
Declension of nouns and adjectives

These notes give a general overview of regularly and irregularly-declined nouns and adjectives. More detailed descriptions can be found in *An Caighdeán Oifigiúil*, *Graiméar Gaeilge na mBráithre Críostaí* and other grammars, and detailed information of their various inflected forms can be found in the grammar files on www.teanglann.ie, which also features a Grammar Wizard that matches any noun with a preposition and/or adjective and automatically generates the correct standard inflections.

Nouns and adjectives in Irish generally fall within declensions, which are essentially formulae or sets of rules which set out how they change according to their grammatical context. There are five declensions for nouns and three for adjectives in Irish, and nouns or adjectives which don't conform to any declension are described as irregular. In this dictionary, nouns and adjectives are categorised by declension according to Ó Dónaill's *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* (1977), the last major Irish-English dictionary to be published and the primary reference source for Irish orthography.

A. NOUNS

Nouns in Irish have four main forms: nominative singular, genitive singular, nominative plural and genitive plural. The declension to which a noun belongs is based on how that noun changes from nominative singular to genitive singular:

- 1st Declension, the final consonant is slenderised;
- 2nd Declension, the ending changes to *-e* or *-(a)í*;
- 3rd Declension, the ending changes to *-a*;
- 4th Declension, there is no change from nominative to genitive;
- 5th Declension, the ending of the word changes to a broad consonant.

While some word endings in a given declension may indicate what plural forms a noun might have, it is often impossible to reliably predict the plural forms of nouns and it is advised to check sources such as www.teanglann.ie, www.tearma.ie or *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* where all forms of nouns are to be found.

Strong and weak plurals:

- If a noun has the same form in both nominative and genitive plural (for example *dánta* > *dánta*, *oifigí* > *oifigí*, *cluichí* > *cluichí*), it is called a strong plural.
- If a noun has different forms in the nominative and genitive plural (for example *focail* > *focal*, *fuinneoga* > *fuinneog*), it is called a weak plural. Except for a few irregular nouns that don't belong to a declension, the genitive plural form of weak plurals is the same as the nominative singular.

First declension (marked 'm1' in this dictionary)

First declension nouns are masculine and their nominative singular form ends in a broad consonant. Such nouns are declined as follows:

- The genitive singular is formed by slenderising the final consonant: *gluaisteán* > *gluaistédín* (*an gluaisteán* > *tiománaí an ghluaistédín*); *airgead* > *airgid* (*an t-airgead* > *fear an airgid*).
- The endings *-ach*, *-each* and *-íoch* become *-aigh*, *-igh* and *-ígh* respectively in the genitive singular: *oileánach* > *oileánaigh* (*an t-oileánach* > *scéal an oileánaigh*); *Taoiseach* > *Taoisigh* (*an Taoiseach* > *óráid an Taoisigh*); *coimhthíoch* > *coimhthígh* (*an coimhthíoch* > *teanga an choimhthígh*).
- The nominative plural is sometimes formed by slenderising the final consonant or by adding *-a* to the singular form: *an caisleán* > *na caisleáin*; *an cleas* > *na cleasa*. These are weak plurals: *na caisleáin* > *stair na gcaisleán*; *na cleasa* > *Cú na gCleas*.

- The nominative plural may also be formed with endings such as *-anna* (*carr* > *carranna*); *-ta* (*díon* > *díonta*); *-tha* (*glór* > *glórtha*) and *-aí* (*éadach* > *éadaí*). These are strong plurals: *na carranna* > *luach na gcarranna*; *na díonta* > *os cionn na ndíonta*; *na glórtha* > *fuaime na nglórtha*; *na héadaí* > *dath na n-éadaí*.
- The first declension contains a number of nouns with irregular plurals, e.g. *bóthar* > *bóithre*, *doras* > *doirse*, *smaoineamh* > *smaointe*. These are generally strong plurals.

Second declension (marked 'f2' or 'm2' in this dictionary)

Second declension nouns are feminine (except *im*, *sliabh*). Their nominative singular form ends in a consonant which may be broad or slender. Such nouns are declined as follows:

- The genitive singular is sometimes formed by adding *-e* to the end of the nominative singular, slenderising the final consonant if required: *cistin* > *cistine* (*an chistin* > *doras na cistine*); *bialann* > *bialainne* (*an bhiann* > *bainisteoir na bialainne*).
- Multisyllabic nouns ending in *-ach* and *-each* change to *-aí* and *-í* respectively in the genitive singular: *gealach* > *gealaí* (*an ghealach* > *solas na gealaí*); *báisteach* > *báistí* (*an bháisteach* > *torann na báistí*);
- Nominative plurals formed by adding *-a* are weak plurals: *na bróga* > *luach na mbróg*; *na leabharlanna* > *foireann na leabharlann*;
- Strong plurals include those ending in *-í*, *-anna*, *-ta*, *-te* and *-tha*: *na habairtí* > *fad na n-abairtí*; *na duaiseanna* > *coiste na nduaiseanna*; *na tonnta* > *neart na dtonnta*; *na coillte* > *lucht na gcoillte*; *na tíortha* > *stair na dtíortha*.
- The second declension includes a number of nouns with irregular plurals, e.g. *scian* > *sceana*; *culaith* > *cultacha*. These are generally strong plurals.

