

# Introduction to Swedish<sup>©</sup>

By Urban Sikeborg, Stockholm 1997–98

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INTRODUCTION TO

# SWEDISH

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Swedish is a fascinating and expressive language. It is also a melodic language, admittedly difficult to pronounce like a native because of its characteristic sing-song rhythm, but otherwise not more complicated to learn than English. Most Swedes born after World War II do speak or understand English – many of them very well, actually – and you will probably be able to have a memorable and enjoyable stay in Sweden without any deeper knowledge of Swedish. But you will find that just a few words of Swedish will work as a wonderful door-key to the Swedes, who have a reputation of being rather reserved to strangers. Addressing someone in his or her native language is a matter of respect, a way of showing that you play by their rules, so to speak. To learn a language means to learn to understand the culture where it is spoken and the people who speak it. In a way, to learn a language opens up a new world.

Swedish is a member of the Indo-European family, to which belong almost all European languages (with the exception of the Finnish-Ugric, Basque, and Caucasian languages), and has many features in common with all of these. Its closest relatives are Danish, Norwegian, and Icelandic. The latter has due to its isolation remained remarkably intact from the Viking Age and therefore is very difficult to understand for other Nordic speakers. Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes usually do not have any difficulties in communicating with each other. Even though Danish is slightly more closely related to Swedish than Norwegian, its "hot-potato-in-the-mouth" pronunciation is the main obstacle when Danes and Swedes speak with each other, whereas Norwegian in that respect is very similar to Swedish. All in all, the differences between the languages are not very big – most Swedes would probably even find it difficult to tell whether a text was written in Norwegian or Danish. Since Swedish also is the second official language of Finland, a basic knowledge of Swedish will thus enable you to understand and make yourself understood in several countries.

There is no natural language which does not require years of study to master completely, but you will soon acquire an impressive passive vocabulary. You will find that signs and headlines become more and more comprehensible and that you within short will be able to browse through a Swedish newspaper and get a good grasp of what is said. Learning Swedish is facilitated by the fact that over the centuries it has borrowed thousands of words from Low German, French, and English; some very common words in English have in turn been borrowed from the Vikings. This means that many words will be familiar to you from the very beginning.

But a language is more than just a collection of words; without a basic knowledge of the grammar, your linguistic proficiency will most likely be very limited. This introduction to Swedish presents a brief outline of Swedish grammar, with the emphasis on the spoken, everyday language. It is advisable to browse through the rules for pronunciation in chapter 8 before each chapter. Otherwise you might end up sending disquietingly like the Swedish Chef in the Muppet Show.

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## Chapter 1:

# How to introduce yourself

Some foreigners have claimed that Swedes in general are rather reserved and stiff in comparison to their own fellow countrymen. This alleged cultural feature is not a personal quality, however; you will soon find out that the Swedes are as passionate, wonderful or silly as most other people you know.

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## SENTENCES TO STUDY

**Hej! Jag heter ..... och kommer från ..... Vad heter du?**

*Hello! I am called ... and come from ... What are called you?*

**Jag heter .....**

*I am called ...*

**Var kommer du ifrån? / Vårifrån kommer du?**

*Where come you from? / Wherefrom come you?*

**Jag är från ... och studerar svenska här. Jobbar du i Stockholm?**

*I am from ... and study Swedish here. Work you in Stockholm?*

**Nej, jag arbetar inte här; jag är också student.**

*No, I work not here; I am too/also student.*

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## NOTES

### 1. Personal pronouns

'Jag' (I) and 'du' (you) are pronouns, words denoting persons that perform an action. In English 'you' can refer either to one individual or to several persons; in Swedish you use separate forms, depending on the number of people you are addressing. The Swedish so-called personal pronouns are:

<b>Personal pronouns:</b> <i>Someone or something that is doing something ("You see")</i>	<b>Objective forms:</b> <i>Someone or something that is the object of an action ("I see you")</i>
<b>Singular (referring to one person)</b>	
jag = I du <sup>1</sup> = you (Ni = your [polite form]) han = he hon <sup>2</sup> = she den <sup>3</sup> = it det = it	mig/mej = me dig/dej = you (Er = you [polite form]) honom = him hénne = her den = it det = it
<b>Plural (referring to two or more people)</b>	
v_i = we ni = you (Ni = you [polite form]) de ('dom') <sup>4</sup> = they	oss = us er = you (Er = you [polite form]) dem ('dom') <sup>4</sup> = them

