

Scots Warks

Support and guidance for writing

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Quick Start Guide

Why write in Scots?

We write for many reasons – to keep track of our possessions, to plan shopping trips, to reflect on our lives, to aid our memory, to share the words to songs, poems or plays, or perhaps to engage in the art of literature.

We may do this in the written forms of any language we choose. For over seven hundred years Scots speakers have written in Scots.

In this guide we explore many of the topics adult Scots speakers encounter when coming to write Scots for the first time, particularly in the context of writing in an encyclopaedic tone. That is where your writing is to communicate information, rather than to engage in artistic expression.

If you are keen to get started, we have compiled the most essential guidance on these first few pages - but, if you are interested in developing your writing in Scots, we would recommend that you work your way through the entire guide.

If you follow only the most essential advice:

1. **READ.** The best way to learn how to write is to read a wide variety of Scots. See [‘Recommended reading’](#).
2. **HAVE CONFIDENCE.** Our [introduction](#), written by Susi Briggs, is all about how Scots speakers should take heart in their familiarity with the language. Trust your own knowledge of Scots.
3. **CONSIDER YOUR PURPOSE.** Morna Young has written the section on [article and structure](#), explaining how to write an explanatory text. Think about why you are writing and who you are writing for.
4. **HAVE REFERENCES.** Use written references - texts, or a dictionary - to help you spell Scots words. Our [spelling](#) section, written by Martin Travers, demonstrates that you will always be able to find an example of the Scots word written down.
5. **SAY IT OUT LOUD.** When you have written or edited some Scots, read it aloud. Is that how you would say it? Our [grammar](#) section, by Laura Green, looks at the rules that Scots speakers use orally and how this applies to writing.
6. **THINK ABOUT HOW YOU PHRASE IT.** Our section on [Idioms](#), written by Christie Williamson, features examples of Scots that have different meanings from their literal translations. Can the information be directly translated into Scots? Is there a better, or more natural, way to communicate your point? Also, see [Covert Scotticisms](#) by Antoni Uri.
7. **CHECK YOUR WRITING.** Read your writing to check for errors. Emma Grae has written our section on [editing](#), which has guidance to help you check that your spelling is consistent and that your writing follows a rationale.
8. **READ SOME MORE.** Read as much Scots as you can. Our [References](#) section, compiled by Antonia Uri, features recommendations of useful resources and texts.
9. **MIND THE DIALECTS.** When you use vocabulary or spellings specific to a certain dialect, it should be a conscious choice and you should keep that consistent.

Introduction

by Susi Briggs

In the [census of 2011](#), the question of Scots language was first included and around 30% of the nation of Scotland reported that they could speak Scots. For the first time in record keeping history, over 1.5 million Scots speakers were able to acknowledge that they have their own language. The number may well be higher than that because there is a lack of awareness that Scots is a language and not just an accent or a form of corrupted English.

According to data from the same census, over 300 thousand Scots speakers have reported that they do not write in Scots. It is hard to gauge just how prevalent the problem of Scots literacy is among Scots speakers. Anecdotal evidence from those who have tried, such as volunteers contributing to or editing Scots Wikipedia, would suggest that numbers of Scots speakers who feel able to write in their own language is low.

Scots is too often seen as just an oral language, which suggests that it is not something you can be literate in. However, when you think about it, all languages are oral except for sign language. You can be literate in other languages from Spanish to Swahili. So why do we think differently about Scots in comparison to all other languages that we can learn to be literate in?

You may be wondering why this style guide has been written in English and not Scots? Well, this is because it is more accessible to read and understand in English because of the low levels of Scots literacy. There are many reasons as to why Scots speakers struggle to read in the language in which they speak.

Multiple generations in Scotland were not formally educated nor encouraged to write in their language. Scots speakers have only ever been formally educated to read and write in English. Our grammar and spelling are so embedded in how the English language works that to write in our Scots language can feel fake and forced. There is a real fear of being mocked if we get it wrong. It does not help that when typing in Scots the 'helpful' spell checker creates self-doubt by scratching angry red lines under every word that is exclusively Scots spelling. There is the added anxiety that we may appear contrived and disingenuous in our writing. We can only rid ourselves of that imposter syndrome by writing in our own language as often as we can.

Our language has often been mocked in media portrayals, of ourselves, as Scots speakers. A lot of Scots speakers have experienced direct discrimination and prejudice in everyday situations. Their language and way of speaking, which is often perceived in mainstream portrayals as incoherent slang, contributes to an aggressive and miserly stereotype. Many Scots speakers paid for elocution

lessons to scour away their dialects and accents so that they could pursue a good career. It was a normal thing to pursue because of blatant prejudice.

Even internet drop-down language options on websites and online forms are void of a Scots language option. Computer systems have the capacity to recognise and include Scots as a minority language option. Scots does exist in the system and has done so for some time. The reason it is rarely seen as an option is because individual companies choose if Scots is included or not in their drop-down menus. The exclusion of this language option directly affects those who create digital content in Scots.

Is it any wonder that a huge number of Scots speakers lack literacy in their own language? The prejudice that surrounds Scots language can only be tackled by making sure our language and our voices are visible, heard, written, and read as much as possible. Small things like the exclusion of Scots in a drop-down menu raise the question: is our language valid and real?

Scots language *is* valid and real. There should be no more debate about it. The growing number of Scottish universities and colleges offering Scots language courses provides us with evidence about the validity of Scots. In schools across Scotland, many primary and secondary schools include Scots language education in their curriculum. Many Scots speakers already write in Scots on social media platforms and in personal messages to friends and family. Some write creatively by using Scots language in dialogues or descriptive text for plays, poetry, and prose.

However, there is a lack of confidence in many of us to write formally for articles. The factual nature of article writing itself can be overwhelming enough without having to decode Scots spelling and grammar as well.

Scots has no standardisation, which is something that has been debated for decades in the Scots language community. We do have well known spellings that are favoured and patterns of grammar and syntax that are uniquely ours. This guide should help you navigate these differences.

Our advice is to listen to your own Scots voice: How does it sound when you say a phrase or sentence? Directly translating, word for word, from English to Scots rarely works because Scots grammar is different to that of English. So, take time to look at the whole paragraph you want to translate and from there, translate it in phrases.

Write it down as you say it. That is the first step towards writing confidently. You may have a particular dialect unique to where you come from. You may not have a specific dialect at all. Both are perfectly acceptable to express in your writing. The beauty of any language is the diversity as

well as the similarities that exist within it. To avoid confusion for the reader, it is important to be consistent in how you present dialect in your writing.

It is worth noting though that if you are writing for a specific publisher or working collaboratively that there may be a need to observe a level of standardisation. To publish articles in Scots for Wikipedia, for example, there is an expected standard. These details are made clear for contributing article writers.

However, you should not let any standardisation put you off. Clear standards can be a useful tool to a writer and an absolute must for publishers of collaborative written work.

Each writer involved in this style guide can offer their own unique story on how they came to write in Scots creatively or formally, whether through the medium of poetry, drama, journalism, or academia. The most common ways of learning were through peer support, reviewing the work of others, and reading Scots in articles and creative works. Learning never stops and nor should it. This style guide has been created by Scots-speaking writers who have navigated their own way into Scots literacy. They overcame their imposter syndrome to write in Scots with confidence. This style guide is just that – a guide to help you answer any questions you may be asking yourself as you make your own journey into writing in Scots. The style guide has been written in English for the sake of accessibility as most Scots speakers are literate in English. Not all Scots speakers are literate in Scots. When we learn to read and write in any language, the jargon surrounding grammar and spelling can sometimes feel overwhelming but please do not lose confidence. You will know far more about your Scots language instinctively than you do seeing it all written down broken up into sections.

We are more than capable of learning the literacies and nuances of grammar in other languages and have done so for generations, be it English, French, German and even Latin. We have a great capacity for learning.

Scots literacy has been largely self-taught because Scots was not welcome as part of formal education for generations. It has never had the status it deserves because we have been taught to cringe at our words and phrases but sell it to tourists on tote bags and tea towels with confidence and flair.

To introduce basic Scots literacy in schools is a wonderful thing. To teach it alongside the literacies of other languages shows validity and inclusion that has not been permitted before. This inclusion is not exclusively beneficial for Scots speakers but for everyone else looking in to see that Scots language is as valid and beautiful as any other language on this bonnie birlin planet.

Article and Structure

by Morna Young

Overview

An explanatory text, or explanation, is a specific form of non-fiction writing most often used in newspaper, magazine or website articles. It aims to assist the reader to understand a process, how something works, or how a particular activity is carried out. Writing a successful explanatory article requires solid content and an understanding of technique. The ambition with any explanatory text is to explain the idea, concept or subject in a clear, concise and objective manner.

Most publishers will adhere to an 'in house' style that defines and dictates preferred language, layout, and formatting. For example, Wikipedia's Manual of Style (MoS) offers the following introduction:

MoS presents Wikipedia's house style to assist its volunteer editors write and maintain articles with precise and consistent language, layout, and formatting. Since using plain English makes the encyclopaedia easier and more intuitive to read, editors should avoid ambiguity, jargon, and vague or unnecessarily complex wording.

Whilst Scots is fundamentally an oral language, there is a long history with creative writing (prose, poems, plays). Explanatory texts, however, are less common. This section is intended to help guide writers through the process.

Identifiable features

Generally, explanatory texts tend to include the following identifiable features:

- Structured with a beginning, middle and end
- Sub-headings to separate sections
- Educational and objective content
- Written in the present tense
- Uses the third-person active voice, indicative
- Formal to-the-point language
- Technical vocabulary
- References to support factual content

Structured with a beginning, middle and end

Explanatory texts should use the following structure:

Introduction: to provide an overview of the subject, outline the main points of the article and engage the reader.

Middle: to make clear, objective points about the subject.

Conclusion: to draw together the points made.

Sub-headings to separate sections

Sub-headings and sections direct the reader through the text, to ensure that information is grouped accordingly. This heightens readability and can guide readers through specific sub-sections of a greater narrative.

Educational and objective content

Writing objectively means that evidence and statements can be verified. The writer must remain neutral by drawing on facts, statistics and research that can be referenced. This presents unbiased information to the reader so that they can determine their own opinion.

In general, text and paragraphs should be edited to ensure that only the key, factual information remains. This brevity also assists readability.

For example:

In the 2011 Scottish census, over 1.5 million people in Scotland reported being able to speak Scots.

Written in the present tense

Writing in the present tense is used to describe an action happening now, to report fact, and to present information that is always true.

For example:

Michael is reading this style guide.

Uses the third-person active voice, indicative

Writing in the **third-person** means that the (grammatical) subject is the person or thing that is being discussed. The third-person is: He, She, It or They. It is not: I or you.

For example:

Writing in the third person secures a focus on facts and evidence instead of personal opinion.