Third declension (marked 'f3' or 'm3' in this dictionary)

The third declension includes both masculine and feminine nouns, all of which end with a consonant. Such nouns are declined as follows:

- The genitive singular is formed by adding *-a* to the end of the nominative singular, broadening the final consonant if required: *gleann* > *gleanna* (*an gleann* > *muintir an ghleanna*); *feoil* > *feola* (*an fheoil* > *blas na feola*).
- Personal nouns describing a person's work, role, character, etc are masculine and have strong plurals ending in *-í*: *druncaeir(i)*, *baincéir(i)*, *leisceoir(i)*, *moltóir(i)*, *dochtúir(i)*.
- As a general rule, monosyllabic nouns with a broad ending are masculine (*am*, *bláth*, *ceacht*, etc) and nouns with slender endings are feminine (*altóir*, *bliain*, *cuid*, etc).
- Multisyllabic words ending in *-(e)acht* and *-(a)íocht* are feminine and have strong plurals ending in *-aí*: *scoláireacht(aí)*, *eolaíocht(aí)*.
- Compound words such as *bunreacht*, *comhlacht* and *gnólacht* are masculine because they are formed from the monosyllabic masculine nouns *reacht* and *lucht*.

Fourth declension (marked 'f4' or 'm4' in this dictionary)

The fourth declension contains mostly masculine but also some feminine nouns. Almost all end in a vowel or the suffix *-ín*. Such nouns are declined as follows:

- Nouns retain their singular and plural forms in both nominative and genitive cases: *ministir* > *ministir* (*an ministir* > *teach an mhinistir*); *uisce* > *uisce* (*an t-uisce* > *tobar an uisce*); *eolaithe* > *eolaithe* (*na heolaithe* > *obair na n-eolaithe*); *oibrithe* > *oibrithe* (*na hoibrithe* > *urlabhraí na n-oibrithe*).
- All nouns have strong plurals.

Fifth declension (marked 'f5' or 'm5' in this dictionary)

The fifth declension contains, with a few exceptions, feminine nouns which end in a slender consonant or vowel. Such nouns are declined as follows:

- In the genitive singular, nouns are given broad endings such as *-ach*, *-d*, *-(n)n* or *-r*: *beoir* > *beorach* (*an bheoir* > *blas na beorach*); *namhaid* > *namhad* (*an namhaid* > *fórsaí an namhad*); *Albain* > *Rialtas na hAlban*; *athair* > *athar* (*an t-athair* > *tréithe an athar*).
- Plurals are strong with the exception of *caora*, *faocha* and *lacha*: *na caoirigh* > *Gleann na gCaorach*; *na faochain* > *fear díolta na bhfaochan*; *na lachain* > *nead na lachan*.
- Some personal nouns are masculine, i.e. *athair*, *bráthair*, *cara*, *deartháir*, *namhaid*.

Irregular nouns

The following nouns are to some degree outside of the traditional five declensions. Although full declensions are given here, *im* and *olann* are not commonly used in the plural.

Nominative singular	Genitive singular	Nominative plural	Genitive plural
bean	mná	mná	ban
bó	bó	ba	bó
deoch	dí	deochanna	deochanna
dia	dé	déithe	déithe
im	ime	imeanna	imeanna
lá	lae	laethanta	laethanta
leaba	leapa	leapacha	leapacha
mí	míosa	míonna	míonna
olann	olla	olanna	olann
talamh	talaimh (masc) OR talún (fem)	tailte	tailte
teach	tí	tithe	tithe

B. ADJECTIVES

Adjectives in Irish have four main forms: nominative singular [*sing*], genitive singular masculine [*gsm*], genitive singular feminine [*gsf*], and plural [*plur*]. The declension to which an adjective belongs is based on how that adjective inflects in these four forms. The adjective agrees with its noun in case and number, i.e. if its noun is feminine and in the genitive singular, the adjective is accordingly in the genitive singular feminine form, etc.