1. Swedes usually address each other with the pronoun 'du', regardless of what position they might have or if they meet for the first time; in fact, the formal 'Ni' are nowadays considered old-fashioned and is mainly used

when talking to older people. The English habit of frequently inserting the name of the person you are talking to is not common in Swedish and can sometimes be felt too intimate.

2. The 'o' in 'hon' is pronounced like 'oo' in 'good'.
3. There are two words for 'it' in Swedish. This is because Swedish, unlike English, still define animals and things in terms of gender, and is in this respect similar to the German with its 'der, die, das' and the French 'le, la'. Whether one should use 'den' or 'det' is decided by what gender the word it refers to has. In the general and neutral meaning 'it' has in phrases like 'it is cold today', 'det' is used: 'Det är kallt idäg.'
4. The words for 'they' and 'them' is normally spelled 'de' and 'dem' respectively, but are almost always pronounced 'dom'.

## 2. Verbs – Doing-or-Being Words

'Heter', 'kommer', 'är', 'studerar', 'jobbar' and 'arbetar' are verbs, words that show what someone/something is or does or what is happening. While English has two different endings for regular verbs depending on who is performing the action – I read, you read, but he/she/it reads – Swedish very conveniently uses only one form, regardless of person: Jag kömmer, du kömmer, hon kömmer, vi kömmer etc. Most regular verbs use the ending -er, -ar or -r when they are in the present tense, that is describe an action taking place now: 'hon studerar' = 'she studies/is studying'.

## 3. Från/Ifrån

'Från' is usually changed to 'ifrån' (literally 'in-from') when it stands after the word it is referring to or at the end of a clause or a sentence.

## Some countries and parts of the world with their names in Swedish

Read more about the pronunciation of Swedish in Chapter 8!

Africa	Áfrika	Iran	Irán
America	Amérika (Nórdamérika, Sýdamérika)	Iraq	Irák
Argentina	Argentína	Ireland	Írland
Asia	Ásien	Israel	Ísrael
Australia	Austrálien	Italy	Itálien
Austria	Ö'sterríke	Japan	Jápan
Belgium	Bélgien [with a 'hard' g]	Latvia	Léttland
Bosnia	Bósnien	Lithuania	Litaúen [the accent on the diphthong 'au']
Brazil	Brasílien	Macedonia	Makedónien
Canada	Kánada	Mexico	Méxiko
Chile	Chíle	Norway	Nórge
China	Kína	Pakistan	Pakistán
Croatia	Kroátien	Poland	Pólen
Czech Republic	Tjéckien	Portugal	Pórtugal
Denmark	Dánmark	Rumania	Rumä'nien
Europe	Európa	Russia	Rýssland
Egypt	Egýpten	Scotland	Skóttland
England, Great Britain	Éngland, Stórbritánnien	Serbia	Sérbien
Estonia	E'stland	Slovakia	Slovákien
Finland	Fínland	Slovenia	Slovénien
France	Fránkrike	South Africa	Sýdáfrika
Germany	Týskland	Spain	Spánien
Greece	Grékland	Sweden	Svéridge [pronounced as if its Swedish spelling were 'Svérje']
Holland, the Netherlands	Hólland, Néderlä'nderna	Switzerland	Schweíz [the diphthong is pronounced with an 'e' sound, not as in German]
Hungary	Úngern	Thailand	Thailand [the stress on the diphthong 'ai', like in English]
Iceland	Ísland	Turkey	Turkíet
India	Índien		

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## Chapter 2:

# Greetings and goodbyes

It has been said that the first impressions last. If that is true, it may be valuable to know how to greet somebody in a proper way (Swedes are not, for instance, very given to cheek-kissing). Here is a list of some salutary phrases in Swedish. Try to find a couple you think could be useful and memorize them.

