



# Strong verb conjugation

Though textbooks usually provide a list of the strong verb classes and their respective vowel gradation, they don't normally come with an easy way of checking whether you have mastered the art of reconstructing a full paradigm. 198 full conjugations can be found in Sean Crist's inflection lists, which I am in the process of proofreading and have provided with an html interface [here](#). This page constitutes another aid, essentially a checklist of things to keep in mind while conjugating Old Norse verbs—or conversely, to bring an inflected form back to its infinitive.

The problem of conjugation is threefold: you will need to find the form of the stem, that of the ending, and any variation (phonological or lexical). The endings are consistent, so they provide little difficulty. Variation within verb classes is the most problematic, but this is largely a lexical issue that will have to be learned along with individual words. The first thing to be tackled is the stem.

## Stems

Given the infinitive or an inflected form of a strong verb, the first thing to check is the class to which it belongs. A number of clues are available to this end. These may be summarised as follows:

<i>class</i>	<i>first</i>	<i>fronted</i>	<i>second</i>	<i>third</i>	<i>fronted</i>	<i>fourth</i>
1	í		ei	i		i
2	jú (jó)	ý	au (ó)	u	y	o
3	eCC (iCC)		aCC	uCC	yCC	uCC (oCC)
4	e		a	á	æ	o
5	e (i)		a (á)	á	æ	e
6	a	e	ó	ó	œ	a (e)
7	X	X-fronted	Y	Y	Y-fronted	X

This table lists the characteristic stem vowels of each of the principal parts of the strong verb, namely (1) infinitive, (2) singular preterite, (3) plural preterite, and (4) past participle. The greyed-out columns demonstrate not further principal parts, but the *i*-mutated realisations of the vowels in the first and third principal parts respectively. It is important to realise that the first of these mutations (found in the singular forms of the present indicative) only applies to three classes at most: classes II and VI have a back vowel in their first principal parts, and most subtypes of class VII do, but all the rest have front vowels there, normally *i*, *e*, or *i*. However, the second fronting in the paradigm (found throughout the preterite subjunctive) applies to most strong verbs, as only class I and most of class VII already have a front vowel in their third principal part. This leads to our first rule of reconstruction:

1. An infinitive or present tense form with a back vowel in the stem can only be class II, VI, or VII, or weak.

However, present indicative singular forms are slightly less reliable as clues to class:

2. Present indicative singular forms always have a front vowel. If the infinitive has a back vowel, it here appears fronted by regular *i*-mutation.

The *CC* following the vowel in class III represents two consonants, which may or may not be identical. Such a configuration is optional in class VII. This contrasts with classes I, II, and IV–VI, which normally have a single consonant following their stem vowel in all the forms of the verb (not counting a second consonant *j* or *v*). However, there are two exceptions to this rule: gemination and the nasal infix. In verbs, gemination, or the doubling of a consonant, is mostly limited to *g* if preceded by a short vowel and followed by *j*. The only strong instances of this are *liggja* (V "lie, rest") and *þiggja* (V "receive, accept") (the defective and rare verb *gyggja* "lose courage" left aside), and these actually behave like weak class 1a in the present tense (in that they retain their *-j-* before *a* or *u*). The resulting double consonant occurs throughout the present system (including imperative and present participle) but disappears in the preterite and the past participle. Though gemination also takes place for *k* under the same and similar circumstances, this is less common in verbs; when *kk* occurs, this is more commonly a result of assimilation from *nk*. In strong verbs, *kk* is limited to class III (*drekkja* "drink", *stökkva* "jump"). Both gemination and *nk*-assimilation are more common in weak verbs (*þyggja* 1a "think", *slökkva* "extinguish" 1b). However, the strong forms *hoggva* (VII "strike"), *hnoggva* (defective "strike"), and *-ggva* variants on *-ggja* verbs must also be taken into account. The nasal infix is an *-n-* occurring either before or after the regular stem consonant throughout the present conjugation of such verbs as *fregna* (V) and *standa* (VI). We may thus construct the following rule:

3. A verb whose stem vowel is followed by two consonants (not counting any forms including *j*, *v*, gemination, or a nasal infix) is probably class III, VII, or weak.

The stem vowels of the preterite indicative abide by the following rules:

4. Classes I–IV and usually class V have two different stem vowels in the preterite indicative: one for the singulars, one for the plurals.
5. Classes VI and VII always have the same stem vowel across the preterite indicative.
6. All classes except I and usually except VII have back vowels across the preterite indicative.

Subjunctives only have one stem vowel per tense, which may be found as follows:

7. The stem vowel of the present subjunctive is always identical to that of the infinitive.
8. The stem vowel of the preterite subjunctive is the *i*-mutated form (see vowel diagram) of the preterite indicative plural forms, or identical with the preterite indicative plural vowel if it is already a front vowel (namely in class I and mostly in class VII).

