

2nd Edition



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# Basic Welsh

A Grammar and Workbook

Gareth King

# BASIC WELSH

*Basic Welsh: A Grammar and Workbook* comprises an accessible grammar handbook and related exercises in a single volume.

The book presents forty grammar units, covering the core materials which students would expect to encounter when beginning to learn Welsh. User-friendly grammar points are followed by multiple examples and exercises which allow students to reinforce and consolidate their learning.

Key features include:

- clear, accessible format
- many relevant and useful examples
- a wide range of challenging exercises to reinforce learning
- concise and jargon-free explanations of grammar
- full answer key, glossary of technical terms and Welsh–English, English–Welsh glossary at the back of the book.

Revised throughout, this updated second edition of *Basic Welsh* provides the ideal practice book for all students beginning to learn the language. It is suitable for both class use and independent study.

**Gareth King** is an experienced teacher of Welsh, Series Advisor for the Routledge Colloquials series and the author of numerous books on language and linguistics.

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# BASIC WELSH: A GRAMMAR AND WORKBOOK

2nd edition

Gareth King

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# CONTENTS

Introduction	vii
1 Identification sentences	
Question words <b>Pwy?</b> , <b>Beth?</b>	
Identifiers <b>hwn</b> , <b>hon</b> ; <b>hwanna</b> , <b>honna</b> ; <b>y rhain</b> , <b>y rheina</b>	1
2 Nouns and noun plurals	3
3 The verb ‘to be’: present tense statements (AFF) and questions (INT)	6
4 The present tense of <b>bod</b> : NEG forms	9
5 Mutations: Soft Mutation	11
6 The definite article: ‘the ...’	15
7 The genitive construction: ‘the X of Y’, etc.	17
8 Adjectives	20
9 The present tense of verbs	22
10 Other auxiliaries with the VN	
Requests	25
11 The complement marker <b>yn</b> <sup>o</sup> + noun/adjective	27
12 Personal pronouns	
Word order	
Third-person singular rule	30
13 ‘Want’ and ‘would like’	33
14 Aspirate and Nasal Mutations	36
15 Possessive adjectives: ‘his ...’, ‘her ...’, ‘your ...’, etc.	39
16 <b>Yn</b> and <b>mewn</b> ‘in’	42
17 The imperfect of <b>bod</b> : ‘I was’, ‘you were’, etc.	45
18 The future of <b>bod</b> : ‘I will be’, etc.	
Affirmative markers <b>fe</b> <sup>o</sup> and <b>mi</b> <sup>o</sup>	48

19	The imperfect and future of other verbs: ‘I was . . . ing’, ‘I will . . .’	51
20	The existential verb: ‘There is/are . . .’, ‘There was/were . . .’, etc.	54
21	Conjugated prepositions	57
22	More conjugated prepositions	60
23	Possession	63
24	Stems	
	Imperatives (command forms)	66
25	The inflected preterite: completed action in the past	69
26	General principles with inflected verbs (verbs with endings)	72
27	Irregular preterites: ‘went’, ‘came’, ‘did’, ‘got’	75
28	<b>Mo</b> after inflected NEG verbs	78
29	Present tense ‘is/are’ with question words	81
30	Numerals 1–12	
	Telling the time	84
31	More numbers	
	<b>Faint . . . ?</b> ‘How much/many . . . ?’	
	Quantity expressions	87
32	Days, months and years	90
33	‘Some’ and ‘any’; ‘no-one’, ‘everyone’; ‘all’	93
34	<b>Rhaid</b> ‘must’, ‘have to’	96
35	<b>Rhaid</b> -type expressions: °well, °waeth, man a man, hen °bryd	99
36	Derived adverbs in <b>yn</b> °	
	Summary of meanings and uses of <b>yn</b>	102
37	<b>Wedi</b> : ‘perfect’ tense	105
38	The pluperfect and future perfect	108
39	Yes/no answers	
	Tags	112
40	Translating ‘have’	116
	Intermediate preview	119
	Key to exercises	121
	Glossary of technical terms and abbreviations	141
	Vocabularies	143
	Welsh–English	144
	English–Welsh	147

# INTRODUCTION

This workbook, now in its second, revised edition, is intended as a grammar-based self-tutor and self-tester for those in the earlier stages of learning Welsh. A companion volume (*Intermediate Welsh*) is available for more advanced students. Forty grammatical points are dealt with in each volume, with exercises designed to drill the user and test understanding. Answers to all exercises are given at the back of the book.