### SALUTARY PHRASES

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<b>Hej!</b>	This is the most common way of greeting someone, be it in a formal or informal situation, and can be used as an equivalent of ‘How do you do’ as well as ‘Hi (there)’.
<b>Tjéna[re]!</b>	Informal and friendly. Actually an abbreviation of 17th and 18th century phrases like ‘Jag förbliver Eder ödmjukaste <i>tjänare</i> ’ (I remain your most humble <i>servant</i> ).
<b>Tja!</b>	<i>Very</i> informal and cool. An abbreviated form of ‘tjenare’, often in combination with ‘ba’ (‘tjá’ba’), a reduced form of ‘bara’ (only), which in Swedish can be used like the English ‘sort/kind of’ as a filler without a real meaning.
<b>God morgon!</b> <i>Good morning!</i>	Used in both formal and informal situations.
<b>God dag!</b> <i>Good day!</i>	This equivalent to ‘How do you do’ is mostly used to people you call ‘Ni’, e.g. elderly people, and on formal occasions.
<b>God kväll!</b> <i>Good evening!</i>	The Swedish ‘good evening’ salute is nowadays mainly reserved for somewhat formal meetings or to people you address with the ‘Ni’ pronoun. The synonymous expression ‘God afton’ is rather antiquated by now.

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### NOTE

*‘Tj’ is pronounced a bit sharper than the English ‘sh’ sound – as in ‘shut’, but with the middle part of the tongue pressed more towards the palate (cp. German ‘ch’ in ‘ich’).*

### If you just have been introduced to someone you might add:

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<b>Trévligt att rǻkas!</b> <i>Nice to meet [you]!</i>	Demonstrating that you are a polite and well-behaved person.
<b>Ángenä́mt!</b> <i>Pleasant/nice [to meet you]!</i>	This equivalent to German ‘Angenehm’ and French ‘Enchanté’ is definitely old-fashioned, but could be popular among mature ladies.

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## NOTE

Like in English some consonants change sound when they are followed by certain vowels (*café* - city; *guest* - *gist*). These so-called soft vowels are in Swedish: *e, i y, ä, ö*. The 'g' in 'angenämt', which precedes the soft vowel 'e', is therefore pronounced like 'y' in 'yes', not like 'g' in 'good'. Read more about the rules for pronunciation in chapter 8!

## If you know the person in question you can ask:

<b>Hur står det till?</b> <i>How stands it to?</i>	Has got a slightly formal touch, but can also be used in informal situations.
<b>Hur är det?</b> <i>How is it?</i>	Informal, very common.
<b>Hur har du det?</b> <i>How have you it?</i>	Informal, very frequent.
<b>Hur är läget?</b> <i>Hos is the situation?</i>	A bit more informal, very common.
<b>Läget?</b> <i>The situation?</i>	An abbreviated and more informal form of "Hur är läget?". A common combination is: "Tjå'ba! Läget?"
<b>Hur går det?</b> <i>How goes it?</i>	Could refer to life in general, but also to a specific task or job.
<b>Hur mår du?</b> <i>How feel you?</i>	Showing concern, focusing on the health/well-being of somebody.
<b>Hur är det med [familjen]?</b> <i>How is it with [the family]?</i>	Showing more personal interest when including someone else.

## Suitable answers

<b>Tack, [båra] bra!</b> <i>Thanks, [just/only] fine!</i>	Very common. Can be used no matter how you feel ...
<b>Skåpligt / Hýfsat</b> <i>Fairly well / Decent</i>	With the Swedish avoidance of superlatives. Quite frequent.
<b>Så där / Det kúnde vára bá'ttre.</b> <i>So there / It could be better</i>	Two variants of the same theme: "Not very well, but I'll survive".
<b>Ínte så bra, tyvä'rr.</b> <i>Not so good, unfortunately.</i>	(You are expected to show genuine concern when somebody tells you this.)