Using the **active voice** means that the subject of a sentence performs the verb's action, following a clear subject + verb + object construct. This offers a direct and clear tone by focusing the reader's attention onto who or what carries out the action. This is different to the passive voice in which the subject is acted upon by the verb.

For example:

Active: *Millions of tourists visit Edinburgh every year.*

Passive: *Edinburgh is visited by millions of tourists every year.*

The **indicative mood** is a verb form that relies on making a statement of fact or asking a question. This ensures that the content of each statement is demonstrably true and cannot be misinterpreted.

For example:

Edinburgh is the capital of Scotland.

Formal, specific language

Specific, formal language ensures that the text is clear and easy to read. It should not use contractions.

Adjectives are rarely used within an explanatory text because they are not objective. One writer might describe a city as 'bonnie' or 'beautiful' but such a statement is driven by personal bias.

Vague descriptors such as 'many', 'often', 'significant' should be avoided as these terms are ambiguous and relative. 'A short time ago' may read as two months to one reader, but as two years to another. By stating the precise time, a reader will receive the factual information required for them to determine their own relative outcome.

When writing in Scots language, it is useful to consider words that can assist structuring content and sentences in a recognisably formal way. For example, linking words such as *hooever* and *mairower* (however and moreover) can help ensure that a formal tone is maintained.

Technical vocabulary

The specific language will depend on the purpose, target audience and precise subject. For example, an article about Scots language could be expected to contain historical context, geographical usage and literature examples.

Technical words that do not already have an accepted Scots spelling should not be translated unnecessarily in an attempt to differentiate the word from English. The aim of writing an article is to communicate the information as simply and directly as possible. Creating new, obscure or unrecognisable 'translations' will only confuse the reader.

For example, splitting the word 'microwave' and translating 'micro' and 'wave' into Scots may give you the term, 'totey-rote': *totey* being an adjective used to describe something small, and *rote* being a word for a succession of waves. This does not take into account, however, that the word 'micro' here is a scientific term, used to suggest a shorter wavelength, or that the term 'microwave', or 'microwave oven', entered Scots speakers' vocabulary as exactly that. As this example demonstrates, some vocabulary that is thought of as English is actually derived from other languages, such is the case here, with 'micro' deriving from the Greek word 'mikros'.

References to support factual content

Referencing provides evidence to support the assertions and factual claims.

Writing an explanatory text in Scots

Language

Articles written in Scots language should aim to use clear and plain Scots. Scots language hosts a plethora of bold, beautiful, muscular words but writers should ensure they select vocabulary that clearly and concisely conveys the meaning. It is a general rule of journalism to avoid unnecessary 'fancy' words and, instead, use straightforward alternatives. This ensures that the focus remains on the point of the article. It is always important to remember that explanatory texts are about conveying information in the simplest way possible.

Using clear and plain Scots does not discriminate against regional variations but, rather, the writer should aim to commit to one standard form of usage rather than mixing and matching. Consistency is key. If there are two correct ways to spell a word, be consistent within your document. For example, if the Doric / Northeast *fit* (meaning 'what') is selected then it would be expected that this becomes the standard term throughout the article.

Numbering

The expected numbering system for explanatory texts is that one to ten should be written in full, but numbers after 10 should be written as actual numbers. However, this can differentiate when using Scots, and writers are encouraged to use full spelling. For example, a *hunner* instead of 100 or *twinty* instead of 20.

When writing the age of a person, it is useful to use *year-auld* rather than listing a number in brackets. For example, Andrew Surname (*twinty-fower-year-auld*).

Names

It is advised to write a person's name in their given spelling rather than translating it to Scots. For example, if someone is called David, do not change it to the Scots version *Dauvit*.

For place names, it is recommended that common usage words (*Glesga* or *The Broch*) are given prominence with the English spelling contained in brackets afterwards.

For example:

Glesga (Glasgow)

Aiberdeen (Aberdeen)

The Broch (Fraserburgh)

However, it is advised to use caution if considering translating place names that do not have a common Scots translation. For example, Motherwell would directly translate as *Mitherweel*, which has no common usage.

Translation

It can cause language confusion when a writer approaches a Scots translation word by word, rather than thinking about the sense of a sentence. Please see the [Grammar](#) and [Idioms](#) sections for further information.

Editing and checking consistency

All articles should be proof-read and spell checked prior to publishing. Purchasing a reputable Scots dictionary is useful for proofreading whilst providing multiple accepted spellings. Dictionary suggestions are provided in the [References](#) section.

In the first instance, written articles are best checked by being spoken aloud. If a word or sentence doesn't read naturally, then it likely needs reworked. However, using this method alone will not guarantee consistency. One suggested method to check consistency is to alphabetically list individual Scots words used throughout the article. This can help ensure any deviation from chosen

spelling. For an article of around 1,000 words, this process will typically last half an hour. Further proof-reading suggestions are provided in the [Consistency and Rationale](#) section.

Code of Practice

Accuracy

Writers must avoid presenting inaccurate, misleading or distorted information. Any significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion must be corrected with due prominence. Ensuring correct, orderly referencing should assist writers to fact check material prior to publishing.

Sensitivity

Writers should ensure discretion particularly when considering sensitive subjects. In the case of Scots language, this may mean using a standardised English word to avoid shock, grief or prejudiced content. For example, official terms - such as those describing certain criminal activities - should not be translated to ensure a necessary level of sensitivity.

Discrimination

Writers should avoid prejudicial or pejorative references to an individual's race, colour, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, class or to any physical or mental illness or disability.

To view the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) Code of Practice for further details, please visit: <https://www.ipso.co.uk/editors-code-of-practice/>

Spelling

by Martin Travers

Scots and English are closely related but separate languages. Scots is not a corrupt dialect of Standard English and therefore Scots spelling is not a corruption of Standard English spelling. Dogs and foxes are closely related – but you wouldn't call a fox a mangy dog or vice versa. Scots is a unique language. The same way that the fox is a unique species.

WHY BE A VANDAL WHEN YOU CAN BE A GUARDIAN?

If you love any language you need to treat it with respect. The best way to respect a language is to try your best to follow the rules of that language. This is sometimes easier said than done as languages are complex and full of contradictions.

If you want to write successfully in Scots, one of the things you need to pay attention to is spelling. Mastering spelling is one of the tricky parts of Scots and can be a wee bit confusing. Especially since Scots is enriched by having ten distinct dialect regions that all have their own unique spellings and pronunciations of certain words.

It is worth bearing in mind that all ten distinct dialect regions of Scots have far more in common with each other than they have differences. These differences should be celebrated as they bring a unique identity and colour to the tapestry of the language.

We are lucky to have wonderful and dynamic examples of writing in the Scots language that go back over 700 years. It is from this substantial body of work that we draw most of our Scots spelling.

Early Scottish literature in Inglis, such as Barbour's *Brus* (c.1375), Wyntoun's *Kronykil* (c.1420) and Blind Harry's *Wallace* (c.1478) may more accurately be described as early northern Middle English: Scholars of Scots refer to the language of the period as Early Scots. By the end of the fifteenth century the Inglis of Scotland had become a national language and was being called *Scottis* to distinguish it from the language of England; although *Scottis* had also previously been used to refer to Scottish Gaelic. The following period in the development of *Scottis*, known as Middle Scots, brought forth an abundance of literature based around the Royal Court in Edinburgh and the University of St. Andrews. Masterpieces by writers such as Henrysoun (1450-c.1505), Dunbar (c.1460- c.1530), Douglas (1476- 1522), and Lyndsay (c.1486-1555) saw the introduction of a great many French and Latin words into Scots. At the same time, the spellings employed by those writers indicated many pronunciation changes, probably owing to natural developments in

the language. English writers and literature also exerted some influence the spelling of Scots.

Eagle, Andy, *Modern Scots*

Our web of wonderful Scots dialects has been hotly debated since the 1920s by academics who have attempted to define and categorise the threads. Academics have also suggested ways to standardise the spelling and grammar of the language. None of these suggestions have been adopted – officially or unofficially.

Scots in all its dialects has survived as a spoken language, learned in social settings, where spelling is irrelevant. Couple this with Standard English being taught to native Scots speakers from their first day in school and expected to be their only form of written communication from that day onwards, it is no wonder that spelling words correctly and consistently in Scots can be baffling – even for fluent native speakers.

It is worth noting that almost all Scots speakers are bilingual with many being fluent in multiple literacies and dialects. This understanding of more than one language may, however, lead to confusion when spelling in Scots.

The most important rule for spelling in Scots is that you should never guess how to spell a word in Scots without then checking if that spelling is correct. By 'correct' we mean that the spelling exists already in one of the published Scots dictionaries or can be shown to be a widely accepted regional variation of the word.

Every word that you will ever want to write down in Scots has been written down before.

You should always try to use one of the traditionally accepted spellings of the word you want to use. Writing in Scots is not about re-inventing the wheel – it is about helping to keep the traditional forms of the language alive.

A correctly spelled sentence in Scots is a thing of beauty so please have patience and always check your spelling. This is not a sign of failure – it is a sign of respect for the language.

TIP: Never get complacent when writing in Scots. Even if you have checked the spelling of a word in the past this doesn't mean you'll remember the correct spelling the next time you use it. Even if you feel confident that you know how to spell a word, always take a few seconds to check it again.

Technology is the Scots writer's friend - online Scots dictionaries are free to use and some have a Scots to English and English to Scots translation feature.

See the [References](#) section for recommendations of Scots dictionaries.

You may prefer to use a printed dictionary when checking your spelling. This will work just as well as a digital version.

It can be useful to cross check certain words in two dictionaries to get a better understanding of the meaning and history of a word and whether it is the right word to use in the sentence you are constructing. For example, if you use the Online Scots Dictionary to find a word you could then cross check it in the Dictionary of the Scots Language (DSL) for spelling variants in dialects, additional definitions and read the quotes it includes to get a wider idea of usage.

TIP: When using one of the online Scots translators it is sometimes easier and quicker to translate the word you want to check from English to Scots rather than hoping that your own Scots spelling of the word is correct to begin with.

Alphabet

Like so many other languages across the world we use the Latin alphabet when writing in Scots. This means that in some instances the written form of a Scots word can only be an approximation of its spoken form.

For example, many languages, including Scots (but not Standard English) have a 'throat-clearing' sound that we hear clearly in the word "loch". There is nothing in the spelling of *loch* to tell us that the 'ch' sound needs to come from the back of the throat.

The Scots alphabet now consists of the same letters as the Standard English alphabet, but in Older and Middle Scots the additional letters <þ> (thorn) equivalent to the modern <th>, /ð/ (eth) as in the, however, not necessarily differentiated consistently. In addition there was also <ȝ> (yogh) representing a sound similar to the <gn> /ŋ/ in the French Bretagne and <y> /j/ as in the modern word year. Those are of course now obsolete. (Yogh still occurs as <z> in many words and may be realised as /j/ as in capercailzie and /ŋj/ or /ŋ/ as in senzie and Menzies.)

