CLIVE P L YOUNG

THE SCOTS LEARNERS' GRAMMAR

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WE ARE AW LAIRNERS

1 Introduction – we are all learners

Grammar is the glue that holds any language together, the rules that make our speech and writing comprehensible to others.

Although native speakers of any language have an instinctive feel for these structures, learners usually need some formal guide. In the case of Scots, however, even fairly fluent native speakers are likely to be unaware of the language patterns they are using as they are almost never taught. It is only when the 'rules' are written down can speakers and learners appreciate how rich Scots grammar is and how much it differs from standard and colloquial English.

Scots is usually spoken and often written in some mixture with English. Knowledge of grammar helps speakers and writers distinguish between the Scots and English components. In such mixtures 'good' Scots is commonly misidentified as 'bad' English, so it is important especially for teachers and writers to be able to tell the difference between the two.

So what does 'good' Scots actually mean? Grammar forms evolve but are not random inventions. The 'good' forms described here usually derive directly from traditional printed Scots usage and have proved to be remarkably consistent over both time and geography. Spoken and literary Scots grammar has been documented in detail for almost a century.

Grammar thus links present-day Scots with its historic pedigree but also ties the various dialects of Scots together. Pronunciations and even vocabulary may vary from Shetland to Ulster but as Christine Robertson rightly notes in her 2012 grammar for children,

> We hae mair things in common than we hae keepin us apart. Ane o they things is grammar.

Given the status of Scots as a primarily spoken tongue, many researchers report a loss of distinct grammatical forms due to convergence with English, but what is really astonishing is how much remains.

This guide is designed for teachers and writers of Scots and aims to give a concise overview of the distinct features of Scots grammar, based on both modern descriptions and recent research.

1.1 What is 'Scots' grammar?

A common root and many centuries of close contact between Scots and English have ensured that the grammars of the two tongues are broadly similar. This is good news for an English speaking learner, but care still has to be taken, as there are many traps for the unwary. Despite a wide number of publications, the grammar of Scots, like its orthography and vocabulary can still be considered as being somewhat fluid. Inevitably authors - including myself with a Central Scots background - are strongly influenced by local dialectical variations, so there are inconsistencies between the various accounts.

This guide aims to find the consensus and highlight some of the main points of difference with English. This comparison is *not* to imply that Scots is 'non-standard English' but simply that most learners of Scots have some knowledge of English grammar, so it is a sensible place to start. Some 'grammatical' terminology has been inevitable to give this document some structure, but I've tried to keep it to a minimum and explain what the terms mean.

1.2 A history of Scots grammars

It may come as a surprise, but the grammar of spoken and literary Scots was first described systematically over a century ago when two comprehensive grammars were published within just a few years. James Wilson's fascinating but largely forgotten 1915 field study *Lowland Scotch* was based on interviews with inhabitants of the Perthshire village of Dunning and uses a marvelous phonetic orthography to capture the sounds of the vernacular. This was followed by William Grant and James Main Dixon's 1921 classic *Manual of Modern Scots* that takes a completely different approach focusing on a meticulous analysis of the literary language over two centuries from the late seventeenth century. Between them these two works provide a remarkably consistent and cohesive snapshot of the spoken and written language before the First World War. Unfortunately both these essentially 'descriptive' grammars were out of print for decades so failed to make the impact on Scots they should have.

However from the late 90s a range of 'prescriptive' grammars for Scots appeared, aiming to set out rules of usage. David Purves' booklet *A Scots Grammar* was published in 1997; about the same time as Andy Eagle's online *Wir Ain Tung*, essentially a reworking of Grant and Dixon. Also in 1997 Philip Robinson produced the masterly *Ulster-Scots - a grammar of the traditional and spoken language*, again something of a homage to Grant and Dixon. These reference works were joined in 1999 by Susan Rennie's *Grammar Broonie*, a workbook aimed at young learners and in 2002 by L Colin Wilson's *Luath Scots Language Learner*, the first-ever Scots language course for the complete novice with extensive sections on grammar. Christine Robinson's 2012 *Modren Scots Grammar* has a notably different focus and introduces grammar to children (and their teachers) through the medium of Scots. *Wir Ain Leid* is a popular and authoritative online grammar [www.scots-online.org]. While not a full grammar *Scots Warks: Support and guidance for writing* published by the Scots Language Centre (SLC) in 2021 also provides useful advice.

1.3 Academic research into the grammar of Scots

Over the last 50 years there have also been numerous small-scale studies of language use in Scotland, usually published in (for the public) rather obscure academic journals. Much of this was drawn together in 2005 by Alexander Bergs in *Modern Scots*, a detailed review of literature which essentially updates Grant and Dixon based on more recent sociolinguistic research. Scots expert Christine Macafee's monograph *Characteristics of non-standard grammar in Scotland* last updated in 2011 takes a similar approach. This fascinating document draws from both linguistic research papers and modern literature though uses a linguistic terminology perhaps challenging for general readers. For a broader academic background, Robert McColl Millar's 2018 *Modern Scots: an analytical survey* is excellent, and Manfred Gorlach's 2002 *A Textual History of Scots* provides a detailed historical perspective.

1.4 Descriptive or prescriptive ?

As David Purves reminded us in 2002 "*in any language revival, an essential stage is the fixing of standards amongst the welter of variation that is always found in the untended garden of natural speech*". With the exception of the 2021 SLC guidance (see above), so far no 'official' body has emerged in Scotland to 'fix standards' but the publications above provide the next best thing; a remarkably consistent description by language scholars of how the core grammar of Scots currently functions. In the absence of a 'circumscribed' standard we have is what some have called a 'circumstantial' standard, but it is a standard nonetheless.

This grammar was therefore created to build some of the newer academic descriptive research into the prescriptive grammar approach, essentially to provide as strong a validation as possible for the Scots grammar 'rules'. It should be noted though that Scots being a primarily oral language there has always been a very close link between descriptive works like Grant and Dixon, Bergs and Macafee with more prescriptive texts like this one. This has been less true of English where prescriptive grammars dominated until comparatively recently when English 'corpus' grammars based on databases of actual usage appeared. There is a strong caveat though, Scots 'corpus' work is in its infancy and is limited by the way Scots is used in practice. Thus, although all the grammar elements described in this grammar have been recorded and where possible cross-referenced between several works, their frequency of use is largely unknown.

What is described here is as close as we currently have to 'standard'. As Robertson mentions above the somewhat overstated dialectical variation in Scots pronunciation and vocabulary Purves alludes to does not seem to extend to grammar. Some of the grammatical variation between the various Scots dialects are noted in the text.

1.5 Using Scots grammar

If you want to increase the strength of your Scots writing or speaking, you can simply use these forms more. In everyday speech of course people tend to mix up Scots and English vocabulary and grammar in varying strengths depending on the context and the speaker's own experience.