## How to say goodbye...

<b>Hej då!</b> <i>Hello then!</i>	Very common, can be used anywhere.
<b>Adjö!</b>	Formal, dismissive. When used alone equivalent to 'good day'.
<b>Adjö' så lä'nge!</b>	More informal than just 'adjö': 'goodbye for now', 'so long'.
<b>God natt!</b> <i>Good night!</i>	Informal, very frequent.
<b>Farvä'!!</b> <i>Farewell!</i>	Outmoded, often used in a melodramatic way.



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<b>Ha det så bra!</b> <i>Have it so good!</i>	Informal, very common, like 'take care'. Often in combination with 'hej då'.
<b>Vi ses:</b> We see [each other]:	See you!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>s</u>énare <i>later</i></li><li>• i <u>m</u>órgon <i>in morning [i.e. tomorrow]</i></li><li>• i <u>k</u>väll <i>in evening [i.e. tonight]</i></li><li>• <u>s</u>nart <i>soon</i></li><li>• om en stund <i>in a while</i></li><li>• nästa <u>v</u>écka <i>next week</i></li><li>• <u>p</u>å mǻndag / tisdag / ónsdag / tórsdag / frédag / lö́rdag / sö́ndag <i>on Monday/Tuesday etc.</i></li></ul>	

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# Things in general and particular

Practically nothing is left in English of the rich inflection of words that characterized the prehistoric ancestor of the Indo-European family. Traces of this ancient and very complex system of showing the exact meaning of a word in a sentence by changing its endings are still preserved in many formations in related languages, to some extent also in Swedish. This can be seen in how nouns, i.e. naming words (denoting persons, animals, things, material, and abstracts, like house, love, and dog) are treated. To use the correct forms of a Swedish noun you need to know the answers to the following questions:

- **Gender**  
Is the word an *en* word or an *ett* word?
- **Indefinite or definite**  
Does the word denote something in general (indefinite form: ‘a bus’, any bus) or someone or something specific (definite form: ‘the/this bus’)?
- **Number: Singular or plural**  
Are you referring to one thing or several? (See chapter 4!)

This is less complicated than it sounds, however.

## GENDER: EN OR ETT?

First of all, in Standard Swedish all nouns belong to one of two genders or sexes: the *en*-word group (in which we find approximately 80% of all nouns) or the *ett*-word group (around 20%).<sup>1</sup> It is important to know which group a noun belongs to if you wish to speak good Swedish, since the group belonging affects what endings or special forms of other words to use – but it may be comforting to know that the differences between the groups are not very big, and very seldom would anyone have any difficulties in understanding you just because you have mixed up the groups. English is very simple in this respect, since it treats all the nouns the same way: There is no grammatical difference between ‘a woman’ and ‘a child’, for example.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to this very easy-to-learn system Swedish sees ‘woman’ as an *en* word (‘*en kvinna*’) but ‘child’ as an *ett* word (‘*ett barn*’), and therefore uses two different words for the English ‘a’ to differentiate between them.

The rules for telling whether a noun is an *en* word or an *ett* word are rather intricate as well as vague, and it would be easier just to memorize each noun together with the article ‘*en*’ or ‘*ett*’ to avoid confusion. Words denoting people and animals, though, are, with very few exceptions (among them ‘*ett barn*’, and ‘*ett djur*’ – an animal), *en* words. If you are not sure what form to use, treat the noun as an *en* word; statistically you would then be right four times out of five.

1. *Many Swedish dialects still use the older division of nouns into three genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter, and refer to things as he, she or it, like German. In Standard Swedish the nouns of the original masculine and feminine genders form the en-word group.*
2. *English has also two forms of the indefinite article: ‘a’ and ‘an’ (as in ‘an example’) both derived from the word for ‘one’. Since which one to use is decided by the initial sound of the following word only, they do not have the grammatical significance as the Swedish ‘en’ and ‘ett’.*

## INDEFINITE OR DEFINITE?

In English you use the word ‘the’ (which with a linguistic term is called ‘the definite article’) to show that you are referring to one or several things or individuals in particular: ‘a bus’ but ‘the bus’, not just any bus, but a specific bus. In Swedish this definite article early became attached directly to the noun:

## En words

Indefinite	Definite
<b>en dag</b> <i>a/one day</i>	däg-en
<b>en hand</b> <i>a/one hand</i>	hånd-en
<b>en människa</b> <i>a/one man/human being</i>	människa-n

## Ett words

Indefinite	Definite
<b>ett år</b> <i>a/one year</i>	år-et
<b>ett barn</b> <i>a/one child</i>	barn-et
<b>ett kök</b> <i>a/one kitchen</i>	kök-et
<b>ett öga</b> <i>a/one eye</i>	ögat

The special endings for the definite forms are thus -(e)n and -(e)t; a noun that ends in a vowel will take only -n or -t.