Eagle, Andy, *Modern Scots*

Graphemes

A grapheme is a letter or a number of letters that represent a sound:

Some words which only have a slightly different pronunciation in Scots than in Scottish Standard English (usually the vowel sound), generally have the same spelling as in Standard English. Do not assume that because a word is spelled the same as in Standard English it is pronounced as such.

The Online Scots Dictionary — Spelling Guide

Two good examples of words in Scots and Standard English that mean the same, are spelled the same: but sound quite different when spoken aloud are 'wash' and 'want'. In Scots 'wash' is pronounced 'wahsh' and 'want' is pronounced 'wahnt'.

Another example of a grapheme particular to Scots can be heard when we pronounce the letter 'o' as 'oa'. This can be found in many commonly used words including 'shop', 'got' and 'on'.

It is worth bearing in mind when writing in Scots that our alphabet only has 21 consonant letters to represent 26 consonant sounds commonly used, and 5 + 1 vowel letters (a, e, i, o, u + the 'y' sound found in Scots words like 'chyngie' and words in Standard English like 'sunny') to represent about 16 vowel sounds.

Silent Letters

Some letters in Scots words might not be pronounced when spoken aloud. It is still important and correct that you include these letters when writing the words down.

For Example:

Wad ye gae roond tae yer brither's an gie him a haund tae git thon glaikit cat oot thon tree? The soonds comin oot o hit coud wauk up the deid!

Might actually sound like:

'd ye gae roon tae yer brither's an gie'im a haun tae git thon glaikit cat oot thon tree? The soons comin oot o't coud wauk up the deid!

It is also worth noting that the 'ch' letters in certain words like *nicht* and *licht* can be pronounced, like *loch* or *dreich*, or considered silent as with the 'gh' in English spelling of equivalent words ('light' and 'night').

In Many dialects the terminal <d> of <nd> and <ld> is usually silent but is often pronounced in the derived forms (especially past tenses) of many words. In order to achieve orthographic consistency such words are spelled with the <nd>, e.g. haund and soond, and haundit and soondit. Entries in dictionaries often include the terminal <d> in brackets, e.g. haun(d), soon(d), sen(d).

The Online Scots Dictionary — Spelling Guide

Eye Dialects

Do not use Eye Dialect when writing formally in Scots. Eye dialect is the use of words that are deliberately misspelled but properly pronounced. The term Eye Dialect was first used by George Philip Krapp in *The English Language in America* (1925).

It often refers to:

- written dialogue that uses nonstandard spelling to indicate that a speaker's regular use of language is nonstandard or dialectal; or
- a set of such nonstandard spellings, collectively used to reflect a certain form of speech.

For example:

Head = Standard English

Heid = Scots

Heed = Eye Dialect

And to complicate things even further, using Eye Dialects sometimes means that the spelling can be the same as other words in Standard English with completely different meanings. For example:

Heed = Standard English for to pay attention to something

Eye dialect spellings are always pronounced in the same way as the widely accepted spellings for the words.

Some writers actively choose to use Eye Dialect in their work for dramatic effect or a drive for a certain atmosphere or feeling. This can be often seen in dialogue between characters. For example:

Scottish poet, writer and critic Tom Leonard chose to spell 'is' as 'iz' and *widnae* as 'widny'. The spellings 'is' and *widnae* are established Scots spellings and 'iz' and 'widny' are not.

Translations

It is worth noting that a word-for-word translation from Standard English to Scots might not look right or seem authentic – that is because it probably isn't. A literal translation will only be Scots words set in sentences that adhere to the rules of Standard English Grammar. You need to use the rules of Scots grammar when you are translating to successfully convert Standard English to Scots. Please see our section on [Grammar](#) for more details.

Grammar

by Laura Green

Introduction

A language is more than its vocabulary – it requires grammar to function. As Scots developed alongside English, there are lots of similarities between the grammar used in modern Scots and the grammar used in modern English. Both have influences from Old English and Middle English, but Scots has also retained grammatical features from Old Norse, which is the ancestor of North Germanic languages such as Danish and Norwegian.

When writing in Scots, it is not enough to merely use the vocabulary. Writers must also pay attention to the grammar, as using Scots vocabulary with grammar that is used in English, ignoring the differences we find in Scots grammar, can make the writing seem odd or inauthentic.

This section of the Style Guide will explain some important features of Scots grammar, and highlight some features that differ from English grammar. See the [References](#) section for further reading.

Verbs

Most Scots speakers use verbs in a systematic way, even if they are unaware of it.

For example, they might:

- use the base form of a verb (*A **fecht***);
- add an -s to create the third person singular tense of the verb (*He **fechts***);
- add the suffix -ed, -it or -t to create the past tense (*A **dichted**/A **dichtit***); although there are some exceptions (*She **gret** an **focht** fir me afore a left*);
- add the suffix -in to create the present participle (*She's **greetin** an **fechtin** awfy much*)
- add the suffix -ed, -it, -t or -en to create the past participle (*A wid hae **pitten** it awa*)

Base form	Third person singular present	Past tense	Present participle	Past participle
affront	affronts	affrontit	affrontin	affrontit
dicht	dichts	dichtit	dichtin	dichtit
ettle	ettles	ettled	ettlin	ettled
gie	gies	gied	giein	gien
bide	bides	bade	bidin	bade
greet	greetes	gret	greetin	grutten
fecht	fechts	focht	fechtin	focht/fochten
fin	fins	fun	finnin	fun
pit	pits	pit	pittin	pitten

Using 'present participle' and 'past participle'

Present participle

The present participle form of a verb, used to describe an action that is ongoing, is formed by adding the suffix -in. It is always accompanied by a form of the auxiliary verb 'be' (be, am, is, are, was, were, being, been).

For example, *A wis **daunnerin** about afore **eatin** ma piece.*

There are exceptions – sometimes the present participle is formed by adding -n to the verb.

For example: *The driver kens A'm **gaun**.*

Past participle

The past participle is used to describe an action that is complete. It is always accompanied by a form of the auxiliary verb 'have' (has, having, had).

Most of the time, it is formed by adding -it or -t to the end of the verb.

For example: *A'd **wantit** tae walk hame but A'v **endit** up gettin the bus.*

The -it is usual when the verb ends with p, b, t, d, or g.

For example: *A'v **stottit** doon the road.*

The -t ending is usual when the verb ends with f, s, sh, n, r, l and ch.

For example: *A'd **footert** aboot wi ma purse afore gettin oan the bus.*

There are exceptions:

- some verbs are given the ending -ed or -d, for example, *A'v **sklimmed** doon fae ma tree hoose fir tae gae tae the bus stap while it was still dry.*
- some verbs are given an -en ending, for example, *A'd **taen** ma chynge an sat near the back.*
- the past tense of some (strong) verbs are formed by changing the vowel within the verb, for example, *A'v **focht** wi the clasp oan ma handbag an A'v **flung** ma purse back intae it.*

Using the 'Infinitive form'

The infinitive form of the verb is mostly used as a complement to the main verb. The verb is always in the base form, regardless of the tense of the sentence, and preceded by the word *tae* (to). Some Scots speakers use *fir tae* (for to) before the base form of the verb:

*A need **tae rin** fir the bus*

*Efter this A'm gaun **tae rin** fir the bus*

*A'm wantin **fir tae rin** fir the bus*

*A'd wantit **fir tae rin** fir the bus*

Using 'Narrative present tense'

A common feature in Scots writing is to use the third person singular version of the verb, even when recounting something that has happened in the past. Some people call this narrative present tense (which is the same form as the third person singular, -s).

For example: say

Base form	Past participle	Narrative present tense
say	said	says

Using English grammar and Scots vocabulary, the author might write: *He **said** tae me that thon bus was roon the corner.*

But using Scots grammar and Scots vocabulary, the author might write: *He **says** tae me that thon bus was roon the corner.*

Here are some other examples:

Base form	Past participle	Narrative present tense
gang	gaed	gangs
gie	gied	gies
rin	ran	rins
lauch	lauched/laucht	lauchs
skite	skitit	skites

TIP: Note that the verb 'seen' can be used in place of 'saw' in Scots. In Scots, writers do not have to use another verb (such as hae/hiv/have) to support the word 'seen'.

For example:

- *A **seen** the film yesterday* does not conform with the accepted standards of English grammar.
- *A **saw** the film yesterday* or *A **had seen** the film yesterday* would be deemed grammatically acceptable within English.
- In Scots, the sentences, *A **seen** the film yestreen* and *A **saw** the film yestreen* are equally acceptable, grammatically speaking.

TIP: The verb 'has' can be used as the main verb indicating possession, as opposed to the phrase 'has got'. For example:

- *She's a wean oan the wey*
- *He's a richt temper when he gets startit*

Those writing in English might be more likely to use 'has got', for example:

- She **has got** a baby on the way
- He **has got** a right temper when he gets started

Using adverbs

In Scots, it is common to avoid the -ly ending for adverbs (for example, quickly, loudly, excitedly) when the adverb has been formed from an adjective.

For example:

- *He blethered so **quickly** A couldnae hear him* uses English grammar.
- *He blethered that **quick** A couldnae hear him* uses Scots grammar, as the -ly ending is not applied, as it would be in English.

Nouns

Using plurals

To make most nouns plural in Scots, add -s, or -es if the word ends in -s already.

For example: *Did ye mind yer **pieces** for schuil?*

Note that nouns that end in -f, for example 'leaf', are pluralised by adding an -s (unlike English, where the -ves ending is added).

For example: *The **leafs** aw fell aff thae trees.*

Noun	Plural
bairn	bairns
fitbaw	fitbaws
cross	crosses
haggis	haggises
elf	elfs
leaf	leafs

Irregular nouns do not follow the -s rule. For some irregular nouns, writers can make them plural, by adding -n.

For example: *Yer schuil **shune** are ower there.*

Irregular Noun	Plural
coo	kye
eye	een
fit	feet
wummin	weemin

TIP: It is acceptable for some nouns that would be pluralised in English to remain singular. For example:

- *Yer buiks are up the **stair***
- *He gied me twa hunner **poun***

This is because Scots speakers sometimes treat 'count nouns', which are nouns that can be preceded by a number and pluralised (1 coin/2 coins; 1 stair/2 stairs) the same way that they would treat 'mass nouns', which are nouns that don't change despite size (land; coffee; air).

Pronouns

Using demonstrative pronouns

As well as using the words 'this' and 'that', which are shared with English, Scots also uses *thon* and *yon*. If 'this' is the object closest to the speaker, and 'that' is the object a little further away, then *thon* is a bit further away and *yon* is further away still.

For example:

- ***This*** bus gangs tae Broughty Ferry, and ***that*** yin gangs tae Dundee... ***thon*** bus ahint it gangs tae Coupar Angus an ***yon*** bus ower the brae gangs tae Alyth.

They, or *thae* is often used as a demonstrative pronoun when talking about more than one item, instead of the English 'those'.