First Declension (marked ‘a1’ in this dictionary): the adjective ends on a consonant and is inflected along one of the following patterns:

	<i>sing</i>	<i>gsm</i>	<i>gsf</i>	<i>plur</i>
a.	bán	báin	báine	bána
b.	glic	glic	glice	glice
c.	cleasach	cleasaigh	cleasaí	cleasacha

Second Declension (marked ‘a2’ in this dictionary): the adjective ends on *-(i)úil* and is inflected along the following pattern:

<i>sing</i>	<i>gsm</i>	<i>gsf</i>	<i>plur</i>
misniúil	misniúil	misniúla	misniúla

Third Declension (marked ‘a3’ in this dictionary): the adjective ends on a vowel and doesn’t change:

<i>sing</i>	<i>gsm</i>	<i>gsf</i>	<i>plur</i>
cliste	cliste	cliste	cliste

Irregular Adjectives (marked ‘adj’ in this dictionary): Any adjective which does not conform to any of the above patterns is deemed to be irregular, however a significant number of these irregular adjectives are similar to the First Declension except that they remain unchanged in the genitive singular masculine. These include all adjectives ending on a long vowel or diphthong followed by *-ch* (*-ách*, *-aech*, *-éach*, *-iach*, *-íoch*, *-uach*, etc); and many monosyllabic adjectives ending in a broad consonant, including *beacht*, *cúng*, *deas*, *docht*, *fann*, *fionn*, *fliuch*, *gann*, *gearr*, *mall*, *mear*, *moch*, *nocht*, *trom* and *tur*:

<i>sing</i>	<i>gsm</i>	<i>gsf</i>	<i>plur</i>
lách	lách	láiche	lácha
buíoch	buíoch	buíche	buíocha
deas	deas	deise	deasa
trom	trom	troime	troma

Adjectives qualifying weak and strong plurals

- Adjectives qualifying strong plurals also take the same form in both nominative and genitive plural: *na dánta luatha* > *foilsíú na ndánta luatha*, *na hoifigí gnóthacha* > *foireann na n-oifigí gnóthacha*, *na cluichí móra* > *torthaí na gcluichí móra*.
- Adjectives qualifying weak plurals have a plural form in the nominative case and revert to their nominative singular form in the genitive plural: *na focail shuimiúla* > *brí na bhfocal suimiúil*, *na fuinneoga móra* > *gloine na bhfuinneog mór*, *na saothair luatha* > *foilsíú na saothar luath*.

C. EXEMPLAR TABLES OF NOUNS AND ADJECTIVES TOGETHER

1) Nouns in the First Declension and accompanying adjectives

Strong plurals:

Nominative singular	Genitive singular	Nominative plural	Genitive plural
an cogadh mór	cúiseanna an chogaidh mhóir	na cogaí móra	cúiseanna na gcogaí móra
an samhradh fada	teas an tsamhraidh fhada	na samhraí fada	teas na samhraí fada

Weak plurals:

Nominative singular	Genitive singular	Nominative plural	Genitive plural
an leabhar cáiliúil	údar an leabhair cháiliúil	na leabhair cháiliúla	údar na leabhar cáiliúil
an t-éan beag	canadh an éin bhig	na héin bheaga	canadh na n-éan beag
an clár conspóideach	ábhar an chláir chonspóidigh	na cláir chonspóideacha	ábhar na gclár conspóideach

2) Nouns in the Second Declension and accompanying adjectives

Strong plurals:

Nominative singular	Genitive singular	Nominative plural	Genitive plural
an lámhscríbhinn cháiliúil	stair na lámhscríbhinne cáiliúla	na lámhscríbhinní cáiliúla	stair na lámhscríbhinní cáiliúla
an earráid bheag	cúis na hearráide bige	na hearráidí beaga	cúiseanna na n-earráidí beaga
an cheist chonspóideach	freagra na ceiste conspóidí	na ceisteanna conspóideacha	freagraí na gceisteanna conspóideacha
an tsráid fhada	ar feadh na sráide fada	na sráideanna fada	ar feadh na sráideanna fada

Weak plurals:

Nominative singular	Genitive singular	Nominative plural	Genitive plural
an bhróg bhog	bonn na bróige boige	na bróga boga	boinn na mbróg bog
an chlárseach bhinn	ceol na cláirsí binne	na clárseacha binne	ceol na gclárseach binn
an chartlann chlúiteach	catalog na cartlainne clúití	na cartlanna clúiteacha	cataloga na gcartlann clúiteach
an fhuinneog mhór	gloine na fuinneoige móire	na fuinneoga móra	gloine na bhfuinneog mór

3) Nouns in the Third Declension and accompanying adjectives*All strong plurals:*