For simplicity and convenience, given the particular difficulties presented by Welsh as regards regional and dialectal variation in many common words, I have adopted the following as standard forms throughout (with equally valid alternatives given in brackets):

**dw i** ‘I am’ (**wi**; **rwy**)

**dyn ni** ‘we are’ (**yn ni**; **dan ni**)

**dych chi** ‘you are’ (**ych chi**; **dach chi**)

**e, fe** ‘he/him’ (**o, fo**)

though Northern forms like **fo** and **dan ni** will of course occur in examples dealing with specifically Northern constructions. Throughout the book, N indicates Northern forms and S Southern forms.

As far as initial consonant mutations are concerned, I have erred on the side of caution, again for the sake of simplicity. On the other hand, it is no secret that the applications of the mutations in the modern living language do not conform to a standard pattern, however much some authorities may try to make them, or claim that they do. On purely practical grounds, I see no point in pretending, for example, that instances of Aspirate Mutation like **bws a thacsi** are ‘correct’ Welsh simply because the handbooks of the literary language tell us so. They are certainly not natural in speech, and therefore by all the criteria of modern linguistics they can hardly be regarded as authentic.

In the exercises that form an integral part of each unit, I have aimed at an unashamedly grammatical approach in drilling the student on the points raised in the unit – this is, after all, a grammar workbook, and in any case I see no reason to apologize for grammar, which went through a

period in recent years of being rather a dirty word among educationalists, but which remains nevertheless an indispensable part of learning any language. The user will notice, however, that some units deal with uses of particular words rather than a specific grammatical point, and I have thought it better in these cases simply to provide translation practice only rather than the mix of translation, grammar drilling and cloze exercises that is presented elsewhere. Considerations of space have placed limitations on the key to exercises at the end of the book: it is not unusual in a language like Welsh to have two or even three equally valid ways of phrasing a particular English expression, but it must be borne in mind that very often I have had to pick one variation and silently pass over another, and I ask the user's indulgence in this. I have, however, tried to ensure that variants be given their due in the body of the workbook.

In this book I have again used a special symbol ° to indicate the Soft Mutation. Used after a word, it means that the word causes Soft Mutation (SM) of the next word – so for example **am**° means that a word following **am** will undergo SM: **punt**, but **am bunt**. Before a word it indicates that the first letter has undergone SM – so for example °**gath** shows that this is the SM form of original **cath**. Similarly <sup>h</sup> for the Aspirate Mutation (AM) and <sup>n</sup> for the Nasal Mutation (NM). For this second edition I have substantially extended the marking of all three mutations.

An asterisk (\*) before a word or phrase indicates an incorrect formation.

Although most grammatical and syntactic structures occurring in the living language are covered in the two workbooks, and although the units in this workbook represent a graded programme of work (with the same being true for the more advanced structures presented in *Intermediate Welsh*), they are not intended as a reference grammar, or for that matter as a self-contained course – readers wishing to have these may find respectively *Modern Welsh: A Comprehensive Grammar* (2nd edition, Routledge, 2002), and *Colloquial Welsh* (2nd edition, Routledge, 2008) of use; I would hope that the grammar workbooks can be used as an adjunct to these fuller, but differing, treatments of the modern language. Certainly the type of Welsh presented in all of them is essentially the same.

My thanks go to the professional and dependable team of Andrea Hartill, Samantha Vale Noya and Isabelle Cheng at Routledge Language Learning for their invaluable moral support and practical assistance during the writing of this and other recent titles.

I am very pleased that this book has found so many friends over the years, and I hope that in this new edition it will find many more in the years to come.