For example:

- ***Thae*** buses are aye late, except when ye're rinnin late yersel.

Using the second person

You and *ye* are used for the second person. *Ye* is very common. For example:

- Did ***ye*** see *thon* driver? ***Ye*** wid ken him.

Du, *dee* and *dy* are used in Shetlandic Scots, similar to 'thou', 'thee' and 'thy' in English. Their use is dependent on who the person is speaking to:

- *Du* is used like the English 'thou', meaning 'you', when addressing someone that you know well; and are on an equal footing with (for example, *Is du needin some denner?*;
- *Dee* is used like the English 'thee', to mean you, when the word is the object of a sentence (for example, *I gied da denner tae dee.*)
- *Dy* is used similarly to the English 'thy'; to mean 'your' (for example, *Dy denner's yundroo, sees du?*).

'You' is used by Shetlandic speakers as well, but it would normally be used in formal situations and/or when the person being addressed has authority over the speaker.

Possessive pronouns

'Your' and *yer* are both used. For example:

- *There yer bus comin*

Scots uses 'her', 'his' and 'oor/our' as English does.

*Youse/you*s and *yeeze* are also used to address more than one person, instead of the English 'You all'.

TIP: In some dialects of Scots, *ye* is not usually used in the emphatic sense. For example:

- *How come A managed tae catch thon bus an **ye** never?*

would be less common than:

- *How come A managed tae catch thon bus an **you** never?*

Similarly, in some dialects, *yer* is not usually used to be emphatic. For example:

- *Did ye get **yer** pieces?* is acceptable; but
- *A've got ma pieces, hiv ye got **yers**?*

would be less common than

- *...hiv you got **yours**?*

Something to be aware of is that Scots uses possessive pronouns in some circumstances where speakers of other languages would omit them.

For example:

- *Is she missin **her** schuil noo that she's oan holiday?;*
- *Did he get that for **his** Christmas?;*
- *Does he want thon tatties for **his** dinner?*

TIP: In Scots, the possessive pronoun 'mine' often has an '-s' added to make it similar to the pronouns 'hers', 'his', and 'yours'.

For example:

- *They're no your pieces – they're mines.*

Therefore 'mines', with the same meaning as the English 'mine', is not unusual to find in Scots speech and writing.

Determiners

Using the definite article

Scots often uses the definite article (the) in instances where other languages, such as English, would omit it.

For example:

- *A've got **the** flu;*
- *He's away tae make **the** dinner.*

Furthermore, Scots often adds 'the' to placenames, for example:

- *The Gorbals* (Gorbals, Glasgow);
- *The Auld Toon* (The Old Town, Edinburgh);
- *The Bannockburn* (Bannockburn);
- *The Briggs* (Bishopbriggs);
- *The Cairn* (Cairnryan);
- *The Haen* (East Haven).

Interrogative words

An interrogative word is used to question, or 'interrogate'. Examples of interrogative words are:

Scots	English
wha/fa	who
when/whan/fin	when
whit/fit	what
whaur/far	where
how/hou/foe	why

Notice that, in Scots, 'how' is normally used instead of the English 'why'.

For example: '**How** did ye end up walkin hame?' is asking the person the reasoning behind their choice to walk, not about the process of walking itself.

Double modals

A modal verb is a verb that expresses that you must do something or that you could do something. In fact, the words *must* and *can* are modal verbs, along with other words such as shall, will, might, should and would. These words affect the meaning of the other verb that follows.

For example: In English a person might say 'I **might** miss the bus'. In that sentence, the word 'might' is the modal verb and the word 'miss' is the verb.

Some Scots speakers, particularly Scots speakers in the Scottish Borders, use what is known as double modals. That means they use two modal verbs in the sentence.

For example:

- A **micht can** catch thon bus there.
- A'll **no can** catch this yin, A'll hae tae wait.
- The driver **will no can** see me.

The Northern Subject rule

The subject of a sentence is the person or thing 'doing the verb', eg. in the sentence 'The **bus** is running late', the word 'bus' is the subject.

In English, the auxiliary verb 'is' changes when the subject becomes plural. For example, in the sentence above, the word 'is' would have to change to 'are' if there was more than one bus:

- *The bus **is** running late.*
- *The buses **are** running late.*

However, the Northern Subject rule is a term used to describe the grammar that some Scots speakers use when the verb stays the same even though the subject is plural. In the example above, this would mean that the Scots speaker would say, 'The buses **is** late.'

For example:

- *Thae buses **is** awfy noisy;*
- *Thon bairns **is** needin thir denner;*
- *Thae buiks **is** gey interestin.*

Apostrophes

Some older Scots texts, such as works by poets such as Robert Burns and Robert Fergusson, may incorporate apostrophes within the Scots vocabulary. For example:

Ye see yon birkie ca'd a lord,
Wha struts, an' stares, an' a' that,
Tho' hundreds worship at his word,
He's but a coof for a' that.

Burns, Robert, *A Man's a Man for a' That*

These apostrophes were typically used in publishing to mark where a letter/s would be missing had the poem been written in English. However, this practice has earned the nickname the 'apologetic apostrophe' due to its rejection by many modern Scots writers. In fact, many Scots speakers and writers are of the opinion that the use of 'apologetic apostrophes' implies that the Scots vocabulary within a piece of writing is, at best, subject to modification to appeal to non-Scots speakers and, at worst, an inference that Scots is inferior to its sister language, English, and so the writer should 'apologise' for using it.

Compare the Burns text (above) to this excerpt from Janet Paisley's poem, 'Gled Stanes', where the only apostrophe included is within a contraction (they had/they'd):

thur is nae stane whaur the gled soars,
nae gled whaur the stanes staun

nor it thair cobbled feet, nae king
tae reign ees braid high street

whaur nowt but smirr croons a castlehill
nae burnin weemin wish they'd droned

Paisley, Jane, *Gled Stanes*

Conclusion

There are countless references available for you to be able to deepen your understanding of Scots grammar, but we must remember that languages are living and breathing - they change – and so sometimes the grammatical 'rules' of a language evolve over time. Another point to remember is that most people speak, read and write in their own language perfectly well without having an in-depth knowledge of their language's grammatical system, without being at any disadvantage whatsoever. Scots speakers are no different. The average person who would use a double modal, if you pointed this out to them, may tell you that they'll 'Might can yaise double modals' as they might not know what you were referring to, despite using this complicated grammar variation perfectly well.

A good rule of thumb, if you are a Scots speaker and you are writing in Scots or translating something into Scots from another language, is to read your Scots sentence, or sentences aloud. Does it sound like something you would say? Or does it sound slightly different? If it does, chances are that the slight difference is not in the vocabulary - it's in the grammar.

Idioms

by Christie Williamson

Haud me back

Introduction

In February 2018, I had the trip of a lifetime. I'd been invited to the annual International Festival of Poetry in Granada, Nicaragua including a partnership event in a New York City hotel. I'd never before crossed the Atlantic, never before been anywhere hot. As a young Shetland boy, going somewhere hot meant Aberdeen on our summer holidays.

On the penultimate afternoon of the festival we, being over 100 poets from every continent and over eighty countries, were taken by boat to a resort on 'Las Isletas' in Lake Nicaragua. I found myself roaming from table to table during a spell when representatives of the festival at each table were giving a prepared message.

Sitting down, I caught the tail end of this from a translator and interpreter who'd been heavily involved in carrying meanings between English and Spanish. As she said, 'We hope you come back to Granada,' the words, 'Haud me back' emerged from my mouth.

Of course, this was not a sincere request to be held back. In Standard English, I'd have said 'Yes please' or 'I'd really like that'. After having spent close on two decades living and working in Glasgow, this idiom had firmly lodged in my consciousness, and now also the consciousnesses of those poets with whom I shared this shaded table in Central America.

Idioms

The Cambridge Dictionary defines an idiom as 'a group of words in a fixed order that have a particular meaning that is different from the meanings of each word on its own'. By their very nature, idioms are a particularly fluid function of any language. This piece does not aim or claim to capture all of the idiomatic language deployed in Scots today. Rather, it seeks to give a flavour of some Scots idioms, and aspires to encourage Scots writers to celebrate some of the richest elements of our language unleashed by idiomatic language.

If there is a branch of writing least likely to yield idiomatic language, it may well be expository prose. Nonetheless, it is easier said than done to produce a text entirely free of idiomatic language.

In my very short recollection above I 'catch the tail end' of the talk from the organisers. Articles about people may quote things they are known for having said, or things which others are known for saying about them. When these draughts of oral language are felt the likelihood of encountering idiom are greatly increased. Wherever it comes from, idiomatic language lends crucial spice to a piece, especially where it is sparse or unexpected. It also has a precision about it all of its own.

Idiom	Meaning
Haud me back	My instinct draws me forwards to your proposal
Pit his gas at a peep	To refute and silence an emphatic assertion. Literally to turn the gas right down.
A'm no as green as a'm cabbage lookin	Don't underestimate my experience
D'ye hink ma heid buttons up the back?	Do you take me for a fool?
Awa an bile yer heid	Begone with your insults
Had de/Haud yer wheesht!	Be quiet!
Haes da cat got de tongue?	Do you retain the power of speech?
A'm hed a cat's lick	I have washed quickly at the sink
Makk a lang airm	The food on the table is for you - take it!
He's no backward in comin forward	He has the confidence to speak up when required
Shø haes a cloot clippin tongue	Her manner of speech is painfully sharp
Boys o Bressa	A Shetlandic exclamation - possibly a minced oath
Wasters come tae want	Take what's there for you before it's gone
Dir nae föl laek a aald föl	One's maturity is not currently enhancing the precision of one's thought
Coat's oan a shoogly peg	Your continued tenure is questionable
Dinnae let the door skelp yer erse on the wye oot	A hasty departure is advised
Cannae dae right fur daein wrang	Nothing is going your way
Wire in/Get tore in/Fill yer buits	There's plenty to eat
Wir bellies is tinkin wir trootts haes bön cut	The promised hospitality is taking longer than one would expect.

Idiom	Meaning
Yer a lang time deid	Literally, you're a long time dead. An exhortation to live life to the full and take opportunities.
Whit's fur ye'll no gie by ye	Things that are meant to will work out and things that don't weren't meant to.
Ne'er cast a cloot til Mey's oot	Once the May trees are in flower, it is safe to wear less protective clothing - until such time anything less than full winter attire cannot be advised.
Aff ma back ya humph	Progress towards our shared goal benefits more from your absence than your continued presence.
See yersel richt	Do not be so generous with your time or money as to leave yourself short.
Hit's a lang sair fecht	The expectations one is required to meet are prolonged and onerous.

Patterns of speech

Any language has widely understood patterns of speech, and Scots is no different. As well as the idiomatic phenomena described above, it's also worth taking some time to consider ways of saying things give writing in Scots a ring of truth. If I say 'A'll be hom at da back o six', this makes perfect sense in Scots. It isn't entirely idiomatic, but would sound odd in English and would be less likely to be understood than 'sometime after six'.