It should be noted individual speakers are unlikely to use regularly, or even have encountered, *all* of the forms listed here; so what you choose to use in any given situation is a matter of confidence and style. The grammar described here however is most definitely 'live' and useable in the sense the forms have been recorded relatively recently in speech or writing by researchers. Some features here may be what linguists call 'recessive' (i.e. becoming less common) but you can have confidence using them as 'correct' Scots. In 2020 Michael Dempster, Director of The Scots Language Centre, published a remarkable series of videos outlining the grammar of spoken Scots, highlighting the substantial 'braid' Scots elements still evident in his everyday West Central Scots speech

1.6 A note on spelling

One of the most tiresome controversies among Scots activists is how to spell the language. There is still a tendency for some individuals, under the mistaken belief that there is 'no Scots standard' to simply make up their own systems with dire consequences for ease of reading.

As modern Scots has been published for over a hundred years not surprisingly a standard has had to evolve. This is not 'endorsed' by anyone but could be simply described as 'common practice'.

The William Grant and James Main Dixon's 1921 classic *Manual of Modern Scots* was perhaps the first attempt to codify the spelling of the literary language, but in the last 20 years two 'prescriptive' dictionaries appeared which only list the commonest written variants. These are *The Concise English-Scots Dictionary* (1993) and the *Essential Scots Dictionary* (1996). These systems are not without controversy, some claim they pay insufficient attention to dialectical variation and the system itself is Anglicised (i.e. not based on either phonetic or older Scots spellings). There is some validity in both of these criticisms but despite occasional attempts to develop a more 'authentic' orthography, currently this is really the only widely used system. I believe anyone wishing to move away from DIY spelling to something people can read comfortably should refer – at the moment at least - to these companion volumes. Both were used extensively to provide a standardised spelling for this grammar.

2 Articles

There are two articles, the 'indefinite' (= a/an) and the 'definite' (= the).

2.1 The indefinite article

The 'indefinite article' is **a**, sometimes **an** before a vowel.

Gie's a aipple or **Gie's an aipple** are equally correct and the former is particularly common in spoken Scots.

The plural is **some**, as in English. **Some fowk niver lairn**.

Ae and the older form **Ane** is used before a noun is an adjective, emphasising 'one-ness'.

> **A'v ae bairn, no twa** I have only one child, not two

2.2 The definite article

As in English, the Scots 'definite article' is **the**. There are some dialect variants; **e** or **ee** in Northern dialects, **da** in Shetland and **tha** in Ulster-Scots.

The it is used much more in Scots, e.g. before times, institutions, trades, branches of knowledge, languages, family members, diseases, seasons, pastimes, days, means of public transport, body parts and sometimes instead of possessive adjectives. There is perhaps an analogy in some of these uses with Scottish Gaelic e.g. *an-diugh* (today) is literally 'the-day'.

Examples are:

the noo now	**up the stair** upstairs
the morn tomorrow	**Whit'v ye got in fur the denner?**
the nicht tonight	**She's guid at the Frainch**
the year this year	**He's aff the wark wi the cauld**
awa tae the kirk	**A'll stairt in the ware** I'll start in spring
at the school	**A'm awa the Seturday** I'm away on Saturday
aff tae the jile prison	**doon the brae** downhill
doon the toon	**wi the train**
he bides in the toon he lives in town	**Keep the heid!** Stay calm!
Whaur's the wife the day? Where's your wife today	**She's guid at the gairdenin** gardening

3 Verbs

3.1 Present tense

Regular Scots verbs 'doing' words in the present have forms not unlike English:

A ken I know	**A greet** I cry
ye ken	**ye greet**
she/he kens	**she/he greets**
we ken	**we greet**
youse ken (plural)	**youse greet**
they ken	**they greet**

Thus in the simple present tense start with the root e.g. **ken, greet** (with **tae** this is known as the infinitive i.e. **tae ken**, **tae greet**) and add **-s** for the she/he form (but see below).
For verbs ending in **-sh**, **-lch**, **-nch**, **-rch** or **-tch**, add **-es** e.g. **she nivver fashes** (worries).

The 'you' plural **youse**, seems to have spread from the West, but **ye** as a plural is also used.

There are several features of the Scots present that differ markedly from standard English

Plural subjects (apart from **youse**) can take singular verbs

> **the gless wis clairtie, the glesses wis clairtie**

> **the lassie eats a fish supper**, **the lassies eats fish suppers**.

Many speakers however now use the English-like plural form (i.e. they drop the **-s**).

Present-tense third person plurals regularly take an **-s** if they don't have the pronoun immediately before the verb

> **They ken aw aboot it** but **Thon laddies kens aw aboot it**

> **Thaim that kens aw aboot it...** (Those who know all about it...).

This feature even has a name, the 'Northern Concord Rule', as it is also found in northern dialects of English in England.

A 'present-historic' narrative form is very common, adding an **-s**, is often used when telling stories.

> **Sae we gangs up tae him an A says 'Awa hame!'**

> So we went up to him and I said 'Go home!'

The 'present-historic' form can also indicate a repeated action.

> **Whan A gets hame A aye mak ma tea**.

3.2 Present participle

The present participle is formed by adding **-in** to the root e.g. **stert**, **stertin**.

If the root ends with a consonant after a single vowel, double the consonant e.g. **ken**, **kennin**; **mak**, **makkin**.

Verbs ending in **-e** drop the last vowel e.g. **come**, **comin**; **ettle** (try), **ettlin**, and verbs ending in **-ie** change the spelling e.g. **cairrie**, **cairryin**.

The only real irregular is the verb **gae** (go). Although **gaein** is used, the form **gaun** is just as popular.

> **A'm gaun hame**.

The spoken contraction **gaunae**, often replaces **gaun tae** before a verb.

> **A'm gaunae mak the tea**

> (but **A'm gaun tae the gemm** if not followed by a verb)**.**

The present participle is used more in Scots than in English. Again this could be a Gaelic influence.

> **A'm no needin ocht the noo** (I don't need anything just now)

> **She stairtit greetin** (She started to cry)

> **A'm no wantin** (I don't want to)

> **A'm thinkin he's no in**.

As in English, the present participle is used to form nouns such as **biggin** (buiding) and **flittin** (house moving).

3.3 Simple past tense – regular verbs

The simple past tense of regular ('weak') verbs may be formed by adding **-it**, **-t** or **- ed** to the root. The rules seem quite complicated but really follow the sound of the root and you do get used to them.

Verbs ending with	Past tense ending	Examples
-b, **-d**, **-g**, **-k**, **-p**, **-t**, **-te** and unstressed vowels	**-it**	**big** (build), **biggit**; **howk** (dig), **howkit, pent** (paint)**, pentit; keep, keepit**
-ch, **-f**, **-l**, **-le**, **-n**, **-r** (sometimes), **-s**, **-se** (with s sound), **-sh**, **-ss**, **-th**, **-ie/y**, **-x**	**-t** add apostrophe after silent **-e**, **-le** and **-ll** becomes **-ilt**	**ken**, **kent** (know); **birl** (spin) **birlt**; **speir** (ask), **speirt**; **lauch** (laugh), **laucht**; **fash**, **fasht**; **hirple** (limp), **hirpilt**; **skoosh** (spray), **skoosht**; **fix**, **fixt**; **bile**, **bile't** (boil), **mairrie**, **mairriet**
- m, **-r** (sometimes), **-se** (with z sound), **-w**, **-z** stressed vowels i.e. **-e** (except those above) **-oo**	**-ed** (displaces -e) Add apostrophe for verbs ending **-ee**	**daur**, **daured** (dare); **stey**, **steyed**; **cry** (call), **cried**

3.4 Simple past tense – irregular verbs

As in all Anglo-Saxon languages, many common Scots verbs are irregular (also known as 'strong'). This means that their past tenses and past participles do not follow the rules above. There are considerable differences between Scots and English in this respect.