Gareth King  
Lios Dúin Bhearna  
Nollaig Bheag 2013

# UNIT 1

## Uned un

### Identification sentences

### Question words **Pwy?**, **Beth?**

### Identifiers **hwn**, **hon**; **hwanna**, **honna**; **y rhain**, **y rheina**

Identification sentences ask for or give names or labels for people, places and things. English examples are ‘Who is that?’, ‘What is the capital of France?’, ‘I’m an engineer, Elwyn is a teacher.’ Notice that the idea of a *name* or *label* is an important characteristic – ‘Elwyn is outside’ is not an identification sentence because *outside* is not a label referring to Elwyn in the way that, say, *teacher* is. Put another way, the two main parts of an identification sentence both refer directly to the same person or thing.

All this is important in Welsh because a special sentence structure is used with identification sentences, and a special form of the verb ‘to be’ also. Look at these examples:

**Pwy ydy hwanna?**

Who is that?

**Dafydd ydy hwanna.**

That is Dafydd.

**Pwy ydy’r rheina?**

Who are those (people)?

**Athrawon ydy’r rheina.**

Those (people) are teachers.

**Beth ydy prifddinas Ffrainc?**

What is the capital of France?

**Paris ydy prifddinas Ffrainc.**

The capital of France is Paris.

**Beth ydy enwau’r plant?**

What are the children’s names?

**Mair a Sioned ydy enwau’r plant.**

The children’s names are Mair and Sioned.

Notice that in the questions the word order is exactly the same as in English, but in the answers the order is the reverse – the new information asked for (i.e. the name or label) is put in where the question word was. We can sometimes do this in English, but not always, as you can see from the examples above.

The word **yd** is used whether singular or plural, and so corresponds to both ‘is’ and ‘are’ here. In many parts of South Wales a different word **yw** is used instead: **Pwy yw’r rheina?**, **Beth yw prifddinas Ffrainc?**

**1**

## Identification sentences

The identifier words you need are:

**hwn** this  
**y rhain** these  
**e** he

**hwanna** that  
**y rheina** those  
**hi** she

**hwn** this (person) (m.)

**hon** this (person) (f.)

**hwanna** } that (person) (m.)  
**hwannw** }

**honna** } that (person) (f.)  
**honno** }

If you want to identify *yourself*, you must use not **yd/yw**, but **dw i** (or **ydw i**) after the name or label: **Alun dw i** 'I'm Alun'; **Athro dw i** 'I'm a teacher'.

**Exercise 1**

Translate into Welsh:

- |                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1 Who is that (m.)? | 5 Who are those?    |
| 2 Who is this (f.)? | 6 What is this?     |
| 3 What is that?     | 7 Who is this (m.)? |
| 4 What are these?   | 8 Who is that (f.)? |

**Exercise 2**

Fill in the blanks using words from the box:

- \_\_\_\_\_ ydy honna?
- Beth ydy \_\_\_\_\_ rhain?
- Pwy \_\_\_\_\_ hwanna?
- \_\_\_\_\_ ydy hwn?
- \_\_\_\_\_ hwanna.
- Pwy ydy'r \_\_\_\_\_

<b>rheina</b>	<b>'r</b>
<b>pwy</b>	<b>ydy</b>
<b>beth</b>	<b>llyfr</b>
<b>ydy</b>	

**Exercise 3**

Match the Welsh and English sentences. One pair is already matched.

- |                     |                   |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1 Beth ydy'r rhain? | a Who are these?  |
| 2 Pwy ydy hon?      | b Who is that?    |
| 3 Beth ydy hwn?     | c What is this?   |
| 4 Pwy ydy'r rhain?  | d What are these? |
| 5 Beth ydy hwanna?  | e Who is this?    |
| 6 Pwy ydy honna?    | f What is that?   |

# UNIT 2

## Uned dau

### Nouns and noun plurals

Nouns in Welsh are either masculine or feminine – you will see some of the implications of this in Units 6 and 8. By and large, you simply have to learn the gender of a noun along with its meaning, just as you have to with French, German, Spanish, Russian or any other gender-language. And, as with all gender-languages, getting the gender of a noun right is not of vital importance – it does not affect the meaning; rather it is something to aim for in one’s natural aspiration to speak as much like a native speaker as is possible. Don’t worry, then, about getting gender wrong – and above all don’t panic if you don’t know the gender. If you don’t know whether **fffenest** is masculine or feminine, then you don’t know and it could be either. So what? The important thing is knowing that **fffenest** means ‘window’. All the same, the gender picture is not as bleak as it might be: there *are* clues sometimes as to the gender of a noun, either in meaning or in form.