Other examples include *aff* for 'from' (*A goat a contract aff ma publisher the ithir day*); *needs* for 'needs to be' (*Mi tawtties needs liftin syne dey dunna rot i da grund*) and as above *A young Shaetlan boy*, being a young boy from Shetland.

Incorporating these patterns of Scots into your writing can often involve quite a bit of unlearning. In English, backed by centuries of state supported education, such patterns of speech can be branded as incorrect. In Scots, they are no such thing. They are simply phenomena of everyday language - alive in the mouths and ears of her speakers and on the pages of her readers and writers.

Conclusion

Neither above list is exhaustive - they simply aim to show the diverse ways that Scots as a written and spoken language contains resources the Scots writer can use to enrich, enliven and improve the texts we create.

Controversies in 2020 around Scots Wikipedia coincide with some of the highest levels of Scots speaking ever recorded. Over 1.5 million people can only have a when of stories to be told. As an avid reader of Scots, I relish the prospects of more and more idiom rich texts being produced in the coming years. There is so much to learn and celebrate about our language, our culture and our people. Haud me back.

Covert Scotticisms

by Antonia Uri

A Scotticism is a word, phrase or idiom which is associated with the language spoken in Scotland, by people who identify as Scottish. David Hume was a Scottish Enlightenment philosopher and essayist, amongst many other things. Hume was concerned about his work being accessible to all English speakers, and did not want to limit himself by only being understood by Scots. Therefore, in 1752, he created and then published one of the first lists of contrasting Scotticisms with their suggested English counterparts. It included, for example, *learn* as a Scotticism of 'teach', and *anent* as a Scotticism of 'with regard to'.

There are two kinds of Scotticisms which can be categorised as 'overt' and 'covert' Scotticisms. Overt Scotticisms are the sort of words and phrases often used to portray Scots in comedy. They may not always be commonly used by Scots speakers (or writers) in day-to-day life, but instead are intended to evoke parody.

Take the cartoon character Groundskeeper Willie, for example. The Scots that he speaks in 'The Simpsons' is so inconsistent and contains so many overt Scotticisms that it was debated for years where he originated from, and he was claimed by a number of Scottish regions. Glasgow City Council were the first to consider Willie theirs, before a spokesman for Aberdeen Football Club came out and argued that he was actually from the granite city. Eventually, the debate was settled in an episode of the show - Wullie was an island man, from Orkney all along. But what caused the confusion? Of course, most Scots speakers will know that Glasgow Scots is very different to North East Scots which is very different to Orcadian Scots. Willie doesn't speak any of these dialects specifically, but instead, through the use of overt Scotticisms, provides a parody of a Scottish man. The Scotticisms used by Willie provide an example of how the complexity of the Scots language and Scottish population can often be misunderstood by and oversimplified for an international audience.

Covert Scotticisms, on the other hand, are regularly used in everyday Scots (and Scottish English), sometimes without the speaker even noticing that they are using distinctly Scots vocabulary. These words and phrases are perfectly valid and should be included in pieces of writing in Scots when it is relevant for them to be used. Some Scots speakers might even be surprised to discover that they have been using some of these terms for their entire lives without realising that they were not English! Nevertheless, simply slipping them into sentences, without adhering to Scots grammar rules or the consistent use of Scots vocabulary, does not make for coherent Scots.

Examples of Covert Scotticisms

Scots	English
Are ye wantin/needin...	Do you want/need?
flit	to move to a new house
I'm nae carin	I don't care
I'm past carin	I don't care anymore
messages	shopping, errands
outwith	outside, beyond
shan	bad, disappointing
shoogly	wobbly
shot(tie)	turn
skelp	slap, smack
skite	slip, slide
squint	askew
wee	small

N.B. This list is not exhaustive but is intended to give the reader a flavour of what is considered to be a covert Scotticism.

Editing

by Emma Grae

Consistency and Rationale Guide

Scots has a number of regional differences across each of the traditional dialects and pandialectal approaches based on traditional spelling, grammatical and idiomatic usages, but whatever form you choose to write your non-fiction articles in, it must be consistent and have a clear rationale behind it.

You could, for example, write your articles in a Burns style, or with a strong regional dialect underpinning your work - such as West Coast Scots.

Scots speakers have been taught how to write in English, not Scots, which is why it's all too easy to slip into English, inconsistent Scots or use the writing conventions of English to write Scots words (e.g. by writing *couldny* rather than a traditional Scots option like *couldnae* or *couldna*).

At this point, it's worth noting that while you can add Scots words to your word processor dictionaries, they will not flag 'English slips', as that is their default language. Therefore, this is only useful to a limited extent - although it can help with consistency.

If *couldnae*, for example, is in your dictionary, the word *couldny* would be underlined and you'd be alerted.

Traditional word processors like Microsoft Word operate by underlining 'mispelt' words in red and grammar errors in green. However, it is worth noting that this is not a reliable way to check the accuracy of your writing even in English as some words may be spelt correctly but simply not be a part of your computer's dictionary and the Grammar feature will not necessarily flag up all grammatical errors.

One way to use a word processor when writing Scots articles is to turn off the spell check option in English (this can be found under 'preferences' or 'settings' depending on your device), or to add Scots words to your existing dictionary, so that if you misspell them or write them with the writing conventions of English, they will be flagged.

To add a word to a custom dictionary, simply right click and select 'Add to Dictionary'.

I suggest the use of Grammarly, which, even in Scots, will flag the repetition of words and other general errors, although it, like your standard word processor dictionary, will flag Scots spellings as being incorrect.

However, it is worth noting that when you are writing in Scots, some of Grammarly's features like spell check will not be useful and present you with many errors even when you are writing in correct Scots. Instead, you have to persevere to take advantage of its useful features, such as flagging the repetition of words.

We suggest purchasing a reputable Scots dictionary (see references) so that you can check the spellings of words that you are not familiar with. These will also provide you with multiple accepted spellings, giving you the chance to pick the one most suitable to your dialect. Another option is to use an online Scots dictionary such as the DSL, which gives multiple spellings of Scots words. Scots Online, on the other hand, only offers one spelling, which will likely contradict your voice if you are writing a regional dialect.

Transcription of spoken language (Used in conjunction with another method)

Every non-fiction article written in Scots can be best checked by being spoken by its writer afterward. If something doesn't read like natural Scots, chances are that it is not and needs changed as we experience Scots as a spoken language.

However, using this method alone is not going to guarantee consistency.

An example below shoes the difference between translating an English paragraph word-by-word into Scots and the difference that reading the translation aloud can make.

Scots is an idiomatic language, and translating it word-by-word puts you at risk of missing out on much of its vibrancy.

English

Gran walked to the bus stop, carrying two bags of shopping. She was tired, and it was raining. All she wanted was to sit by her fireplace and watch *Homes Under the Hammer*, but she was still a good half an hour away from her home.

Word-by-word translation

Granny walked tae the bus stoap carryin twa bags o messages. She wis tired, and it wis rainin. Aw she wanted wis tae sit by hur fireplace and watch 'Homes Under the Hammer', but she wis still a guid hauf an hour away fae hur hame.

Scots read aloud

Granny walked tae the bus stoap wi twa bags o messages. She wis scunnered, and it wis a richt dreich day. Aw she wanted was tae work oan hur fireplace tartan while watchin 'Homes Under the Hammer', but she wis still a fair bit away fae gettin hame.

As you can see, the idiomatic nature of Scots is something that can't be achieved with word-by-word translations. In short, the magic of Scots as a spoken language can only be truly achieved when it is read aloud and not simply translated from English word-by-word.

Below are three suggestions of methods you can adopt to ensure the consistency of your Scots while writing your articles.

Writing, like any skill, is something that is developed over time, and as you become more accustomed to writing in Scots, you will develop one which works best for you.

It is recommended that you explore all of these methods and then speak to other Scots writers to ask what they do too.

Spelling

The most time-consuming, but effective rationale

The best way to check the consistency of your writing is to go through your article's Scots word by Scots word, and make a list. Then you can search your document for words that deviate from your chosen spelling as you go along.

This is a time consuming-process, but for an article of around 1,000 words, it will typically not take more than half an hour. This can also be done with a custom dictionary by adding your preferred Scots spellings.

Usually, the most difficult part is checking the consistency of the first page. After that, the majority of common words will have been checked, making the remainder of the document relatively easy to go through, so this shouldn't put anyone off writing longer articles.

A list such as this would allow you to use the find/replace function with the English cognates and compare the use of vocabulary across both articles.

Article One	Article Two
about - about	about - about
	do - dae
for - fur	
	from -fae
her - hur	her - hur
herself - hursel	herself - hursel
himself - himsel	himself - himself
I - Ah	I - Ah
my - ma	my - ma
myself - masel	myself - masel
of - o	of - o
off - aff	
on - oan	on - oan
onto - oantae	onto - onto
out - oot (but not wi'oot or shout)	out - oot (but not without or shout)
was - wis	was - wis
wasn't - wasnae	wasn't - wasnae
with - wi	

An Alternative: Tracked Vocabulary

If going through your document in this level of detail simply isn't possible due to time constraints, another way of checking your Scots is to make a list of all the Scots words you use in a document, then highlight them as and when they appear in your article.

This will give you a ready-made guide to what words you are using as you write, especially if you are being faithful to a regional dialect.

For a 1,000 word article, this method, which will obviously require advance preparation, taking around twenty minutes.

About	Belchin	Cannae	Dancin	E'er	Guid	Hame
Aff	Broon	Callt	Dae	Efter	Gane	Haun
Ah	Bucklin	Comin	Daein	Everythin	Gie	Haunded
Ah'd	Burd	Couldnae	Didnae	Everywan	Gonnae	Heid
Ah've			Doacter	Eyebroos	Gret	Hoo
Alang			Doonstair		Groond	Hoor
Anythin			Drippin			Hud

Base Words

While absolute consistency only exists in an ideal world, sometimes you will only have time to check base words - that is, those which are used most frequently. These are the key words that makeup any language, and we have compiled the following list to ensure that your Scots is as consistent as possible.

It is also worth noting that when you are checking the base words within your writing, it can be useful to sort them by frequency, as this will yield more results than doing it alphabetically.

Ah/A (I)	Aff (Off)	Cannae (Can't)	Dae (Do)	Gien (Given)
Gaun (Going)	Fur (For)	Fae (From)	Hud (Had)	Huv (Have)
Hur (Her)	Nae (Not)	Naw (No)	O (Of)	Oot (Out)
Tae (To)	Wi (With)	Whit (What)	Wis (Was)	Wur (Were)

100 Common Words

However, if you have the time to check more than just the base words in your Scots and want a guide of what words are likely to be used frequently, these are the 100 most common Scots words.