The following rules hold true of the past participle:

9. In classes V–VII, the stem vowel of the past participle is normally identical to that of the infinitive.
10. Classes II–IV have a rounded back vowel (*o* for II and IV, *u* or *o* for III).

And the imperatives are formed as follows:

11. All three imperatives use the infinitive stem, without *i*-mutation (but with labial mutation where applicable).

## Inflectional endings

As indicated above, the personal endings are regular across the classes. In the present tense, they are in fact identical to those of the weak verbs, with the one difference that strong verbs have no thematic vowels, so the endings are immediately joined to the stem. Preterite endings are different for strong verbs, following these rules:

1. First and third person singular have a zero ending (i.e. they end in the root-final consonant: *bar*, *fór*).
2. Second person singular adds *-t* to the stem: *bart*, *fórt*.
3. Plurals take the endings *-um*, *-uð*, *-u*.
4. Past participles end in *-in* plus gender-suffix *n* (from *r*), zero, or *t*.
5. Preterite subjunctive endings are identical to those of the present tense, i.e. *-a*, *-ir*, *-i*, *-im*, *-ið*, *-i*.
6. The second person singular imperative has a zero ending (*ber*, *far*); the other imperatives are identical to the present indicative (*berum*, *farið*).

In the case of the second person singular preterite indicative endings, it should be added that the presence of a stem-final dental (*ð* or *t*) was originally turned into *z* (pronounced /ts/) before the personal ending *-t*: *þú hézt* (for *heita* "call"). However, in many words that *zt*-sequence was simplified to *tt* (hence usually *reitt* not *reizt* for *ríða* I "ride", *bautt* not *bauzt* for *bjóða* II "offer"). In others, such as *heita*, the *z* was consistently retained.

## Paradigms

With the help of the above rules, you should be largely able to reconstruct paradigms like those set out below. However, *verða* "become" is affected by a further sound change, and other verbs not listed here display far more complex variations. For these, you may want to read up on the phonological changes that took place in the Proto-Norse and early Norse periods (e.g. Gordon §§30–76).

<i>ríða</i> I "ride" (active voice)							
<i>present indicative</i>			<i>present subjunctive</i>				
<i>1sg</i>	ek ríð	<i>1pl</i>	vér ríðum	<i>1sg</i>	ek ríða	<i>1pl</i>	vér ríðim
<i>2sg</i>	þú ríðr	<i>2pl</i>	ér ríðið	<i>2sg</i>	þú ríðir	<i>2pl</i>	ér ríðið
<i>3sg</i>	hann ríðr	<i>3pl</i>	þeir ríða	<i>3sg</i>	hann ríði	<i>3pl</i>	þeir ríði
<i>preterite indicative</i>			<i>preterite subjunctive</i>				
<i>1sg</i>	ek reið	<i>1pl</i>	vér riðum	<i>1sg</i>	ek ríða	<i>1pl</i>	vér ríðim
<i>2sg</i>	þú reizt	<i>2pl</i>	ér riðuð	<i>2sg</i>	þú ríðir	<i>2pl</i>	ér ríðið
<i>3sg</i>	hann reið	<i>3pl</i>	þeir riðu	<i>3sg</i>	hann ríði	<i>3pl</i>	þeir ríði
<i>past participle</i>	<i>m.</i>	riðinn	<i>f.</i>	riðin	<i>n.</i>	riðit	
<i>imperative</i>	<i>1pl</i>	ríðum	<i>2sg</i>	ríð	<i>2pl</i>	ríðið	

<b>ljúga II "(tell a) lie" (active voice)</b>							
<i>present indicative</i>			<i>present subjunctive</i>				
1sg	ek lýg	1pl	vér ljúgum	1sg	ek ljúga	1pl	vér ljúgim
2sg	þú lýgr	2pl	ér ljúgið	2sg	þú ljúgir	2pl	ér ljúgið
3sg	hann lýgr	3pl	þeir ljúga	3sg	hann ljúgi	3pl	þeir ljúgi
<i>preterite indicative</i>			<i>preterite subjunctive</i>				
1sg	ek laug	1pl	vér lugum	1sg	ek lyga	1pl	vér lygim
2sg	þú laugt	2pl	ér luguð	2sg	þú lygir	2pl	ér lygið
3sg	hann laug	3pl	þeir lugu	3sg	hann lygi	3pl	þeir lygi
<i>past participle</i>	<i>m.</i>	loginn	<i>f.</i>	login	<i>n.</i>	logit	
<i>imperative</i>	1pl	ljúgum	2sg	ljúg	2pl	ljúgið	