Verbs which are irregular in English may be regular in their Scots equivalents: **keep, keepit**; **sell**, **sellt**; **tell**, **telt**; while several verbs which are regular in English are irregular in Scots e.g. **quit**, **quat**; **hit**, **hut**.

To make matters more complicated, a few Scots verbs have both regular and irregular forms of the past forms e.g. **stick** has the forms **stickit** (regular) or **stack** (irregular). Unfortunately all you can do is learn them as you go along.

The list is long and some may now be rare but the most common ones are as follows (the past participle is also given - see Perfect tense below) The *Essential Scots Dictionary* has a fuller list.

English	Scots	simple past	past participle
be	**be**	**wis**	**been**
become	**become**	**becam**	**become**
begin	**begin**	**begoud**	**began**
break	**brek**	**brak**	**brukken**
bring	**bring**	**brocht, brang**	**brocht, brung**
build	**big**	**biggit, bug**	**biggit**
buy	**buy**	**bocht**	**bocht**
choose	**choose**	**choose**	**choosen**
come	**come**	**cam**	**come**
do	**dae**	**did**	**duin**
draw	**draw**	**drew**	**drewn**
drink	**drink**	**drunk**	**drunken, drukken**
drive	**drive**	**drave**	**driven**
eat	**aet/eat**	**ett**	**etten**
fall	**fa(a)/faw**	**fell**	**fawn**
find	**fin(d)**	**fan(d)**	**fun(d)**
forget	**forget**	**forgat**	**forgotten**
get	**git/get**	**gat**	**gotten**
give	**gie**	**gied. gien**	**gien, gied**
go	**gae, gang, gau**	**gaed**	**gaen, gaun, went**
grow	**growe**	**growed**	**growed, growne**
have	**hae**	**haed**	**haen, haed**
hear	**hear**	**haird**	**haird**
hold	**haud**	**held**	**hauden**
let	**lat**	**lat, loot**	**latten**
make	**mak**	**makkit, made**	**makkit, made**
put	**pit**	**pat, pit**	**pit, pitten, putten**
run	**rin**	**run, ran**	**run, ran**
see	**see**	**seed, saw**	**seen**
seek	**seek**	**socht**	**socht**
sit	**sit**	**sut, sat**	**sutten**
speak	**speak**	**spak**	**spoken**
stand	**staun**	**stood**	**stooden**
stay	**bide**	**bade**	**bidden**
take	**tak**	**taen, took**	**taen**
win	**wun**	**wan**	**wun**
work	**wark**	**wrocht**	**wrocht**
write	**write**	**wrut, wrate**	**wrutten**

3.5 Perfect tense

The perfect tense normally uses the present tense of **hae / hiv** (have) with the past participle in a similar way to English though the forms often differ - **hae / hiv** is described later.

The **hae** component can be dropped after an auxiliary (see below)

> **A wudna bin sae daft** I would have not been so crazy

Stairt and **come** can take forms of be:

> **He wis come the day** He came today

Unlike English **jist** (just) doesn't need to take the perfect; **Jamie jist cawed** (Jamie has just called).

3.6 Pluperfect tense

A form of **hae** is regularly inserted in conditional structures in this tense;

> **If ye haed'v come airlier** If you had come earlier

> **I wish he'd'v tellt me afore** I wish he had told me before

3.7 Future tense

In English, *will* and *shall* can be used almost interchangeably to form the future tense.

This is not the case in Scots, only **will** (or **wull**) or the abbreviated form **'ll** simply implies future action but **s(h)all**, when used at all, in Scots always implies assertion. To a Scot, **A wull gae tae the pub the nicht** and **A shall gae tae the pub the nicht** state quite different levels of commitment to pub-going.

The immediate future tense is widely used **A'm gaunae gae tae the pub**, meaning I'm about to go.

Wull can also indicate supposition, as in the stereotype Edinburgh welcome

> **Come in, ye'll hae haed yer tea**

Or for politeness

> **Hoo auld'll yer faither be?**

The negative is **wunna** or **'ll no**

> **A'll no gae tae the pub** or **A wunna gae tae the pub**.

The negative question is

> **Wull ye no gae tae the pub?**

3.8 Forming the negative

Scots **no** is used generally in the same ways as English *not* e.g. **A'm no gaun oot**. **Nae** carries out this function in the North East dialect; otherwise **'nae'** before nouns is the equivalent to English 'no' e.g. **Therr nae luck aboot the hoose**.

Note however the auxiliary verbs (as with **wull** above) have particular negative forms (see below).

Negation is quite flexible in Scots e.g **Gauna(e) no dae that!** (Don't do that!), **He isna still no warkin?**

Multiple negation is quite common, reinforcing rather cancelling out **A'm no sayin naethin**. These are regarded as colloquial.

Niver, a common general marker of negation is also regarded as colloquial ; **A niver did it** (more 'I didn't do it' than 'I have never done it') and **nut**, an emphatic variant of **no** especially in children's speech; **Ye wis! A wis nut!**

3.9 Passives

Often formed with **get**, unlike English even when the 'agent' is stated.

> **We got liftit by the polis** We were arrested by the police

The prepositions **fae** and **wi** are also commonly used to indicate the 'agent'.

3.10 Imperatives

Generally the same as structure as in English

> **Gang hame!** Go home!
>
> **Dinna gang hame!** Don't go home!
>
> **Lat's (no) gang hame**! Let's (not) go home!

Unlike English the subject pronoun can be used for emphasis

> **Dinna you fash** Don't worry

Note the use of **an**, where the English equivalent is 'to'

> **Come an see me the morn** Come to see me tomorrow
>
> **Mind an pit the cat oot** Remember to put the cat out

Dinna is not used after **an**

> **Come awa an no get cauld** Come in so as not to get cold

Polite 'imperatives' are common: **Wull ye gang hame**, **Ye cudna gang hame, cud ye?**

The pseudo verb **awa** is often used as an imperative as in

> **Awa hame!** Go home!
>
> **Awa wi ye!** Come off it!
>
> **Awa bile yer heid!** Clear off!

Other adverbs can be used in the same way: **Ootside! Noo**!

3.11 Auxilliary Verbs

These are verbs (in English such as be, have, will etc.) used together with a main verb to expand meaning and expression. Scots usage is similar to English, but the forms are quite distinct.

Be and **hae** are the usual auxilliaries used to build compound tenses, **be** is used to make the present and past progressive tenses **Whit *are* ye daein?** and **hae** the present and past perfect tenses e.g. **Whit *hae* ye bocht?**, **Whit *haed* ye bocht?**.

