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A Pronunciation Guide To The Danish Alphabet

With a little practice, you'll be pronouncing Danish words like a natural.

By Thomas Moore Devlin | July 20, 2022



The alphabet presents you with the building blocks of language. It's a bit strange, then, that we often skip the alphabet when we're learning a new language, especially if the alphabet looks similar enough to the one we already know. Slowing down and learning the Danish alphabet first, however, is a way to save yourself a lot of headaches down the line. By learning all the letters and their various pronunciations, you'll be far more prepared to speak Danish with confidence.

To get you started, we put together this guide to the Danish alphabet. We'll cover the pronunciation of the letters that are most likely to trip you up, with examples of each of them in context.

The Danish Alphabet

The Danish alphabet has 29 letters. It has all 26 that English has, plus three extra vowels. If you learn best through song, you can also try this [alphabet song](#).

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z Æ Ø Å

Notable is that while C, Q, W, X and Z are part of the alphabet, these letters only appear in loanwords. Diacritics also aren't very common in Danish, though you may see the acute accent (á, é, etc.) from time to time to indicate stress.

Danish Vowels

Vowels are more than half the battle when it comes to learning the Danish alphabet. Each vowel has two pronunciations: long and short. When the vowel comes before two or more consonants in a row (and sometimes at the end of a word), it's pronounced short. Otherwise, it's long. Here, we'll go through the pronunciation of each of the vowels.

A

- The letter A is pronounced differently depending on what letter follows it. If it's followed by a K, M, P, R, U or NG, it sounds like the "a" in "car."
 - ▶ *en **far**far* — a grandfather
 - ▶ *en **st**ang* — a poll
 - ▶ *en **b**akke* — a hill
- If the letter A comes before a D, L, N, S or T, it sounds more like the "e" in "bed."
 - ▶ ***d**ansk* — Danish
 - ▶ *en **n**at* — a night
 - ▶ *en **a**ssistent* — an assistant
- When the letter combination AF appears at the beginning of the word as a prefix, they combine to form a sound like the "ow" in "brown." If they appear in the middle or at the end of a word, they are pronounced separately.
 - ▶ *at **a**fslutte* — to finish
 - ▶ *en **a**ften* — an evening [not a prefix]
 - ▶ *en **k**raft* — power

- The letter combination AG has two pronunciations. At the end of a word or before a vowel, it sounds like the “ay” in “hay.” Before a consonant, it sounds like the “ow” in “brown.”
 - ► **et tag** — a roof
 - ► **at bage** — to bake
 - ► **en dagbog** — a diary
- The letter combo AJ usually sounds like the “uy” in “buy.”
 - ► **maj** — May
 - ► **en kaj** — a wharf
- At the end of a word or before a consonant, the letter combo AV sounds like the “ow” in “brown.”
 - ► **København** — Copenhagen
 - ► **et hav** — a sea
- If AV appears before a vowel, there are two ways to pronounce it. The A always sounds like the “e” in “bed,” but the V can sound either like the “v” in “ever” or like the “w” in “award.”
 - ► **en gave** — a gift [Pronunciation 1]
 - ► **en gave** — a gift [Pronunciation 2]

E

- The long E — the E before single consonants — doesn’t exist in English. One approximation is the “a” in “male,” pronounced while smiling. At the end of words or before a soft D, the long E is slightly shortened.
 - ► **et diskotek** — a club
 - ► **en te** — a tea
- The short E, pronounced before two or more consonants, is not as difficult. It sounds like the “e” in “end.”
 - ► **ekstra** — extra
 - ► **en eftermiddag** — an afternoon
- At the end of a word, the E sounds like the “er” in “closer,” but is a little bit shorter.
 - ► **et hjælpe** — to help
- In words that end with -en or -em, the E is almost entirely silent.
 - ► **klokken** — clock
- The letter combos EJ and EG usually sound like the “uy” in “buy.”
 - ► **hej** — hi
 - ► **at sejle** — to sail
 - ► **jeg** — I

I

- A long I sounds like the “ee” in “knee.”
 - ▶ *at lide* — to like
 - ▶ *en bil* — a car
- When a word ends with -ig, -ik, -it, -lig, -tig or -i, the I sound is shortened.
 - ▶ *en politik* — politics
 - ▶ *en bandit* — a bandit
- The short I in Danish has no English equivalent, but it sounds kind of like the “e” in “egg.”
 - ▶ *ikke* — not
 - ▶ *briller* — glasses

O

- A long O is pronounced like the “o” in “most.”
 - ▶ *en kone* — a wife
 - ▶ *en skole* — a school
- A short O sounds like the “o” in “odd.”
 - ▶ *en sommer* — summer
 - ▶ *en blomst* — a flower
- When an O appears at the end of a word, it sounds like a long O, but it’s shortened.
 - ▶ *at bo* — to live
 - ▶ *to* — two
- The letter combos OG and OV both create a diphthong that sounds like the “o” in “throw,” followed by the “u” in “unlikely.”
 - ▶ *en bog* — a book
 - ▶ *over* — over

U

- A long U is pronounced like the “u” in “rude.”
 - ▶ *et hus* — a house
 - ▶ *du* — you
- Though there is no exact English equivalent, the short U sounds somewhat like the “o” in “rob.”
 - ▶ *under* — under
 - ▶ *et tyggegummi* — chewing gum

Æ

- There's no exact English equivalent, but the Æ sounds kind of like the "e" in "end," except your mouth should be opened wider to pronounce it.
 - ▶ **et hjælpe** — to help
 - ▶ **et æg** — an egg
- When the letter Æ appears in front of an R, it sounds more like the "a" in "care."
 - ▶ **et bærr** — a berry
 - ▶ **ærlig** — honest

