisteachd mhath againn	we had a good audience
'se an t-òl a chuir gu bàs e	it's the drinking that killed him
chan eil an fhaireachainn math idir	the feeling isn't good at all
tha sgrìobhadh math aice	she has good handwriting
cha b' e ruith ach leum	he/she jumped at it
bhiodh an t-iasgach na b' fheàrr ...	fishing used to be better