Dae is the supporting auxilliary used for negatives, questions etc e.g. ***D'ye ken whit's wrang? Whit *did* ye brek?***

Wull, **maun** and **micht** are the modal auxilliaries which form the future and tenses which express uncertainty e.g. ***Wull* ye gang the morn?** Auxilliary verbs have distinct negative forms in Scots and several also have emphatic forms. You will come across many spelling, dialectical and form variants of Scots auxiliary verbs. I've tried to pick a fairly conservative/neutral set here.

Be

Be has eight different forms: **be**, **am**, **are**, **wis**, **wur**, **bin/been** which correspond to the English cognates. As Scots has survived as a mainly spoken language, elision (missing out letters) is normal in many auxilliary verbs (and indeed throughout the language) where there are two adjacent vowels. The elided form of the present tense of **tae be** is therefore:

> **A'm** I am
>
> **ye'r(e)..**you are
>
> **he/she/it's** he/she/it is
>
> **we're** we are
>
> **youse are** you (plural) are
>
> **they're** they are

The negative of most auxiliaries is formed by adding **-na(e)**, to the unelided form: **A'm, A amna**; **ye are, ye ar(e)na**, **ye wis**, **ye wisna** etc. The older negative of **be** is **binna** ie **binna feart** (afraid) but nowadays **dinna be feart** would be more common.

Note that the English 'there is/are' is often simply **there/ therr** (i.e. 'is/are' is not used)

> **Therr yer tea**. There is your tea

The question form **Is therr?** (colloquially **Is they?**) and the past form **therr wis** is similar to English.

Here can take a similar form to **therr**; **Here the buik ye gied me**.

The past tense is usually written **wis** and **war**. Remember the singular forms **is** and **wis** often replace **are** and **war**

> **Thae lassies is fleein** Those girls are drunk
>
> **The English wis bate at Bannockburn** .The English were beaten at Bannockburn.

Hae

Hae has the present tense forms: **hae**, **his**,

> **A hae** I have
>
> **ye hae** you have
>
> **he/she/it his** he/she/it has
>
> **we hae** we have
>
> **youse hae** you (plural) have
>
> **they hae** they have

With the past tenses **haen**, **hid/hed/haid**, **haen** (see irregular verb table), so for example

>**they haed –** they had

>**A hae haen** – I have had

There is a common alternative to **hae** sometimes used as an 'emphatic' form **hiv** providing **A'v** the common elided form to **A hae**.

The negative forms are distinct: **hisna** (often shortned to **hinna**) /, **hidna** etc. The past is **haed(na)**, elided to **'d**.

Hae is also of course used not as an auxiliary but as a possessive, often **hae got** as in English.

Note the reduced forms in **If a haed'v kent** or colloquially **If A'd haed a kent**.

Dae

Dae has forms **dae**, **dis** as well as an 'emphatic' form **div**.

A dae I do

ye dae you do

he/she/it dis he/she/it does

we dae we do

youse dae you (plural) do

they dae they do

With the past tenses **did**, **duin/done** (see irregular verb table), so for example

>**they did –** they did

>**A hae duin** – I have done

The elided form of the past **is'd**. 'To do' is often written **adae**.

Dae has an irregular negative, **dinna** (**disna** in the **he/she/it** form**), **didna etc**. The past is **did(na)**.

With short verbs, sometimes you still hear a form of asking questions without **dae**.

>**Hae ye onie siller?** Do you have any money?

>**Hae/Hiv ye tae gang the noo**? Do you have to go now?

>**Cam ye wi the bus?** Did you come by bus?

>**Think ye sae?** Do you think so?

3.12 Modal Verbs

Modal verbs such as **can** and **wull** are used in a similar way to English except for in the future tense (see above).

The negative forms are **wull**, **wullna** (often shortned to **winna**); **maun**, **mauna** (note single 'n'); **micht**, **michtna**, **daur**, **daurna**, **need**, **needna**.

The past is usually written as **wad(na)**, **micht(na)**, **durst(na)**, **needed**. Maun has a rarely used past **bud** ie **it bud tae be**. Negative past forms are **wadna**, **michtna**, **durstna**.

Must

Must (negative forms **mustna** or **mustn't**) in Scots implies a 'truth statement' rather than an obligation

> **Tam must hae it** Tom will (definitely) have it

For 'real' obligations 'I must do it', **maun**, **need tae** or **hae** (**got**) **tae** are more typically Scots

> **A maun speir at the high heid yin** I must ask the boss

The **hae** in the idiom **hae better** is often dropped **Ye better dae it noo**, **A'll better no gang**.

The idiom **A maun awa** implies the verb **gang** and means 'I must go'.

Daur / need tae

Daur and **need** (**tae**) are not really modals, but still take the **-na(e)** form that was once more widespread in Scots.

Can, cud, shuid, wid/wad

Can, cud, shuid, wid/wad all have **-na(e)** negative e.g. **canna**, **shuidna**, **cudna**. **Wad** has the elided form **-'d**. As the Scots equivalent of 'be able' is **tae can**, a distinctive modal future format is possible

> **A micht can dae it the morn** I might be able to do it tomorrow

> **She'll can wark on it aifter** . She'll be able to work on it later.

There is no direct equivalent of English 'may'; (**tae**) **can** or **get** (**tae**) are used in the sense of being allowed to.

> **A wantit tae gang, but cudna get** I wanted to go but wasn't allowed

> **Ye can gang hame airlie** You may go home early

> **Ye hae tae can lauch at yersel** You must be able to laugh at yourself.

Note in the last example with **tae can**, double modals appear

> **A micht can dae it the morn** I might be able to do it tomorrow.

The past is usually written **cuid** and **shuid**, and can also be used in complex multiple modals

> **She micht cuid hae tae gang** She might have been able to go

> **He michtna cuid no hae duin it** He mustn't have been able to do it

> **He shuid no can come** It should not be possible for him to come

Remember that you can still use the **no** from of negation with auxiliaries. E.g. **The buik isna bad** or **The buik's no bad**. **She hisna come** or **She's no come** with largely the same meaning but there is a definite difference between the following pair

> **Ye canna come tae the pairtie** (not permitted)

> **Ye can no come tae the pairtie** (implies a choice).

4 Nouns

4.1 Plurals

As in English, for the plurals of nouns ('naming words') normally add **-(e)s**.

Unlike English, words ending in **-f** or **- fe** simply add an **-s** e.g. **wifes**, **leafs**, **lifes** .

When coming immediately after a number, measurement or amounts nouns don't change in the plural , e.g. **twa inch**, **fower fit**, **nine metre**, **ten mile**, nor do **meenit**, **oor** (hour), **month** and **year**, but **day**, **days**.

Some Scots irregular plurals are: **ee**, **een** (eyes); **shae**, **shuin** (shoes); **wumman**, **weemen**; **coo**, **kye** (cows); **fit**, **feet** and **ox**, **owsen**, **child**, **childer** not forgetting **moose**, **mice**; **loose**, **lice**; and **goose**, **geese**.

As in English, some nouns are the same in singular and plural such as **deer**, **sheep**, **troot** (trout), **cod**, **saumon** (salmon)**, grouse**, but in Scots so are **gait** (goat/s) and **horse**.

Fish has two plurals, **fish** (a lot of fish) and **fishes** (a countable number of fish).