Infinitives in Scots take a different form, as you will see in this table. In English, the infinitive form of a verb uses 'to' e.g. to err (is human.) However, in Scots this may take the form for tae. e.g. for tae err (is human).

A/Ah (I)	Acause (Because)	Aff (Off)	An (And)	Ane / ae een, yin, wan (One)	Aw (All)	Auld (Old)	Bairn, wean, cheil (Child)	Bane (Bone)	Bluid (Blood)
Breist (Breast)	Burd (Bird)	Burn, watter (River)	Cannae (Cannot)	Cauld (Cold)	Clodd (Cloud)	Dae (Do)	Dug (Dog)	Ee (Eye)	Fae (From)
Faither (Father)	Faur (Far)	Fir tae blaw (To blow)	Fir tae birl (To turn [Intransitive])	Fir tae boak (To vomit)	Fir tae coont (To count)	Fir tae dee (To die)	Fir tae dicht (To wipe)	Fir tae gie (To give)	Fir tae grogger (To spit)
Fir tae faw (To fall)	Fir tae fecht (To fight)	Fir tae be feart (To be scared)	Fir tae flee (To fly)	Fir tae haud (To hold)	Fir tae hink (To hink)	Fir tae lauch (To laugh)	Fir tae lig (To lie [as in a bed])	Fir tae ken, knaw (To know)	Fir tae kull (To kill)

Fir tae scrit (To scratch)	Fir tae sinner (To split)	Fir tae sook (To suck)	Fir tae staun (To stand)	Fir tae swoon (To swim)	Fir tae sweel (To swell)	Fit (Foot)	Floer (Flower)	Foostie (Rotten)	Fower (Four)
Fur (For)	Gie (Give)	Gien (Given)	Giein (Giving)	Guid (Good)	Guidman (Husband)	Hairt (Heart)	Haun (Hand)	Heid (Head)	Hou (How)
Hud (Had)	Hur (Her)	Huv (Have)	Ither (Other)	Iss (This)	Maet (Meat)	Mauki, Manky (Dirty)	Muckle (Big)	Mither (Mother)	Moontain (Mountain)
Nae (Not)	Naw (No)	Narra (Narrow)	Nemm (Name)	Nicht (Night)	O (Of)	Oot (Out)	Shaip (Sharp)	Richt (Right, correct)	Rid, Ried (Red)
Smith (Smooth)	Strecht (Straight)	Tae (To)	Thrie (Three)	Twa (Two)	Wee, sma (Small)	Weet (Wet)	Wha (Who)	Whaur (Where)	Wi (With)
Wids (Woods)	Wis (Was)	Whit (What)	Whan (When)	What (Where)	Wumman (Woman)	Wur (Were)	Ye (You)	Yees (Yous)	Yilla (Yellow)

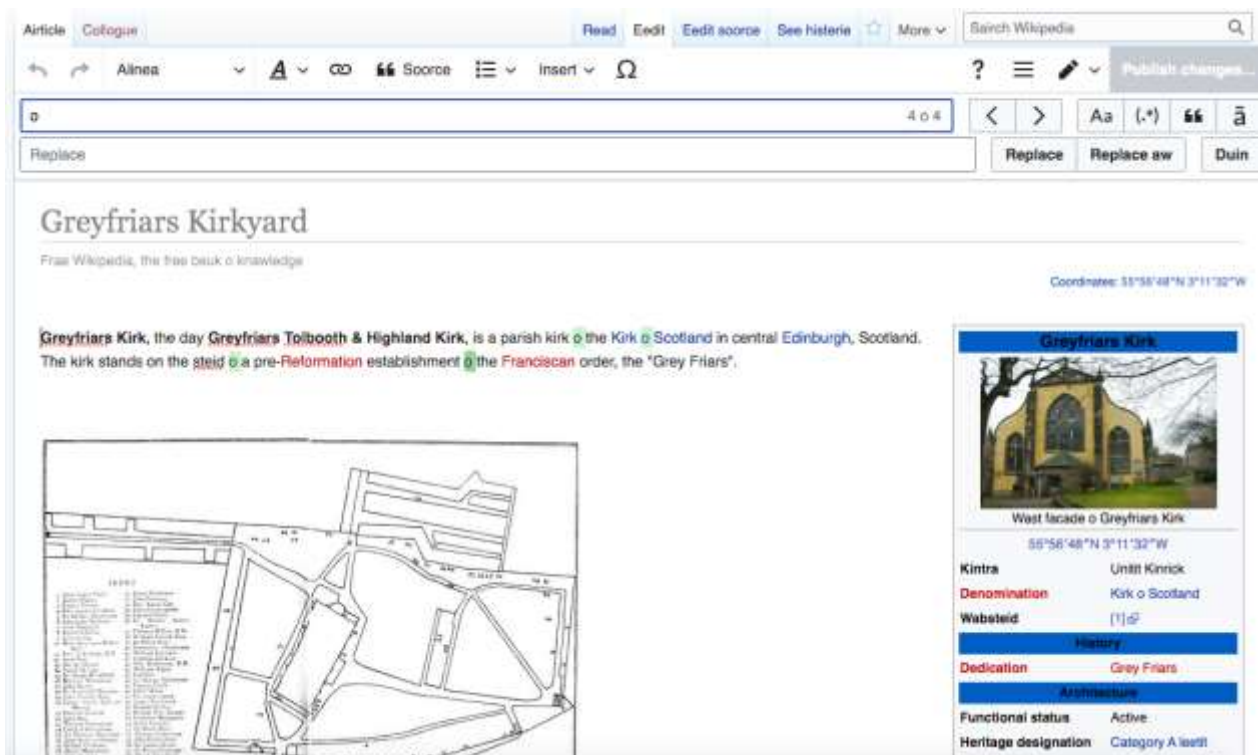
Case Study: Editing Scots Wikipedia

The Scots Wikipedia in its existing form is a huge editable, community written resource, and it can be tempting to edit articles as they are on the website when you are not writing new content.

However, if you do so, it is important to note that a search of the article's content on Wikipedia may not highlight every example of a given word (i.e. *flair*) in an article. This is why it's important to edit infoboxes and other page elements too, as, in its current form, there are a lot of inconsistencies across these elements, as Scots Wikipedia is still under development and being translated.

Wikipedia infoboxes provide information at a glance about a page's subject, but as they are not part of the page that immediately becomes available when the 'edit' option is selected, they may have been ignored and/or forgotten about.

In the example below, searching for a word on a page (in this instance, the Scots 'o') does not highlight the word in the infobox too.



The screenshot shows the Scots Wikipedia interface for the article "Greyfriars Kirkyard". The search bar at the top contains the letter "o". The infobox on the right side of the page provides details about the kirkyard, including its location, denomination, and heritage designation. The infobox content is as follows:

Kintra	Unitt Kinrick
Denomination	Kirk o Scotland
Websteid	[1]d[2]
History	
Dedication	Grey Friars
Architecture	
Functional status	Active
Heritage designation	Category A list[1]

In some instances, page attributes such as infoboxes aren't even written in Scots!

During the first Wikipedia editathon, one approach used was to cross-reference words speakers were unsure of through the use of the [Dictionary of the Scots Language](#) (DSL).

When you are editing articles, if you can't find a word in the dictionary and are unsure if it is even Scots, simply remove it or rework the sentence to include Scots words that you are completely confident of.

As Scots is an oral language, a problem that speakers often face is idiom: you might be sure that a phrase such as 'yer a lang time died' is Scots, but can't find it in the DSL. If this is the case, it is recommended that you simply ask another Scots speaker if they have heard the phrase before.

Another issue that arose during the editathon was regional quirks. If you are a Scots speaker and editing articles about your hometown and surrounding areas, if something doesn't *sound* right, it probably isn't. A good example here is the 'Wast Coast o Scotland'. While 'Wast' is used by some Scots speakers, as someone who grew up on the West Coast, I never heard it described in this way and stuck to this when editing.

Regardless of what you encounter while editing, it is worth noting that Wikipedia is a peer-reviewed resource, and therefore, if you edit something in a way that doesn't work for other Scots speakers, they will always have the chance to correct you.

Wikipedia has functions for talk which enable this feedback to be provided to you when you log onto the website, and if you are working during an editathon, you are more likely to receive this feedback in real time.

General Editing Advice

Reading aloud

Regardless of whether you are writing in Scots or in English, it is always a good idea to read your work aloud. This will help you to spot sentences that are too wordy, or simply places where additional punctuation may be needed.

Line-by-line checks

Going through your writing with a fine tooth-comb by carefully looking at each line will help you spot a lot of tiny issues - like the overuse of phrases, or the repetition of words.

Cross-referencing

If you have the slightest inclination that you are not using an idiom or phrase correctly, it is never a bad idea to cross-reference this with a dictionary. For a long time, I mistakenly wrote 'having a nanny rooney' when, in fact, the correct Scots was 'Annie Rooney'.

Don't be afraid to ask for help: We are all human, and we all have gaps in our knowledge. If there is something that you aren't sure about, there are a lot of Scots language resources available on social media - such as the [Scots Language Forum](#) on Facebook - where people will be happy to help answer your questions. If it is possible, share your work with other Scots writers too. The number of people writing in Scots is growing and many are happy to discuss writing in the leid.

Step away

Last, but most certainly not least, if you are struggling with a particular piece of writing, it can be a good idea to take a break from it. Often, you will return with fresher eyes and perspective that will help you to achieve your goal.

References

Compiled by Antonia Uri

Online Dictionaries

The two online dictionaries recommended are 'The Online Scots Dictionary' and the 'Dictionary of the Scots Language'.

The Online Scots Dictionary' provides translations from English to Scots and Scots to English. It does not always indicate which dialect a word belongs to and this should be cross-checked if you are writing in a particular dialect. It also only generally allows users to search for single words, not phrases.

The 'Dictionary of the Scots Language' will often indicate dialectal variations. These are indicated by abbreviations such as 'Sh.' (Shetland), 'Ork.' (Orkney) and 'Uls.' (Ulster). It will also provide examples of texts where the word searched for has been used.

Both resources are free to use.

Suggested reading

Scots Online, 2020. *The Online Scots Dictionary*. [Online].

Available from: <https://www.scots-online.org>

Scottish Language Dictionaries Ltd, 2020. *Dictionary of the Scots Language*. [Online].

Available from: <https://dsl.ac.uk>

Dictionaries in Print

For anyone who wishes to write in Scots, the DSL (Dictionaries of the Scots Language) provides a plethora of invaluable resources. The 'Concise Scots Dictionary' (CSD), for example, is an incredibly useful tool for those looking to write in any Scots dialect, or indeed no specific dialect at all. The DSL also offers a bilingual 'Concise English-Scots Dictionary' which may also be helpful for anyone who writes in Scots, no matter their level of proficiency. The Scots Dictionary for Schools app is based on the text of the Dictionaries of the Scots Language's publication, the '[Essential Scots Dictionary](#)'. The current (second) edition was launched on 25 January 2021 and features pronunciation guides.