Nominative singular	Genitive singular	Nominative plural	Genitive plural
an léachtóir cáiliúil (masc)	saothar an léachtóra cháiliúil	na léachtóirí cáiliúla	saothar na léachtóirí cáiliúla
an bhanríon cháiliúil (fem)	saol na banríona cáiliúla	na banríonacha cáiliúla	saol na mbanríonacha cáiliúla
an t-eas beag (masc)	torann an easa bhig	na heasanna beaga	torann na n-easanna beaga
an eagraíocht bheag (fem)	obair na heagraíochta bige	na heagraíochtaí beaga	obair na n-eagraíochtaí beaga
an cainteoir conspóideach (masc)	óráid an chainteora chonspóidigh	na cainteoirí conspóideacha	óráidí na gcainteoirí conspóideacha
an chomhdháil chonspóideach (fem)	i ndiaidh na comhdhála conspóidí	na comhdhálacha conspóideacha	i ndiaidh na gcomhdhálacha conspóideacha
an gleann mór (masc)	dúiche an ghleanna mhóir	na gleannta móra	dúiche na ngleannta móra
an ghluaiseacht mhór (fem)	ceannairí na gluaiseachta móire	na gluaiseachtaí móra	ceannairí na ngluaiseachtaí móra
an sos fada (masc)	le linn an tsosa fhada	na sosanna fada	le linn na sosanna fada
an tseanmóir fhada (fem)	téacs na seanmóra fada	na seanmóirí fada	téacs na seanmóirí fada

4) Nouns in the Fourth Declension and accompanying adjectives

All strong plurals:

Nominative singular	Genitive singular	Nominative plural	Genitive plural
an dráma cáiliúil (masc)	údar an dráma cháiliúil	na drámaí cáiliúla	údar na ndrámaí cáiliúla
an dúiche cháiliúil (fem)	stair na dúiche cáiliúla	na dúichí cáiliúla	stair na ndúichí cáiliúla
an t-asailín beag (masc)	cró an asailín bhig	na hasailíní beaga	cró na n-asailíní beaga
an aiste bheag (fem)	ag scríobh na haiste bige	na haistí beaga	ag scríobh na n-aistí beaga
an cluiche conspóideach (masc)	tar éis an chluiche chonspóidigh	na cluichí conspóideacha	tar éis na gcluichí conspóideacha
an chuideachta chonspóideach (fem)	stiúrthóir na cuideachta conspóidí	na cuideachtaí conspóideacha	stiúrthóirí na gcuideachtaí conspóideacha
an féasta mór (masc)	le linn an fhéasta mhóir	na féastaí móra	le linn na bhféastaí móra
an fharraige mhór (fem)	trasna na farraige móire	na farraigí móra	trasna na bhfarraigí móra
an slabhra fada (masc)	ag tarraingt an tslabhra fhada	na slabhraí fada	ag tarraingt na slabhraí fada
an tsleá fhada (fem)	ag caitheamh na sleá fada	na sleánna fada	ag caitheamh na sleánna fada

5) Nouns in the Fifth Declension and accompanying adjectives

All strong plurals:

Nominative singular	Genitive singular	Nominative plural	Genitive plural
an litir cháiliúil	dáta na litreach cáiliúla	na litreacha cáiliúla	dátaí na litreacha cáiliúla
an abhainn bheag	timpeall na habhann bige	na haibhneacha beaga	timpeall na n-aibhneacha beaga
an cháin chonspóideach	bailiú na cánach conspóidí	na cánacha conspóideacha	bailiú na gcánacha conspóideacha
an mhonarcha mhór	foireann na monarchan móire	na monarchana móra	foireann na monarchana móra

Nominative singular	Genitive singular	Nominative plural	Genitive plural
an tseanchathair stairiúil	ballaí na seanchathrach stairiúla	na seanchathracha stairiúla	ballaí na seanchathracha stairiúla
an cara maith	tréithe an charad mhaith	na cairde maithe	tréithe na gcairde maithe
an namhaid fíochmhar	ionsaí an namhad fhíochmhair	na naimhde fíochmhara	ionsaí na naimhde fíochmhara

6) Irregular nouns and accompanying adjectives

Nominative singular	Genitive singular	Nominative plural	Genitive plural
an bhean shaibhir	scéal na mná saibhre	na mná saibhre	scéal na mban saibhir
an bhó bhradach	nós na bó bradaí	na ba bradacha	nós na mbó bradach
an deoch dheireanach	ag ól na dí deireanaí	na deochanna deireanacha	ag ól na ndeochanna deireanacha
an dia bréagach	íomhá an dé bhréagaigh	na déithe bréagacha	íomhánna na ndéithe bréagacha
an lá fada	i ndiaidh an lae fhada	na laethanta fada	i ndiaidh na laethanta fada
an leaba chúng	faoi bhun na leapa cúinge	na leapacha cúnga	faoi bhun na leapacha cúnga
an mhí fhuar	le linn na míosa fuaire	na míonna fuara	le linn na míonna fuara
an olann mhín	luach na holla míne	na holanna míne	luach na n-olann mín
an talamh bocht	ag saothrú an talaimh bhoicht OR ag saothrú na talún boichte	na tailte bochta	ag saothrú na dtailte bochta
an teach mór	muintir an tí mhóir	na tithe móra	muintir na dtithe móra