Teeth the plural of **tuith** (tooth) is sometimes used as a singular.

Parritch (porridge) however is sometimes a plural, and several nouns are only used in the plural e.g. **breeks** (trousers), **galluses** (braces), **duds** (rags or old clothes), **shears** (scissors).

4.2 Diminutives

Often added to proper names e.g. **Davie**, **Jeanie**, the diminutive suffix **-ie** is also commonly added to short adjectives to indicate smallness as an alternative to the adjectives **wee**, **bit** or **sma** e.g. **lass**, **lassie**; **kist**, **kistie** (chest/box); **hoose**, **hoosie**; **bit**, **bittie**.

Scots may have been influenced by Flemish/Dutch which has an even more obsessive tendency to add -*je* (pronounced '*-ye'*) to words e.g. *een kopje* (**a cuppie** - small cup), *een reisje* (**a trippie** - short trip). As in Scots there is an implied affection.

4.3 Quantifiers

The use of nouns like **bit** as quantifiers is actually quite common, but note they are not necessarily followed by **o** (of) e.g. **a bit bried**, **a drap watter**, **a moothfu haggis**, though **eneuch** is followed by **o**.

Whiskie of course has its own terminology: **dram**, (**wee**) **hauf** and even a **thocht**.

Aa/aw (all), a **wheen** (some), **onie** (any), **eneuch** (enough), **hauf** (half), **baith** (both) are used as in English.

Some, when used in Scots, often has the implication of 'big'

> **That's some dunt on the caur**..That is a big bash on your car

Baith and **maist** (see below) are usually used with **the** e.g. **the baith/maist o thaim**. **Monie**, **mair**,

maist are the forms for countable nouns, **muckle** (or nowadays usually **much**), **mair**, **maist** for uncountable nouns , though colloquial Scots may blur this distinction.

There is no **a** after **monie**, so 'many a time' would be **monie time**.

'How many/much' is **Hoo monie/much?** English 'few' is translated as **nae monie**, both fewer and less as **less**. 'Too much' is **ower monie**. 'A few' is **a wheen**, **twa-three/three-fower** etc.

Larger amounts are expressed by **awfie** (**a awfie midges**), **hantle** (**a hantle fowk**), **rowth** (abundance). A **dod o breid** is a 'chunk'. A **crood** is a large group of people or things and a **curn** is a small group.

4.4 Compound nouns

Scots compound nouns may be hyphenated to clarify meaning or pronunciation e.g. **week-en**, **post-caird**, **twa-bedded** (twin-bedded).

The use of double nouns is very common in Scots e.g. **tumshie hied** (stupid person), **baa heid** (idiot), **muck midden** (dunghill, but usually used metaphorically), **stair fit** (bottom of the stairs), **piece poke** (sandwich bag), **brae heid** (top of the hill).

4.5 Possessive forms

Possessive forms as in English with **-'s** which can also be used instead of **-s'** with regular plurals **bairns's**. The alternatively form with **o** is also used e.g. **the convener o the meetin**. Note the idiomatic use of the possessive in **the morn's morn** (tomorrow morning), **the morn's nicht**.

5 Pronouns

5.1 Personal pronouns

Scots is sometimes said to have both unemphatic forms and emphatic forms of personal pronouns, though actual use is inconsistent. The emphatic forms are given in [square brackets] in the text below and usually correspond to the English equivalent.

This is a useful distinction. **A telt ye**, **I telt ye**, **A telt you** and **I telt you** all have different emphases which would be expressed in English by stress if spoken or putting in italics/bold if written. The concept that English-like linguistic forms are more assertive or emphatic is an interesting theme and you often hear Scots speakers code switch into English for effect e.g. **A told you tae dae it**.

Subject (nominative):

> **A** [**Ah/I**]
>
> **ye** [**you, ye** in Ulster Scots]
>
> **he/she/it** [**he/she/hit**]
>
> **we** [**we**]
>
> **ye(z)/youse** [**you**]
>
> **they** [**they**]

The 'I' form seems to cause problems in orthography. Scots pronounce it *A*, *Ah* (a bit longer), *Eh* (distinctive of Dundee) as well as *Ay* (the usual English way). Personally I write **A**, leaving **Ah** and **I** for emphasis.

In West central dialects **ye** has distinct plural **yiz** [**youse**], a possible import from Ireland. This is so useful it seems to be becoming a standard, replacing the **ye** [**you**] plural

> **Whit're yez daein the nicht?** What are you (all) doing tonight?

An informal American English equivalent would be 'y'all' or 'you guys'. Further emphasis can be provided by **you(se) yins**.

Nowadays Scots, like English, largely lacks a familiar form of you, but **tou** [**thou**] survived on the mainland until this century, but is now only used in Orkney (**thoo**) and Shetland (**du**) with the verb in the s/he form.

Note that when combining **A** with another pronouns, the object forms are used and the I equivalent is usually placed first.. **A'm no comin** but **Me an her isna comin** (She and I are not coming).

When using **it** with subject pronouns, order is different from standard English e.g. **Gie hir it** (Give it to her), **Did ye tell him it** (Did you tell it to him?).

The pronoun often appears in an elided (short) form; **Gie's it** (give it to me), **By ma wey o't** (In my opinion), **He tellt hir't** (He told it to her).

There is no Scots equivalent to the English neutral pronoun 'one', and in Scots neutrality is represented by **ye** or **they**.

Object (accusative):

> **me** [**me**]
>
> **ye** [**you**]
>
> **him/her/it** [**him/hir/hit**]
>
> **us** [**huz**]
>
> **ye** [**you/youse**]
>
> **thaim** [**thaim**] (but the unstressed form is usually pronounced **thum**).

The **us** form is often used colloquially in the first person

> **See's thon buik** (Pass me that book over there)
>
> **Gie's a poond** (Give me a pound), **Come wi's** (Come with me)

Thaim that is the eqivalent to the English 'those that'

> **Therr wark for thaim that want it**   There's work for those that want it

Note **Is that you? Ay, that's me** means 'Are you ready/finished ? Yes I'm ready'.

See can be used to emphasise any object pronoun; **See him, he's a daftie**, **See us, we're brilliant**.

Posessives (My one, your one etc)

The 'nominal' possessive pronouns are

> **mines**
>
> **yours**
>
> **his/hers**
>
> **oors/wirs**
>
> **theirs**

Thus **thon buik's mines, it's no yours**. My, your etc is in the adjectives section.

For emphasis use **my ane(s)**, **your ane(s)** etc.

Reflexive pronouns

The 'nominal' reflexive pronouns are

> **masel**
>
> **yersel**
>
> **himsel** [**hissel**], **hersel**, **itssel** [**hitsel**]

> **oorsel/wirsel**
>
> **yersel** or **the sel o ye**
>
> **thaimsel/theirsel**.

The plurals alternatively take **-s** ie **wirsels**.

Me and **ye** can replace **masel** and **yersel**.