<b>verða III "become" (active voice)</b>							
<i>present indicative</i>			<i>present subjunctive</i>				
1sg	ek verð	1pl	vér verðum	1sg	ek verða	1pl	vér verðim
2sg	þú verðr	2pl	ér verðið	2sg	þú verðir	2pl	ér verðið
3sg	hann verðr	3pl	þeir verða	3sg	hann verði	3pl	þeir verði
<i>preterite indicative</i>			<i>preterite subjunctive</i>				
1sg	ek varð	1pl	vér urðum	1sg	ek yrða	1pl	vér yrðim
2sg	þú varzt	2pl	ér urðuð	2sg	þú yrðir	2pl	ér yrðið
3sg	hann varð	3pl	þeir urðu	3sg	hann yrði	3pl	þeir yrði
<i>past participle</i>	<i>m.</i>	orðinn	<i>f.</i>	orðin	<i>n.</i>	orðit	
<i>imperative</i>	1pl	verðum	2sg	verð	2pl	verðið	

**bera IV "bear" (active voice)**

<i>present indicative</i>				<i>present subjunctive</i>			
1sg	ek ber	1pl	vér berum	1sg	ek bera	1pl	vér berim
2sg	þú berr	2pl	ér berið	2sg	þú berir	2pl	ér berið
3sg	hann berr	3pl	þeir bera	3sg	hann beri	3pl	þeir beri
<i>preterite indicative</i>				<i>preterite subjunctive</i>			
1sg	ek bar	1pl	vér bárum	1sg	ek bæra	1pl	vér bærim
2sg	þú bart	2pl	ér báruð	2sg	þú bærir	2pl	ér bærið
3sg	hann bar	3pl	þeir báru	3sg	hann bæri	3pl	þeir bæri
<i>past participle</i>	<i>m.</i>	borinn	<i>f.</i>	borin	<i>n.</i>	borit	
<i>imperative</i>	1pl	berum	2sg	ber	2pl	berið	

**gefa V "give" (active voice)**

<i>present indicative</i>				<i>present subjunctive</i>			
1sg	ek gef	1pl	vér gefum	1sg	ek gefa	1pl	vér gefim
2sg	þú gefr	2pl	ér gefið	2sg	þú gefir	2pl	ér gefið
3sg	hann gefr	3pl	þeir gefa	3sg	hann gefi	3pl	þeir gefi
<i>preterite indicative</i>				<i>preterite subjunctive</i>			
1sg	ek gaf	1pl	vér gáfum	1sg	ek gæfa	1pl	vér gæfim
2sg	þú gaft	2pl	ér gáfuð	2sg	þú gæfir	2pl	ér gæfið
3sg	hann gaf	3pl	þeir gáfu	3sg	hann gæfi	3pl	þeir gæfi
<i>past participle</i>	<i>m.</i>	gefinn	<i>f.</i>	gefin	<i>n.</i>	gefit	
<i>imperative</i>	1pl	gefum	2sg	gef	2pl	gefið	

**fara VI "travel" (active voice)**

<i>present indicative</i>			<i>present subjunctive</i>				
1sg	ek fer	1pl	vér förum	1sg	ek fara	1pl	vér farim
2sg	þú ferr	2pl	ér farið	2sg	þú farir	2pl	ér farið
3sg	hann ferr	3pl	þeir fara	3sg	hann fari	3pl	þeir fari
<i>preterite indicative</i>			<i>preterite subjunctive</i>				
1sg	ek fór	1pl	vér fórum	1sg	ek fœra	1pl	vér fœrim
2sg	þú fórt	2pl	ér fóruð	2sg	þú fœrir	2pl	ér fœrið
3sg	hann fór	3pl	þeir fóru	3sg	hann fœri	3pl	þeir fœri
<i>past participle</i>	<i>m.</i>	farinn	<i>f.</i>	farin	<i>n.</i>	farit	
<i>imperative</i>	1pl	förum	2sg	far	2pl	farið	

**heita VII "call" (active voice)**

<i>present indicative</i>			<i>present subjunctive</i>				
1sg	ek heit	1pl	vér heitum	1sg	ek heita	1pl	vér heitim
2sg	þú heitr	2pl	ér heitið	2sg	þú heitir	2pl	ér heitið
3sg	hann heitr	3pl	þeir heita	3sg	hann heiti	3pl	þeir heiti
<i>preterite indicative</i>			<i>preterite subjunctive</i>				
1sg	ek hét	1pl	vér hétum	1sg	ek héta	1pl	vér hétim
2sg	þú hézt	2pl	ér hétuð	2sg	þú hétir	2pl	ér hétið
3sg	hann hét	3pl	þeir hétu	3sg	hann hėti	3pl	þeir hėti
<i>past participle</i>	<i>m.</i>	heitinn	<i>f.</i>	heitin	<i>n.</i>	heitit	
<i>imperative</i>	1pl	heitum	2sg	heit	2pl	heitið	