Those who desire to learn more about or become more proficient in writing in a particular Scots dialect have the option of purchasing a dictionary specific to their chosen dialect.

Suggested reading

Concise English-Scots Dictionary, 2001. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Concise Scots Dictionary, 2017. 2nd edition. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Christie, A. and Christie, A., 2014. *Shetland Words: A dictionary of the Shetland dialect*. 2nd edition. Lerwick: The Shetland Times Ltd.

Kynoch, D., 2019. *A Doric Dictionary*. Edinburgh: Luath Press.

Historical Thesaurus

Researchers at the University of Glasgow have compiled the 'Historical Thesaurus of Scots', also known as the HTS. As any writer, of any language, will know, a thesaurus is a helpful tool when constructing a piece of text of any type. The HTS consists of language found in the earliest known records of Scots right up to the Scots language used today making it useful when attempting to broaden your Scots vocabulary. The HTS can be accessed online, and users can either perform a thesaurus search or browse the categories (divided into adjectives, adverbs, interjections, nouns, phrases, verbs and reflexive verbs).

Suggested reading

University of Glasgow, 2015. *Historical Thesaurus of Scots*. [Online].

Available from: <https://scotsthesaurus.org>

Online Courses

For those looking for a more structured way to learn Scots, The Open University provides two free courses which, between them, cover just about anything a learner could want to know about the language. If you would like to gain a deeper understanding of a specific area (grammar or the history of the language, for example) you can also pick and choose the modules that you would like to focus on and skip those that you are not so interested in.

Suggested reading

The Open University, 2019. *Scots language and culture - part 1*. [Online]. Edinburgh: The Open University.

Available from: <https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=2705>

The Open University, 2020. *Scots language and culture - part 2*. [Online]. Edinburgh: The Open University.

Available from: <https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=4190#tabs-2>

Videos

Some people prefer to learn by watching and listening rather than by only reading. This comprehensive collection of videos is ideal for such people who would like to work on improving their written or spoken Scots.

Once again, the videos are free to watch and easily accessible on YouTube.

Each video is approximately an hour long and covers a different area of the Scots language.

Suggested reading

Dempster, M., 2020. *Scots Language an Accent*. [Online]. 23 August.

Available from:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLmk3hiyUEgWI7Qa9pBGN3r94ahQiSXJ2U>

Scots Language Guides

Dempster, M., 2020. *Mind yer language? Scots – language and accent*. [Online].

Text: <https://independent.academia.edu/DempsterM>

Videos: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLmk3hiyUEgWI7Qa9pBGN3r94ahQiSXJ2U>

Mak Forrit, 2020. *How to read Scots: A brief introductory guide (written in English)*. [Online].

Edinburgh: Mak Forrit.

Available from: <https://www.makforrit.scot/scots/read-scots/>

Mak Forrit, 2020. *Mak Forrit Style Sheet*. [Online]. Edinburgh: Mak Forrit.

Available from: <https://www.makforrit.scot/scots/stylesheet/>

Scots Language Centre

Finally, the Scots Language Centre website offers an abundance of resources for any Scots speaker and/or writer.

For example, the website contains a page dedicated to the Scots translations of Scottish place names as well as common Scots place-name elements (such as brae meaning hillside or burn meaning stream). This resource could prove to be particularly useful when writing factual texts about Scotland.

Suggested reading

Scots Language Centre, 2020. *Centre for the Scots Leid - Hame*. [Online]. Perth: Scots Language Centre.

Available from: <https://www.scotslanguage.com>

Scots Language Centre, 2020. *Guide to a map of Scotland in Scots*. [Online]. Perth: Scots Language Centre.

Available from:

https://d3lmsxlb5aor5x.cloudfront.net/library/document/Map_of_Scotland_in_Scots-Guide_and_gazetteer.pdf

Scots Language Society

Joining the Scots Language Society (Scots Leid Associe) is recommended for anyone who is interested in reading more Scots literature of all sorts and styles. One of the best ways to learn a written language is to immerse yourself in the literature. Membership to the Scots Language Society costs £20 per year for anyone living in the United Kingdom. For this price, you will receive quarterly editions of 'Lallans' – the Scots Journal of Arts and Letters. Each edition of Lallans contains a variety of Scots works, from poetry to short stories and more.

The Scots Language Society also holds an annual Scots writing competition called "Sangshaw". Anyone can enter – it is a great opportunity to show off what you have achieved in your journey to literacy in Scots!

Suggested reading

Scots Language Society, 2020. Lallans – the Scots Language Society – Hame. [Online]. Arbroath: Scots Language Society.

Available from: <https://www.lallans.co.uk/index.php>

Works Consulted

Cameron, G., 2009. *Don't be silly... He's our Willie*. [Online]. Glasgow: The Scottish Sun. Available from: <https://www.thescottishsun.co.uk/archives/news/23263/don%C2%92t-be-silly-he%C2%92s-our-willie/>

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Corbett, C., 2009. *Understanding Grammar in Scotland Today*. Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies.

Dempster, M., 2020. *Mind yer language? Scots – language and accent*. [Online].

Text: <https://independent.academia.edu/DempsterM>

Videos: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLmk3hiyUEgWI7Qa9pBGN3r94ahQiSXJ2U>

Eagle, Andy, 2020. *An Introduction to Modern Scots*

Available from: <https://www.scots-online.org/articles/contents/ModernScots.pdf>

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Available from: <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/features-of-scots/>

IPSO (Independent Press Standards Organisation), 2019. Editors' Code of Practice. [Online]. London: IPSO.

Available from: <https://www.ipso.co.uk/editors-code-of-practice/>

Johnson, J. and Wild, K., 2019. *Fantoosh sitooteries and more: new Scottish entries in the March 2019 update*. [Online]. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Available from: <https://public.oed.com/blog/new-scottish-entries-in-the-oed/>

National Library of Scotland, 2019. *Scotticisms*. [Online]. Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland.

Available from: <https://digital.nls.uk/learning/scottish-enlightenment/source/a-list-of-scotticisms-by-david-hume-published-in-the-scots-magazine-1760-first-printed-in-1752/>

Scots Language Centre, 2020. *Fit Like Is't?* [Online]. Perth: Scots Language Centre.

Available from: https://www.scotslanguage.com/The_Doric_uid72/Fit_Like_Is%27t%3F

Scots Language Centre, 2020. The Main Dialects of Scots. [Online] Perth: Scots Language Centre.

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The Open University, 2020. *Unit 17: Grammar* [Online]. Edinburgh: The Open University.

Available from: <https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=147479>

The Scottish Corpus of Texts & Speech. 2021 [Online]. Glasgow: University of Glasgow. <http://www.scottishcorpus.ac.uk>.

Selfe, David W, "A ferlie he spied wi' his e'e": Examining the Apologetic Apostrophe.

Available from: <https://www.epicureancure.com/302/a-ferlie-he-spied-wi-his-ee-a-brief-examination-of-the-apologetic-apostrophe/>

Shetland For Wirds, 2020. *Grammar*. [Online]. Lerwick: Shetland For Wirds.

Available from: <https://www.shetlanddialect.org.uk/grammar>

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Available from: https://www.scots-online.org/dictionary/spelling_guide.php

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Available from: <https://scotssyntaxatlas.ac.uk>

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Available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eye_dialect

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Appendix 1: Recommended reading

Susi Briggs – Recommended Reading

As someone who writes creatively in Scots, I can highly recommend reading anything in Scots that resonates with you. This allows for the best learning of Scots literacy as you will understand the full meaning behind the [text](#). Please do not just opt for learning what words mean but also find written work that makes you think and feel inspired.

When I first started to write in Scots, I chose to delve into classic children's literature such as *The Hoose at Pooh's Neuk* translated by James Robertson and *The Eejits* translated by Matthew Fitt. As I was familiar with the stories already in English it meant that the written Scots was far easier to comprehend and retain without grabbing a Scots dictionary every five minutes. Modern picture book translations are ideal as they are short and familiar.

More recently I have enjoyed *Callum and The Mountain* by Alan McClure, where the Scots language features so naturally among the English text. Scots language features naturally in the landscape and emotions of the characters as well as their dialogue with each other. I also love the books by Ross Sayers. In the books *Sonny and Me* and *Daisy on the Outer Line* the use of Scots is prevalent, and the settings and characters are relatable to modern times. I enjoy returning to the stories in the book *A Tongue in Yer Heid* edited by James Robertson. The stories by various Scots writers cover various dialects and styles which I find fascinating.

Matt McGinn, The Corries, Hamish Henderson and Violet Jacobs to name a few musicians and poets I adore. Scots is a musical language and I believe that any language is often best felt and understood in poetry and song. My favourite poem is *The Flytin o Life and Death* by Hamish Henderson.

I highly recommend learning the roots and history of the language and this is covered in books like *Why Scots Matters* by Derrick McClure and *The Mither Tongue* by Billy Kay. Discovering the roots of Scots language is important and it is worth remembering how we lost our way in order to make sure we protect and nurture our Scots language and literacy better.

Morna Young: Essential Scots Reading

Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off by Liz Lochhead

Sunset Song by Lewis Grassie Gibbon

Country: Scotland. What like is it?

Like many other students in Scotland, I read Liz Lochhead's *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* whilst I was in school. I remember the shimmer of excitement when I experienced the Corbie's opening speech describing Scotland with gorgeous, richly layered Scots language. The Scotland here wasn't just "bonnie", it was everything from "a bricht bere meadow" to "a field o' stanes". For a teenager brought up speaking North East Scots, seeing these visceral words on the page was awe-inspiring. I'd read many Scots poems and songs prior to this – and performed them at our wonderful Moray Music Festival – but discovering Scots as dialogue cracked open endless, new possibilities. These were words that demanded to be tasted and read aloud.

As a North East quine, I will also never forget my first reading of Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Sunset Song* and its weaving of Doric. Chris Guthrie was the heroine I didn't know I needed and the repeated reference of the "two Chrisses" that "fought for her heart and tormented her" deeply resonated, and continued to do so into my adult life. It remains my favourite novel of all time and it is one I return to time and time again. Like an old friend, it brings me comfort to revisit the Mearns for, despite the harshness of the lives lived, it is ultimately a story about resilience.

I would also thoroughly recommend anything by Anne Donovan, but particularly *Buddha Da* which I found both hilarious and poignant. I've always loved comedy that's rooted in emotional depth and this absolutely hit the spot.

Martin Travers: Essential Scots Reading

Linmill Stories by Robert McLellan

A few years ago, I was doing some early research into my play *Annville*. It is an adaptation of Canadian author and artist Heather Spears' novel *The Flourish*. This true story climaxes in a double murder and suicide in 1883 in Kirkfieldbank near Lanark. From the very beginning I knew I wanted my take on the story to be in authentic Clydesdale Scots.