*Meaning:* with nouns denoting animate creatures (either human or animal), grammatical gender usually follows natural gender. So **tad** ‘father’ is masculine and **mam** ‘mother’ is feminine; similarly **tarw** ‘bull’ is masculine while **buwch** ‘cow’ is feminine.

*Form:* you can spot some genders by the *ending* of a noun. Nouns of more than one syllable with the following endings are masculine:

-ad	-iad	-der	-did
-dod	-dra	-eb	-edd
-had	-i	-iant	-ni
-rwydd	-wch	-wr	-ydd
-yn			

Nouns of more than one syllable with the following endings are mostly feminine:

-aeth	-as	-en	-es
-fa			

In addition, certain vowels and vowel combinations tend to be associated with gender. For example, **-a-e-** is a fair indication of feminine: so you could guess with some certainty that words like **pabell**, **tabled**, **sianel** would be feminines. In the same way, **-o-** and **-y-** tend to be ‘masculine vowels’. This kind of thing is far from entirely dependable, however, and exceptions abound. If in doubt and you have to guess (which you will have to), go for masculine unless there are good reasons in favour of feminine – masculines are statistically more numerous in any case, and furthermore masculine is the ‘default’ gender so loanwords tend to be adopted as masculines.

What is more difficult about nouns in Welsh is that there are a number of ways of forming the plural, and there is no real way of getting round this. This matter is more crucial as well, because, unlike gender, plural contributes to meaning, and furthermore not using the right plural form will sound more odd to native speakers. Your first priority is to be able to *identify* plurals – this will help you with reading, which is an important part of acquiring vocabulary. Here are the commonest plural *endings*, roughly in decreasing order of frequency:

<b>-au</b> or <b>-iau</b>	<b>-on</b> or <b>-ion</b>	<b>-i</b>	<b>-edd</b> or <b>-oedd</b> or <b>-ydd</b>
<b>-od</b>	<b>-iaid</b>	<b>-ed</b>	<b>-ys</b> (English loanwords)

But many nouns in Welsh form their plural not with an ending but with *internal vowel change* (like English ‘goose/geese’): **corff**, **cyrff**; **pabell**, **pebyll**. Really these simply have to be learnt – they don’t give themselves away as plurals in the way that nouns with endings do.

There is also a large group which form their plural by *internal vowel change + ending*, i.e. both methods combined: **braich**, **breichiau**. These are problematic for the inexperienced learner because spotting the plural ending (here **-iau**) is not enough to find the root word, which is not **\*breich** but **braich**.

Finally, some nouns in Welsh do not even come under the normal singular/plural arrangement, but instead come in *collective* and *unit* forms, with the unit form made by adding an ending to the collective: **dail** ‘leaves, foliage’, **deilen** ‘leaf’; **moch** ‘pigs’, **mochyn** ‘pig’.

## Exercise 1

Sort the following nouns into two lists, depending on whether they are singular or plural. Don’t worry about meanings for this exercise.

siopau cath teipiadur ysgolion parseli ffenest llyfr llyfrgelloedd stafell  
babanod papurau gwasanaeth cwpan geiriaduron desgiau posteri gardd

coeden mochyn carpedi crysau rhagolygon cyfieithwyr golygydd mynyddoedd tywysoges bysiau goleuadau eglwysi dannedd pysgotwyr geiriau teigrod Rhufeiniaid bwrdd llewod brechdanau undeb rhieni plentyn dynion merch ffenestri olwynion llun dŵr fforestydd potel papur llewod dramâu cadeiriau pontydd tân cyfrifon nodiadur gorsafoedd planhigion trêen tapiâu rhaglenni bwydlen llaeth sanau stori

## Exercise 2

Try and assign gender to the following singular nouns using clues in their appearance; there are an equal number of masculine and feminine.

bwydlen	cyfieithydd	mynedfa	mochyn
swyddogaeth	toriad	tywysoges	terfyniad
plentyn	teyrnas	coeden	rhaglen
methiant	gyrrwr	tawelwch	awel
undeb	drygioni	swyddfa	llofruddiaeth
heddwch	dwyieithrwydd	cyfreithiwr	meithrinfa
gwaeledd	Saesnes	priodas	stafell

# UNIT 3

## Uned tri

### The verb 'to be': present tense statements (AFF) and questions (INT)

It is very important to master the verb 'to be' (dictionary form **bod**) in all its forms; as well as being a very commonly used verb in its own right, in Welsh it also plays a major part in forming many of the tenses of other verbs (see Unit 10 for more on this).

