

In actual fact, you have chosen to learn a language with one of the most complex system of sonorants (L N and R) anywhere in the world. Daunting? Perhaps, but be proud of it. And it IS learnable, trust me.

But back to Imitated Pronunciation. Sometimes it works, say if you wanted to represent the sounds of Basque with Spanish syllables/letters. That is possible because there is a large number of sounds common to both languages. But you simply can't do that with English and Gaelic, the two are just too different. English doesn't have clear vowels, Gaelic does. English doesn't have a long/short vowel distinction, Gaelic does. English has one L, N and R, Gaelic has three each. English has two dental fricatives, neither of which is much help in Gaelic. English has a [w] which isn't any help because Gaelic doesn't ... it's a loooong list.

So using English sounds/syllables to create a system of Imitated Pronunciation is not going to work - <lap-ee> and <cheen> are as far removed from the Gaelic words **leabaidh** and **tighinn** as <sing> and <oftalmolodschist> are from <thing> and <ophthalmologist>.

So why the IPA? Haven't I enough to worry about?

Well, actually the IPA is there to help you make your life easier. And you don't have to learn all of it anyway, just the bits you need for Gaelic. It's as reliable tool as you will find in writing down the sounds of any language because it was developed by linguists to do just that. True, it's not 100% perfect, but what is?

So what do you need to know?

Well, as a general principle in the IPA (the International Phonetic Alphabet) the key principle is that one symbol stands for one sound. This sound can then be described in more detail by using a set of squiggles (or diacritics rather) which can sit over, under or behind a symbol. These are always smaller than a full symbol. That's it really for the general principle, let's look at the symbols and squiggles you will need for Gaelic (by the way, you don't have to learn the names of the symbols, the IPA is just a tool, not a purpose in itself):

Symbol	Name	Meaning & Usage	English Example	Gaelic Example
ː	vowel length	placed after a vowel symbol it shows that this vowel is long	grɪːn green	kaːr càr
~	tilde	placed over a vowel to show it is nasal in quality	-	ʃɛ̃v sèimh
̃	tilde	placed through a consonant, it shows that this consonant is velarised, i.e. your velum is lowered.	-	ãũ̃ ann
̪	dental sign	placed under a consonant it shows that this sound is made with your tongue touching your teeth.	-	ãũ̪̃ ann
ˈ	apostrophe	placed before a syllable it shows that this syllables carries primary stress	pəˈmɪt permit	əˈmɑx a-mach

	superscript h	placed either before or after a consonant it shows that slight aspiration either precedes or follows a consonant. After word initial stops like p, t, k etc ^h is generally not written because these sounds are automatically aspirated both in Gaelic and in English when they appear at the beginning of a word. So you will only see them at the beginning of a word in the two examples on the right.	p ^h ə'mɪt permit	k ^h u ^h pə cupa
h				
j	superscript j	placed after a consonant it shows that this consonant is palatalised, i.e. your tongue is touching your palate during articulation	-	d̪ʲian dèan
.	fullstop	placed between two vowels it shows that these vowels do not form a diphthong and belong to the same syllable, but rather that they are two separate vowels belonging to two different syllables	sɪː.iːɡl sea-eagle	fɪ.əx fitheach
◦	hollow circle	placed over or under a consonant this shows that the consonant is devoiced, i.e. has no voicing anymore. See Guide to Voicing	-	ɡ̊ə gu
i	high front vowel	as in English	sɪː sea	bɪ bi
e	mid high front vowel	as in English	peɪd paid	le le
ɛ	mid low front vowel	as in English	bɛt bet	kɛ ^h t̪ cait
a	low front vowel	as in English	ɡaɪ guy	aran aran
ɔ	mid low back vowel	as in English (but short)	θɔː thaw	ʃɔ seo
o	mid high back vowel	the so called "close o" (occurs in Scots, but only as a long vowel)	soː so (Scots)	fo fo
ɤ	mid high back unrounded vowel	see Fuaimreagan	-	ɡɤd̪ ^j goid
u	back high vowel	as in English (but short)	ʃuː shoe	ɸus bus
ʊ	back high unrounded vowel	see Fuaimreagan	-	kʊːt̪ caol