> **A bocht me a new caur the day** I bought myself a new car today)
>
> **Sit ye doon!** Sit (yourself) down

Some more idioms:

> **Yer twa sels** Both of you
>
> **He did it aw his ain sel** He did it all by himself
>
> **Ye missed yersel at the pairtie** You missed a good party
>
> **A'v aften seen masel getting tae the office at seeven** …form often used when telling a story

Himsel/hersel often implies an important person at home or a t work ie a boss, husband or wife

> **Whan hersel hears yon, therr'll be a stushie** ..When the boss/wife hears that there'll be trouble)

English 'alone' is translated as **his/her/their** etc **lane**

> **We gaed wir lane**..We went by ourselves
>
> **Is thon lass by her lane?** Is that girl alone?)

Itsel is the equivalent of 'by itself'.

Relative pronouns

The relative pronoun (English which, who etc) is simply **that** or **at**, depending on the dialect and sometimes it is omitted as in English. **The bairns that brak the windae**, **The mannie A ken...**

When English 'whose' is a relative pronoun, it is not, as you might expect, **whase** in Scots, but **that** plus a possessive

> **The man that his siller wis tint** The man whose money was lost

In speech this is contracted to **that's** for all pronouns.

> **The bairn that's breeks wis tore** The child whose trousers were torn)

Wha is normally only used as part of a question, so Burns' **Scots wha hae** is stirring but nowadays ungrammatical! **Scots that haes** is the modern form.

Interrogative pronouns

The interrogative pronouns are all different in form from English, but used similarly to their equivalents.

18

hoo how or why	**whit** 'what' or 'which'
wha e 'who' as well as 'whom'	**whit ane/yin** which
whan when	**whit wey** or **hoo** or **whit for** why, for what
whase whose	reason
whaur where	**hooaboots** how
whauraboots whereabouts	**whit like** what sort of
whitna which, what kind of	**hoo me?** why me?

Whase is is often replaced by **wha belangs**.

> **Wha belangs thon hoose?** Whose house is that?

As we have seen above when English 'whose' is a relative pronoun, it is **that** plus a possessive.

Whit is generally used where 'which' would be expected in English

> **Whit wey noo?** .Which way now?

> **Whit yin/ane d'ye want?** .Which one do you want

There are several other idioms using **whit/**

> **Whit bonnie!** How pretty!

> **Whit for no?** Why not?

> **Whit's he greetin/roarin at?** Why is he crying/shouting

> **Whit a fowk!** What a lot of people!

> **Whit age are ye?** How old are you?

> **Whit wecht is it?** How heavy is it?

In children's speech especially the tag **Eh?** (see below) can be used as an interrogative;

> **Eh, ye'v got a new bike?** Do you have a new bike?

A distinctive feature of the North- East dialect of Scots is that the *wh* sound is replaced by *f* (so **foo**, **fa**, **fit** etc **Fit like?** is 'How are you?').

There are several other dialectical variants for example **what** (to rhyme with 'cat) instead if **whit**.

Question tags

These usually operate in a similar positive/negative way to English; **He's no gaun, is he?**

However negative tags can have a distinct Scots form

> **He's on the buroo, is he no?** (with rising intonation).

Compare to the English-like form **He's on the buroo, i(s)n't he?** (with falling intonation).

A neutral tag **Eh?** which can be either positive or negative is also very common **He's on the buroo, eh?** and **He isna on the buroo, eh?**

A negative tag **eh no?** can also be used here. There is an analogy with a very similar informal positive tag *hè* common in Flemish/Dutch.

The colloquial urban Glasgow tag **int** (isn't) as in **It's awfie faur int it?** is thought to be a fairly

recent innovation or perhaps import.

The 2020 videos by Michael Dempster, explain question tags in more detail.

Indefinite pronouns

In Scots these are

a bodie someone, somebody

awbodie everyone, everybody

awthin everything

naebodie no one, nobody

naethin or **nocht** nothing

oniebodie anyone, anybodie

oniethin or **ocht** anything

sumhin/sumthin something

nane none.

English 'one' could be **ane** (often pronounced 'an') but is more characteristically **a bodie** e.g. **Gin a bodie meet a bodie**. Also '**ilkane** or **ilka ane** (each one), **onie ither bodie** (anyone else), **nae ithir bodie** (no one else). **Yin** is also a common way of expressing the English 'one' in West Central dialects; **the big yin**, **thon yins**, **yin thing aifter anithir**. As in English **ye** is an impersonal pronoun: **ye niver can tell**.

6 Adjectives (Describe nouns and pronouns)

Suffixes and prefixes

Scots often use **-lik(e)** added to simple adjectives sometimes equivalent to English '-ish' or **'-ly'** but often with added metaphorical or poetic undertones e.g. **blecklike** (blackish, darkly etc), **bairnlike** (childish, childlike, juvenile etc), **doucelike** (sweetly, respectfully etc), **shilpitlike** (starved-looking), **wicelike** (sensible, proper, good-looking). **Like** is also used for emphasis **Thon jeelie is sweet-like** and colloquially has often become a meaningless tag, **Are ye comin the morn, like?**

Other Scots endings are **-some** meaning 'full of' e.g. **lichtsome** (carefree, cheerful), **forritsome** (forward, impudent), **scunnersome** (disgusting), **waesome** (sorrowful); **-ie** e.g. **creeshie** (greasy), **reekie** (smoky), **stoorie** (dusty); and **-fu** meaning 'full' e.g. **fearfu**, **thochtfu**, **mensefu** (polite, respectable), **awfu** or **awfie**.

Prefixes are less common, e.g. is **un-** or its equivalent **wan-**' e.g. **wanchancie** or **unchancie** (unlucky, unfortunate), **unbraw** (unattractive).

No is also used independently to create negative adjectives e.g. **no wicelike**.

Comparatives

Comparatives and superlatives are formed in the same way as English, by adding **-er** or **-est** e.g. **bonnie**, **bonnier**, **bonniest** or using **mair**, **the maist**. Note **wee**, **wee-er**, **wee-est** and **like**, **liker**, **maist like**.

There are always irregulars

> **guid**, **better**, **best**
>
> **bad/ill**, **waur/warse**, **warst**
>
> **faur**, **forder**, **fordest**
>
> **awfie, mair awfie, awfie-est**.

Double comparisons using **maist** are sometimes used for effect e.g. **The maist brawest sicht A ivver seen**. **Maist** can also be used as a suffix e.g. **doonmaist** (at the very bottom), **hinnermaist** (at the very end).

When there is a second part to the comparison, use **nor**

> **Jock is mair glaikit nor Tam** (more foolish)
>
> **Mair siller nor sense** (More money than sense).

Note the **whit** in the construction

> **As guid as whit she is, she'll no win**.

Demonstratives (This, that etc)

Used to specify the distance or location of something in relation to the speaker. **This** and **that** are used as in English and Scots has two extra forms **thon** and **yon** to refer to things more distant from both speakers. **Thon** seems to be between **that** and **yon** both spatially and linguistically. These can be used

as pronouns **yon's awfie** (that's awful). There is some dialectical variation. e.g. in Nothern Scots **this** and **that** can be used with plurals.

singular	this lad	tha(t) lad	thon lad	yon lad
plural	these/thir lads	thae lads	thon lads	yon lads

In some dialects the *th* sound often disappears from **that** and **this**, and the demonstratives are sometimes written as **at** and **is**. That one is **that ane/yin/wan** depending on dialect.

