

Reconstructed Pronunciation of Old Icelandic, ca. 1200-1250

Letter	IPA	English ex.	Comments
a	[a]	<i>got</i>	
á	[ɔ:]	<i>store</i>	the same vowel as /ɔ/ (see below), but longer
b	[b]	<i>boat</i>	
d	[d]	<i>death</i>	
ð	[ð]	<i>then</i>	
e	[ɛ]	<i>bet</i>	
é	[ɛ:]	<i>bed</i>	the same vowel as in <i>bet</i> , but longer
f	[v]	<i>ever</i>	
f ₂	[f]	<i>fox</i>	at the beginning of a word, if doubled (<i>ff</i>), or next to <i>k, p, s, t</i>
g	[ɣ]	-	like /g/ in Spanish <i>Argentina</i> , or very roughly like /g/ in English <i>go</i>
g ₂	[g]	<i>go</i>	at the beginning of a word, if doubled (<i>gg</i>), or next to <i>k, p, s, t</i>
h	[h]	<i>house</i>	
i	[i]	<i>seat</i>	
í	[i:]	<i>seed</i>	the same vowel as in <i>seat</i> , but longer
j	[j]	<i>yes</i>	
k	[k]	<i>kick</i>	
l	[l]	<i>less</i>	
m	[m]	<i>man</i>	
n	[n]	<i>never</i>	
o	[o]	<i>wrote</i>	roughly (no offglide /w/; closer to Spanish or German /o/)
ó	[o:]	<i>road</i>	the same vowel as /o/, but longer
p	[p]	<i>pill</i>	
r	[r]	-	like /r/ in Spanish <i>rojo</i> , or roughly like /r/ in English <i>road</i>
s	[s]	<i>sand</i>	<u>never</u> pronounced like /z/ in English <i>zoo</i>
t	[t]	<i>time</i>	
u	[u]	<i>soup</i>	
ú	[u:]	<i>you</i>	the same vowel as in <i>soup</i> , but longer
v	[v]	<i>very</i>	
x	[ks]	<i>six</i>	
y	[y]	-	like /y/ in Norwegian <i>nytt</i> ; roughly like English <i>dude</i> (“surfer” accent)
ý	[y:]	-	like /y/ in Norwegian <i>ny</i> ; roughly like English <i>dude</i> (“surfer” accent)
z	[ts]	<i>rats</i>	<u>never</u> pronounced like /z/ in English <i>zoo</i>
þ	[θ]	<i>thin</i>	
æ	[æ:]	<i>rag</i>	
ø	[ø]	-	like /ø/ in Norwegian <i>øks</i> , or roughly like /u/ in English <i>fur</i>
ó ¹	[ø:]	-	like /ø/ in Norwegian <i>høne</i> , or roughly like /i/ in English <i>bird</i>
q ²	[ɔ]	<i>storm</i>	
Diphthongs			
au	[aw]	<i>house</i>	
ei	[ej]	<i>rain</i>	
ey	[øy]	-	like Norwegian <i>øy</i> , or roughly like /oy/ in English <i>boy</i>

1/ø/ (also spelled /œ/) is no longer distinguished from /æ/ in Icelandic manuscripts after ca. 1240, and in Modern Icelandic both are written /æ/.

2In origin /ɔ/ and /ø/ are different vowels: /ɔ/ is the U-umlaut of /a/, /ø/ is the I-umlaut of /o/. The two are no longer distinguished in Icelandic manuscripts after ca. 1200, and in Modern Icelandic both are written /ö/ (pronounced [ø]).

See also: Hreinn Benediktsson. 1959. “The Vowel System of Icelandic: A Survey of Its History.” *Word* 15: 282-312.

Küspert, Klaus-Christian. 1988. *Vokalsysteme im Westnordischen: Isländisch, Färöisch, Westnordwegisch*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

Noreen, Adolf. 1913. *Geschichte der nordischen Sprachen*. Strassburg: Trübner.