I contacted Donald Smith at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh about where best to find examples of late 19th century or early 20th century Lanarkshire Scots.

His suggestion literally changed my creative life. He said I should read Robert McLellan's *Linmill Stories*.

Like most folk tackling written Scots for the first time, I initially struggled reading the book until I tracked down recordings of four of the stories McLellan himself had made for the BBC in the 1960s.

Reading and hearing these stories at the same time did something to my brain. I was able to make the connection between spoken Scots and written Scots. It was like a door opening up and taking me into a new and exhilarating world.

I have never read a funnier and more touching collection of stories than Robert McLellan's *Linmill Stories*. Part *Tom Sawyer* and part *Oor Wullie*, it is a national treasure that captures the Clyde Valley at the start of the 20th century and its rural characters wonderfully and forever.

THE NOVEL: <https://canongate.co.uk/books/232-linmill-stories/>

THE RECORDINGS: <https://www.lallans.co.uk/index.php/19-scots-language/161-sscd-050>

Laura Green – What to read?

As an English teacher working outwith schools, I must recommend Anne Donovan's collection of short stories, *Hieroglyphics*. The story itself, *Hieroglyphics*, is about a wee lassie who struggles with literacy in school. Nevertheless, she is captivated by stories, and expresses her engagement by drawing wee images - like hieroglyphics - instead of writing words.

Other favourites in the collection include *A Chitterin Bite*, where Donovan's description of eating hot food after a trip to the swimming baths transports me right back to my school days (our local swimming baths was next to the chippie!) and *Loast*, a story about an aging woman, lonely in the routine of her mundane life.

So - stories that mind me of teaching, stories that evoke childhood memories, stories that relate to me as a woman. That's why writing in Scots, and having access to writing in Scots, is so important - relatability. What could be more relatable than texts that are written in the language of your mother, your partner, your community, yourself?

Christie Williamson – A Scots reader

As a Scots writer, I inhabit two main substrata of the literary tradition - a poet, and a Shetlander.

In many ways I began my journey through writing as a Shetlander first. I have been fortunate to inherit and be part of a rich literary tradition in Shetland. Key texts here include John J Graham's 'Shadowed Valley', a novel narrated in English with Shetlandic dialogue and 'Shoormal', Robert Alan Jamieson's debut collection of poems which explores how 'da dialect' and standard English interact with and infiltrate each other. Other writers I keep coming back to include Christine De Luca, Stella Sutherland, Vagaland and William J Tait.

As poet, the work of the Scottish renaissance is a huge inspiration, and a high water mark one attempts to approach in one's own writing. As well as Sydney Goodsir Smith and Robert Garrioch, there's simply no getting past its architect, Hugh MacDiarmid - a bold visionary and a modernist poet of deservedly global renown.

Antonia Uri – What do you read?

I adore Scots poetry and enjoy reading the quarterly editions of Lallans, work published by The Poets' Republic and of course the works of our national treasure Rabbin Burns. For non-fiction pieces and articles in Scots, my go-tos include Mak Forrit and Bella Caledonia.

Emma Grae – Scots Essential Reading

As a Scottish novelist, my earliest introduction to writing about Scotland and regionally specific words and phrases were Lillian Beckwith's books. Set in the Hebrides, Beckwith's books really opened my eyes to the vibrancy and specificity that you get within different Scots communities. Some favourites are *The Sea for Breakfast* and *The Loud Halo*. But getting to Scots specifically, a must-read is Billy Kay's *Scots: The Mither Tongue*, which details the history of the Scots language, as well as Michael Munro's *The Complete Patter*, which is useful if you're considering writing fiction in the leid.

Dr Michael Dempster – What do you read?

Perhaps it's to be expected from the Director of the Scots Language Centre, but I would recommend exploring the wealth of Scots resources available through www.scotslanguage.com. The centre has an abundance of free high quality Scots writing from aw the airts an pairts written by a wide variety of speakers of all dialects an from throughout its 700 year literature collected over the past decades, and it regularly posts new content. As it has been for countless others, the centre was the first online resource that gave me access to writing in my own first language. This was long before I even considered becoming involved in writing in Scots.

Other than the Scots Language Centre's website I would highly recommend reading the Scots Language Society's Lallans Journal. With membership of the society you receive three issues of Lallans per year brimming with a wealth of Scots poetry, prose, drama, and even comics. There are a wide variety of writers displaying all sorts of Scots writing within.

<https://lallans.co.uk/>

Appendix 2: Common spelling conventions

by Dr Michael Dempster

Spoken Languages are made up of sounds. Both Scots and English spoken with a Scots accent use the same basic sounds. Many languages which use the Latin alphabet have what is known as a deep orthography, which means that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between the sounds of the language and how it is represented in a written form.

In Scots accents we have 26 basic consonant sounds and 16 basic stressed vowel sounds. In English accents there are fewer consonant sounds and more vowel sounds. The Latin alphabet has only 21 consonant letters and 5 vowel letters. So in Both Scots and English we cannot have a one-to-one correspondence between the sounds of the language and a single letter to represent these sounds.

Instead, we have traditional spelling systems with multiple different ways to represent sounds. Here are the most common spellings of the consonant sounds:

The most common consonant spelling conventions in Scots and English (by sound)		
Dempster's shorthand	Example words	IPA spelling
p	pen , happy and top	p
b	bed , rubber and web	b
t	tale , later , letter , receipt and hat	t
d	drum , ado , ladder , odd and clad	d
k	kid , ink , cat , act , back , queen and exam	k
g	ghost , get , begin , beggar , and leg	g
m	map , vamp , humming and jam	m
n	nag , band , spanner and can	n
ng	singer , bring , linger and brink	ŋ
f	fish , raft , baffle , half , chaff , roughage , cough , photo , graphite and graph	f
v	van , pave , Slav and of	v
th	think , without and bath	θ
dh	these , mother and bathe	ð
s	slide , gasp , messy , gas , guess , exit , city and lace	s
z	zoom , faze , guzzle , buzz , viz , phase and does	z
sh	shine , washing , lash , sugar , session and emotion	ʃ
j	measure , beige , equation and azure	ʒ
h	hot , Birmingham and whole	h
ch	loch , haugh	x
wh	which , white	ʍ
w	wink , quick and aqua	w
y	yes , alliance .	j
l	like , balance , telling , bell and fool	l
r	rap , bard , harrumph and star	r/r
tsh	chin , batches , nature and teach	tʃ
dj	gin , joke , Django and judge	dʒ

Scots and English, along with most languages which use the Latin alphabet, share most of the spelling conventions shown above. The traditional spellings of vowel sounds vary across languages, as the sounds used in those languages vary more than consonants.

The traditional spellings of English derive from a variety of Middle English.

The most common vowel spelling conventions in English (arranged by Scots accent sounds)		
Dempster's shorthand	examples	IPA spelling
i	<i>sit, bit, give, with, since</i> and <i>fish</i>	ɪ
uh	<i>above</i> and <i>runner</i> or any vowel	ə
u	<i>tonne, fun, just, young</i> and <i>world</i>	ʌ
ee	<i>be, feed,</i> and <i>beat</i>	i
ae	<i>late, wear, game, where, make, gain,</i> and <i>way</i>	e
eh	<i>bed, head, chest, were</i> and <i>said</i>	ɛ
ah	<i>bat, hang, had, yard, farm, aunt</i> and <i>half</i>	ɑ
oo	<i>cool, foot, pull, do, Luke</i> and <i>loose</i>	ʊ
oa	<i>coat, both, old, bowl, soul</i> and <i>told</i>	o
aw or aa	<i>talk, what, dog, from, got, naught, saw</i> and <i>off</i>	ɔ
awy	<i>boy, toy, voice</i> and <i>boil</i>	ɔi
ow	<i>how, pound</i> and <i>down</i>	ʌʊ
yoo	<i>new, few</i> and <i>tube</i>	jʊ
ay	<i>shy, die, live, by, my</i> and <i>I</i>	ae
iy	<i>mice, blind, fight</i> and <i>find</i>	ɛi

The traditional spellings of Scots developed to represent the sounds of Scots accents.

The most common vowel spelling conventions in Scots (arranged by Scots accent sounds)		
Dempster's shorthand	examples	IPA spelling
i	<i>pit, guid, an the</i>	ɪ
uh	<i>afore</i> an <i>scunner</i> or any vowel	ə
u	<i>tonne, fun, full, haes, an young</i>	ʌ
ee	<i>be, scheme, feed, heid, grieve, guid, feart,</i> an <i>deave</i>	i
ae	<i>nae, claethe, day, grey, maist, lave, an wi</i>	e
eh	<i>bed, merse, fairm, an heard</i>	ɛ
ah	<i>tap, an dance</i>	ɑ
oo	<i>coo, hoose, an dour</i>	ʊ
oa	<i>tho, shop, brose, horse, an board</i>	o
aw or aa	<i>haar, haun, cause, faw, an twa</i>	ɔ or ɑ
ui	<i>guid, uise, buke, an neuk</i>	ø
awy or oay	<i>boy, toy, vyce</i> an <i>noise</i>	ɔi or oi
ow	<i>stow, an clout</i>	ʌʊ
yoo	<i>new, few, neuk, muir</i> an <i>tube</i>	jʊ
ay	<i>shy, buy, rive, die, guise, by, an I</i>	ae
iy	<i>pey, while, blind, fyle, an find</i>	ɛi

Appendix 3: Dialect variation in Scots writing

by Dr Michael Dempster

The dialects of Scots have a large amount of vocabulary, grammar, and idiom in common. Scots can vary in how it is spoken from village to village, even along the same street. These sound changes between dialects of Scots are often regular and follow certain tendencies in how the sounds vary in comparison to other dialects of Scots; and tend to account for the greatest spelling variants across the dialects of Scots. Some of these can be found in the table below.

Scots Dialect	Pronunciation variation from other Scots dialects	Examples of words with Scots dialect variation
Insular	th → t	think → tink
	th → d	thee → dee
North East	wh → f	whit → fit
Northern	ay → eh	aye → eh
East Central	-a → -ae	Glesga → Glesgae
West Central	ai → eh	fairm → ferm
Southern	ow → oa	howk → hoak
Borders	oo → ow	you → yow
	ee → ey	me → mey

The Scots words that are traditionally spelled <ui> vary across dialects, accounting for much of the distinctiveness in dialect pronunciations. In the Northern Isles, parts of Angus and West Dunbartonshire these words maintain a distinctive vowel sound. (This is spelled with the umlaut in Insular dialects, 'ö'). In other dialects it has been replaced with other sounds used in those dialects.

	muin	puir	nuik
Insular -	mön	pür	nyook
North East –	meen	peer/pear	nyook
Central, Southern, & Ulster Scots	min	paer	nyuk

In the North East, words traditionally spelt <ui> that are preceded by a **k** or **g** sound tend to have acquired a **w** sound; for example in *scuil*, which may become *skweel*; and *guid*, which may become *gweed*.