Note the idioms **A tellt ye that** (I told you so) and **this wee while** (for a short time).

Distributives (Each and every)

In written Scots 'each' and 'every' are both often translated as **ilka**, but in spoken Scots **each** and **ivverie** are more usual. **Aither** (either) and **naither** are used as in English.

'Each one' is **ilk/each ane** and 'each other' is **ilk/each ither**. **A(w) kin o** is sometimes used for 'every' as in **A(w) kin o fowk wis therr** (Every type of person was there).

Possessives

The possessive adjectives are

> **ma** (**me** in Insular Scots)
>
> **yer** [**your**]
>
> **hir/hur**
>
> **his**
>
> **wir** [**oor**]
>
> **their**

Examples: **wir school**, **ma freens** (friends), **yer faither**.

While the possessive **its** is used, it can be replace by **o it** or **o't**. There are a number of idioms different from English

> **A'm awa tae ma bed**
>
> **Whit did ye get for yer Christmas?**
>
> **Whit are yea haein for yer tea?**

As we have seen in Scots 'the' is sometimes used where English would use the possessive pronoun

> **The wife's oot daein the messages** (My wife is out doing the shopping)
>
> **Dinna loss the heid** (Don't get angry/crazy).

Compound adjectives

As with nouns there is a tendency in Scots to form compounds such as **crabbit-luikin** (of cantankerous appearance), **guid-gaun** (lively), **thrawn-luikin** (of disobliging appearance), **weill-daein** (respectable), **greetin-faced** (tearful), **doon-hertit** (dejected).

7 Adverbs (Describe how something happens)

When the adverb is positioned next to the verb, it takes the same form as the adjective e.g. **He cam in quiet**. **He's near feenished**. If more emphasis is needed **-like** is added e.g. **Run, quick-like!**

Generally adverbs can be formed by adding **-lie** to the end of the related adjective e.g. **slaw**, **slawlie**; **saft**, **saftlie**; **braw**, **brawlie**; **maist, maistlie**, but **-lik(e)** can also be added here and often seems a preferred construction. Perhaps by extension, as mentioned above, **like** has become a very common intensifier in West Central and Ulster dialects

Are ye comin we me, like?

Some adverbs have an optional extra **-s**: **aiblins** (perhaps), **whiles** (sometimes)**, mebbies**, **geylies** (pretty much), **brawlies** (excellently), **nae wunners** (no wonder).

Many Scots prepositions (see below) can be used as adverbs.

The common adverb **awa** appears in several idioms, sometimes replacing a verb

A'm awa (I am going)

Come awa! (come here)

Awa (wi ye)! (expression of disbelief)

Awa (an) bile yer heid! (get lost!)

A'm fair awa wi it (happy/proud).

The adverb **gey (an)** is used to intensify an adjective e.g. **It wis gey dear** and it is worth noting are the range of words, very distinctive of Scots, used to intensify adjectives such as **awfie**, **fell**, **rare**, **sair**, **unco**.

That is used as an adverb equivalent of the English **'so'**

A wis that wabbit a jist gaed hame.

8 Prepositions (Used to indicate movement, position, relation etc)

Many can also be used as adverbs. Some of the most common are:

ablow below	**ayont** beyond	**o** of
aboot about	**ben** within a house	**on** on
abuin above	**bi wey o** via	**ontae** onto
aff off	**by** by, past	**or** until
aff o from	**doon** down	**oot** out (of)
afore before, prior to	**doon by** down there	**ootby** out-of- doors, outlying
agin against	**efter** after	**ootwi(th)** outside
ahint behind	**fornent** opposite	**ower** over
alang along	**frae/fae** from	**roond** round
amang among	**for** for	**syne** since
aneith beneath	**furth** out of a town, country	**throu** through, during
anent alongside,	etc	**tae/till** to
regarding (in a letter)	**in** in	**till** till
aroon around	**in aneith** under, underneath	**taeward** toward
as as	**in maugre/spite o** despite	**unner** under
aside beside	**in o** inside	**up** up
at at	**inby** within, inside a building	**upon** upon
athort across	**intae** within, inside	**wantin** without
athoot without	**intil** into	**wi(th)** with
atween between	**nar** near	**wi-in**, within.

Many of these can be used as compounds e.g. **intil, inower, ootower** (outside), **in o, aff o, naraboots** etc. **Note** the related **hereawa** (hereabouts), **therrawa** (thereabouts), **yonderaboots** (there or thereabouts).

The positioning of prepositions such as **aff**, **oot** is sometimes different from English equivalents

> **He took aff his bunnet** (He took his cap off)

> **She humphed oot the bucket** (She hauled the bin out)

Otherwise use is broadly similar to English although there are some variations especially related to nouns e.g. **think on** (think about), **merrit on/wi** (married to), **beelin at** (angry with), **ower the windae** (out of the window), **in a praisent** (as a present), **wyte on** (wait for), **cry on** (call to), **feart for** (afraid of), **mind o** (remember), **lippen tae** (depend on), **speir at** (ask, request), **get oot the road** (out of the way), **ask for** (enquire after someone's health), **lauch on** (laugh at).

Needs and **wants** don't take **tae** but use a past participle instead.

> **The wife wants taen hame** (My wife would like to be taken home)

> **Thon hoose needs pentin** (That house requires to be painted).

Prepositions are idiosyncratic and illogical in most language and therefore quite difficult to learn. The best way is to 'collect' examples.

This highly idiomatic use of prepositions to greatly extend the meaning of verbs, although of course a

feature of standard and colloquial English, is very common in Scots and to some extent belies the claim that Scots has a restricted vocabulary.

A few other examples are

come roon recover	**gae efter** chase
gie in tae confess	**tak efter** resemble
git on be friendly	**pit doon for** register
git thegither assemble	**pit oot** advertise
git gaun rile	**pit by** save
gae agin argue	**be pit oot** offended
gae wrang lose one's way	**pit on** pretend.
tak tent pay attention	

9 Conjunctions

Scots conjunctions tend to work harder than English ones, and generally cover a range of English synonyms. As a result of this and the use of prepositions to extend meaning described above, Scots texts often seem more concise and direct than their English translations. A few illustrative equivalents are given below.

afore before, previous to, earlier than, prior to, ahead of, rather than **an** and, although **as** as **athoot** unless, except, save, but for **but** but, excluding, other than, save for **efter** after, following, subsequent to **forbye** besides, except, apart from, excluding, bar, aside from, with the exception of **for aw that** despite **hooaniver** however, nevertheless **or** or **sae** so, as a result, thus, therefore, subsequently, accordingly, hence, consequently	**sae bein** provided that, since **seein as** given that, given the fact that, seeing that, considering, bearing in mind, in view of the fact that, since **syne** from the time that **tho** though, although, even if, despite the fact that **whan** when **whaur** where **wioot** without, devoid of, lacking.

There are two words for 'if' in Scots, **if** and **gin** (pronounced with a hard 'g'). The first covers matters of fact **If ye'r that smert, you dae it** (if you are so smart, you do it), the other for speculation - and nowadays more a written than spoken form- **Gin ye gat the job, whit wid ye dae?** (if you got the job, what would you do). 'As if' in Scots is **like as if**.