In the present tense, **bod** gives particular problems. To begin with, it has different forms depending on whether you are making a statement (the AFF or affirmative forms), a question (the INT or interrogative forms) or stating a negative (NEG). And on top of this, in the spoken language, there is considerable variation in the forms themselves. In this unit, we will concentrate on the statement forms ('I am', 'you are', etc.) and the question forms ('am I?', 'are you?', etc.).

Here are the statement forms for the present of **bod**:

#### *Singular*

1	<b>dw i; wi</b> (S)	I am
2	<b>(wyt) ti</b>	you are
3	m. <b>mae e</b>	he is
	f. <b>mae hi</b>	she is

#### *Plural*

1	<b>dan ni</b> (N); <b>(d)yn ni</b> (S)	we are
2	<b>dach chi</b> (N); <b>(d)ych chi</b> (S)	you are
3	<b>maen nhw</b>	they are

And here are the corresponding question forms:

#### *Singular*

1	<b>ydw i?</b>	am I?
2	<b>(wyt) ti?</b>	are you?
3	m. <b>ydy e?</b>	is he?
	f. <b>ydy hi?</b>	is she?

*Plural*

- |   |  |           |
|---|--|-----------|
| 1 | <b>ydan ni?</b> (N); <b>(yd)yn ni?</b> (S)       | are we?   |
| 2 | <b>(y)dach chi?</b> (N); <b>(yd)ych chi?</b> (S) | are you?  |
| 3 | <b>ydyn nhw?</b>                                 | are they? |

Here are some examples of present AFF and INT forms of **bod**:

<i>Dw i yn y lle iawn.</i>	<i>I'm in the right place.</i>
<i>Ydw i yn y lle iawn?</i>	<i>Am I in the right place?</i>
<i>Mae Siwan gartre.</i>	<i>Siwan is at home.</i>
<i>Ydy Siwan gartre?</i>	<i>Is Siwan at home?</i>
<i>Dyn ni yn Aberystwyth.</i>	<i>We are in Aberystwyth.</i>
<i>Ydyn ni yn Aberystwyth?</i>	<i>Are we in Aberystwyth?</i>
<i>Dych chi fan'na.</i>	<i>You are there.</i>
<i>Ydych chi fan'na?</i>	<i>Are you there?</i>
<i>Maen nhw yn y gegin.</i>	<i>They are in the kitchen.</i>
<i>Ydyn nhw yn y gegin?</i>	<i>Are they in the kitchen?</i>

Notice that what English achieves by changing the word order, Welsh does by changing the verb-form itself – in Welsh, AFF and INT sentences have the same order.

## Exercise 1

Turn these AFF sentences into INT (questions):

*Example:* Mae Angharad yn y lolfa.  
(Angharad is in the sitting room.)  
**Ydy Angharad yn y lolfa?**  
(Is Angharad in the sitting room?)

- 1 Dw i yn y lle iawn.
- 2 Mae'r plant tu allan.
- 3 Mae'r siop leol ar agor.
- 4 Maen nhw ar gau pnawn 'ma.
- 5 Dyn ni mewn pryd.
- 6 Mae Tomos a Gwenith yn yr ysgol heddiw.

### 3

The verb  
'to be'

## Exercise 2

Translate into Welsh:

- 1 Is Dr Williams in the surgery (**feddygfa**) today?
- 2 Am I in the right place?
- 3 Are you upstairs?
- 4 Is the library open all day tomorrow?
- 5 Are they outside in the garden?
- 6 Are the children home?
- 7 Where are they?
- 8 Where are the cups?
- 9 Are they in the kitchen?
- 10 Is she outside?