Ø

- The long Ø is another vowel that doesn't exist in English, but it sounds kind of like the "u" in "hurt." To make it more accurate, pronounce that vowel and round your lips, pulling them inwards.
 - ▶ **at køre** — to drive
 - ▶ **at købe** — to buy
- A short Ø sounds like the "i" in "bird."
 - ▶ **at svømme** — to swim
 - ▶ **en søndag** — sunday
- At the end of a word, the Danish Ø sounds like a shortened version of the long Ø.
 - ▶ **en kø** — a line
- A short Ø followed by a J or an ØG letter combo both sound like the "oy" in "boy."
 - ▶ **en løjpe** — a cross-country ski run
 - ▶ **røget** — smoked

Å

- A long Å sounds like the "o" in "open."
 - ▶ **at få** — to receive
 - ▶ **en dåse** — a can
- A short Å sounds like the "u" in "up."
 - ▶ **at måtte** — to have to
 - ▶ **et bånd** — a band
- When Å appears before an R, it is longer than usual and sounds like the "o" in "rose."
 - ▶ **et får** — a sheep
 - ▶ **dårlig** — bad

Y

- The long Y doesn't have an exact English equivalent, but sounds kind of like the "oo" in "hoop." To get closer to the Danish pronunciation, say the "oo" sound while moving your lips slightly upward.
 - ▶ **ny** — new
 - ▶ **tyve** — tyve
- The short Y sounds like the "oo" in "look."
 - ▶ **et smykke** — a piece of jewelry
 - ▶ **at synge** — to sing

Danish Consonants

The consonants aren't quite as complex as the vowels, but there are still some difficult parts. Here, we focus on the hardest consonants to show you the various ways they can be pronounced.

D

- When it appears at the beginning of a word or before a stressed vowel, the Danish D sounds like the "d" in "dark."
 - ▶ **at danse** — to danse
 - ▶ **en idé** — an idea
- When the letter D (or doubled DD) appears after a stressed syllable, it's a soft D. It sounds more like the English TH sound.
 - ▶ **hvad** — what
 - ▶ **at hedde** — to be called
- When it appears after an L, N or R or before a T or S, the Danish D is generally silent.
 - ▶ **en mand** — a man
 - ▶ **pludselig** — suddenly

G

- At the beginning of a word or when doubled (GG), the Danish G sounds like the "g" in "good."
 - ▶ **godt** — good
 - ▶ **at ligge** — to lie down
- When G is after a long vowel, it's silent.
 - ▶ **søndag** — Sunday

- ▶ **at besøge** — to visit
- When G comes after an O or Å, it sometimes becomes a diphthong. See the relevant vowels in the above section for more details.

HV and HJ

- The letter combo HV appears only at the beginning of Danish words. The H is silent and the V sounds like the “v” in “very.”
 - ▶ **hvad** — what
 - ▶ **en hval** — a whale
- HJ also appears only at the beginning of words. The H is once again silent, and the J sounds like the “y” in “year.”
 - ▶ **et hjul** — a wheel
 - ▶ **en hjerne** — a brain

J

- The letter J at the beginning of a word or before a vowel sounds like the “y” in “you.”
 - ▶ **jeg** — I
 - ▶ **fjorten** — fourteen
- In certain loanwords, the letter J will sound like the “j” in “just.”
 - ▶ **jazz** — jazz
- When the letter J appears after an A or E it forms a diphthong. Scroll up to those vowels for more details.

K

- The letter K sounds like the first “k” in “kick.”
 - ▶ **tak** — thanks
 - ▶ **at komme** — to come
- A double KK has a softer pronunciation, like the “k” in “snooker.”
 - ▶ **ikke** — not
 - ▶ **en bakke** — a hill

P

- At the beginning or end of words, P sounds like the “p” in “pocket.”
 - ▶ **et posthus** — a post office
 - ▶ **en kop** — a cup

- In the middle of a word or doubled (PP), P sounds like the “b” in “bear.”

- ▶ *en lam**pe*** — a lamp

- ▶ *en tra**ppe*** — a staircase

R

- At the beginning of a word, at the beginning of a syllable or after a consonant, the R is pronounced in a way unlike anything in English. It is slightly rolled.

- ▶ *en **regn*** — rain

- ▶ *en **frisør*** — a hairdresser

- When R appears after a vowel, it extends the vowel sound.

- ▶ *en **torsk*** — a codfish

- ▶ *et **får*** — a sheep

- When a word ends with ER, it sounds like the “o” in “oven.”

- ▶ *en **datter*** — a daughter

- ▶ *en **lærer*** — a teacher

T

- At the beginning or end of a word, the T is pronounced like the “t” in “tall.”

- ▶ ***tyve*** — twenty

- ▶ *en **hat*** — a hat

- In the middle of a word or when doubled (TT), the T sounds more like the “d” in “bad.”

- ▶ *et **teater*** — a theater

- ▶ ***nitten*** — nineteen

V

- The V at the beginning of a word sounds like the “v” in “very.”

- ▶ ***vi*** — we

- ▶ ***venstre*** — left

- After an L, the V is silent.

- ▶ ***halv*** — half

- ▶ *et **gulv*** — a floor

Glottal Stops

- In the northern part of Denmark, there’s something called the *stød*. It’s a glottal stop, which is rarely used in English. You can hear a glottal stop in the middle of “nuh-uh”

(the informal way of saying “no”). There’s no exact rule for using the glottal stop, but it can be heard by some Danish speakers in several words.

- ▶ *lang* — long
- ▶ *hun maler* — she paints
- ▶ *en hund* — a dog

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