10 Numbers (Cardinals are 1,2,3 etc; Ordinals 1st, 2nd 3rd etc)

Cardinal numbers are largely different to English in spelling and/or pronunciation, but the construction of complex numbers is the same e.g. 444 **fower hunner an fowertie fower**. There are some minor variations in spelling/pronunciation between Scots dialects.

Note that sometimes 'one' is used in English in an emphatic way, acting more like an adjective. 'That's *one* man I can't stand'. This has a special construction in Scots, **ae**, or **yae** in some dialects.

> **Thon's ae man a canna thole**.

This is **ae** used as an adjective.

0	**zero/ nocht / naethin**	10	**ten**
1	**ane/yin/wan**	11	**eleeven**
2	**twa/twae/twaw**	12	**twal**
3	**three**	13	**thirteen/thretteen**
4	**fower**	14	**fowerteen**
5	**five/fev**	15	**fifteen**
6	**sax**	16	**saxteen**
7	**seeven**	17	**seeventeen**
8	**echt/aicht/aucht**	18	**echteen**
9	**nine**	19	**nineteen**

20	**twintie**
21	**twintie-ane / twintie-yin** etc
30	**thertie/threttie**
40	**fo(we)rtie**
50	**fuftie**
60	**saxtie**
70	**seeventie**
80	**echtie**
90	**ninetie**
100	**a hunner**
1,000	**a thoosan(d)**
1m	**a mullion**

Ordinal numbers nearly all end in **-t** ie **first**, **saicant**, **third** (irregular), **fowert**, **fift**, **saxt**, **seevent**, **echt/aucht**, **nint**, **tent**. Add **-t** to the cardinal numbers for subsequent forms. Sometimes the ordinal is used instead of the cardinal e.g. the **the twintie Mairch**. The abbreviated form is **1t**, **2t**, **3d** (irregular), **4t** etc.

Related vocabulary: **single**, **dooble**, **threeple** and the suffix **-some** to indicate a group of people e.g. **a fowersome at the gowf** (golf), **a echtsome reel** (a type of dance with 8 participants). Fractions are **hauf**, **third**, **quarter**, **fift** etc. Remember **twa-three**, **three-fower** mean 'a few' and a **dizzen** (dozen).

11 Time

To answer the phrase **Whit's the time?** (What time is it?):

> **Fower (o' clock)** or **fower oors**
> **juist efter fower**
> **the back o fower**
> **ten efter fower**
> **a quarter efter fower**
> **hauf fower**
> **a quarter til/tae five**
> **ten til/tae/frae five**
> **juist afore five.**

Until a few generations ago Scots **hauf fower** would have meant 3.30 (as still in Flemish/Dutch). Units are **saicant**, **meenit**, **oor** (remember no plural forms immediately after numbers).

Some common expressions of time:

morn morning	**nicht** night
twalours/nuin midday	**day** day
midnicht midnight	**the day** today
weeoors early morning	**the morn** tomorrow
keek o day sunrise	**the morn's morn** tomorrow morning
mornin morning	**the nicht** tonight
nuin or **twal-oors** noon	**yestreen** yesterday
efternuin afternoon	**week** week
sundoon sunset	**fortnicht** fortnight
gloamin just after sunset	**month** month
eenin/fornicht evening	**year** year

The modern forms of the days of the week are:

> **Monday**
>
> **Tuesday**
>
> **Wadensday**
>
> **Thursday**
>
> **Friday**
>
> **Saturday**
>
> **Sunday**

Sunday is also **the Sawbath,** and **Friday** is, if you're lucky, **Peyday** ! As usual you will see some spelling differences, sometimes the older forms **Monanday** and **Tyseday**.

Nixt/neist is used differently for days of the week. **This Saturday** is the equivalent of English 'next Saturday;, while **nixt Saturday** is the next Saturday but one.

The months of the year are

Januar	**Julie**
Februar	**August**
Mairch	**September**
Aprile	**October**
Mey	**November**
Juin	**December**

The last five months are of course similar in many European languages.

Laist, referring to time, is used like English 'last' (but 'last year' can be **fernyear**). (When 'last' refers to position, use **hin(ner)** or **hinnermaist)**.

The **Fower Saisons**:

> **Spring** /**Ware** Spring
>
> **Simmer** Summer
>
> **Hairst** Autumn
>
> **Winter** Winter

A few important days in the Scottish calendar are

> **Ne'erday** New Year's Day
>
> **Burns' Nicht** 25 Jan
>
> **Fastern's een** Shrove Tuesday
>
> **Pace** Easter
>
> **Gowk's Day** or **Huntigowk** 1 April
>
> **Beltane** 1 or 3 May
>
> **Guy Fawkes Nicht** 5 November
>
> **Sanct Andra's Day** 30 November
>
> **Yuil Een** 24 December
>
> **Yuil Day** Christmas
>
> **Hogmanay** New Year's Eve.

The autumn half term school holiday is still sometimes called the **tattie holiday** - a time when traditionally children were needed to help with bringing in the potato harvest.

The Scots **Quarter Days** (still used at some Universities) are **Cannlemas** (2 Feb), **Lammas** (1 Aug), **Michelmas** (29 Sep) and **Mairtinmas** (11 November).

12 Exclamations and 'markers'

Exclamations

Scots has a remarkable range of colourful exclamations, several derived from religious phrases e.g. **michtie** (Almighty God!), **crivvens** (Christ defend us!), **fegs** (Faith!). A few other common ones are:

Ach! impatience	**Haud on!** Stop!
Awa wi ye! disbelief	**Hievens!** wonder
Ay ay disbelief	**Hish!** Be quiet!
Blethers! Bletheration! disbelief	**Jings!** surprise
Caa cannie! Watch out!	**Mercie me!** surprise
Crivvens! astonishment	**Michtie!** alarm
Feech! disgust	**Niver!** disbelief
Fegs! surprise	**Och!** impatience
Gaun yersel! Go/come on!	**Wheesht!** Be quiet!
Guid kens! puzzlement	**Yer grannie!** disbelief
Haivers! disbelief	

You really know you are a Scots speaker when you start saying these spontaneously. Oh and don't forget real Scots shout **Heech!, Hooch!** or **Heuch!** whenever dancing to a reel.

Discourse markers

These are important wee words and short phrases dropped into speech to establish a rapport between the speakers and generally keep the conversation going.

> **Ye ken, och weel, A'm seein him the morn onieweys, like.**

Scots markers include words phrases such as

> **och**
> **weel**
> **A/ye ken**
> **oniewey(s)**
> **in fack**
> **noo**
> **aye**
> **oh/och aye**
> **aye weel**
> **naw**
> **ken** (often in a final position)

Like (in a final position as in the example) is also a common marker in some dialects but thought of as 'colloquial'.

References and further reading

The following books and online resources were used in the preparation of this document.

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- **The Concise English-Scots Dictionary** (1993) and its companion **Essential Scots Dictionary** (1996) from The Scottish National Dictionary Association and published by Chambers, Edinburgh are the best prescriptive dictionaries available and were used to attempt a standardised spelling for this grammar.