### NOTES

-sk- in 'människa' is pronounced similarly as 'sh' in 'shut', while 'k' in 'kök' is pronounced like the 'tj' sound, since it is followed by a soft vowel. Read more about the pronunciation in Chapter 9.

As mentioned in chapter 1 the English pronoun 'it' can be expressed in two ways in Swedish, depending on the gender of the word it stands for: 'den' for en words, 'det' for ett words and in neutral expressions like 'it's hot in here'.

## SENTENCES TO STUDY

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**Var är bilen? Den står här.**

*Where is the car? It stands here.*

**Hur mycket är klockan? Jag vet inte, den är trasig. Men det är sent, eller hur?**

*How much is the clock/watch [i.e. What time is it?]? I know not, it is broke. But it is late, or how [i.e. right/isn't it]?*

**Ser du huset? Det ligger där/där borta**

*See you the house? It lies there/there away (i.e. over there)..*

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### NOTE

When describing location, that is where something is, Swedes often say that things "stand" ("står") or "lie" ("ligger") somewhere, instead of just saying "they are here". Which expression to choose depends on the object in question and its position.

"Eller hur" has only this form, and corresponds to the English expressions "he's tall, isn't he?", "you're tired, aren't you?", "they won't come, will they?", "she does like me, doesn't she?", and so on, but is not used as frequently as in English.

## Chapter 4:

# Even more things

To show that a noun is in the plural in English an 's' is usually added to the noun: one house, but two houses. The formation of nouns in the plural is more complex in Swedish. The Swedish nouns are usually divided into five groups, depending on their plural endings: -or, -ar, -(e)r, -n; the fifth group has not got any ending at all in the indefinite form, but looks the same both in the singular and in the plural.

As soon as you know to which group a noun belong, you can easily determine what the definite form ('the cars', not just any cars) must be:

1. -or (definite form: -na)	2. -ar (definite form: -na)	3. -(e)r (definite form: -na)	4. -n (definite form: -a)	5. – (definite form: -en)
<i>'en words' that end in an unstressed -a</i>	<i>'en words' that end in an unstressed -e, and monosyllabic 'en words' that end in a consonant</i>	<i>'en words' with the stress on the last vowel, and 'ett words' with more than one syllable with a stress on the last vowel</i>	<i>Mainly 'ett words' that end in a vowel</i>	<i>'ett words' that end in a consonant, and 'en words' ending in -are</i>
<b>en klócka</b> <i>a/one clock, watch</i>	<b>en dag</b> <i>a/one day</i>	<b>en telefón</b> <i>a/one telephone</i>	<b>ett stá'lle</b> <i>a/one place, spot</i>	<b>ett barn</b> <i>a/one child</i>
<b>två klóckor</b> <i>two clocks, watches</i>	<b>två dagár</b> <i>two days</i>	<b>två telefóner</b> <i>two telephones</i>	<b>två stá'llen</b> <i>two places, spots</i>	<b>två barn</b> <i>two children</i>
<b>klóckorna</b> <i>the clocks, watches</i>	<b>dágarna</b> <i>the days</i>	<b>telefónerna</b> <i>the telephones</i>	<b>stá'llena</b> <i>the places, spots</i>	<b>bárnen</b> <i>the children</i>
<b>en mä'nniska</b> <i>a/one human being</i>	<b>en bil</b> <i>a/one car</i>	<b>en minút</b> <i>a/one minut</i>	<b>ett árbéte</b> <i>a/one job, work</i>	<b>ett ár</b> <i>a/one year</i>
<b>två mä'nniskor</b> <i>two human beings</i>	<b>två bilár</b> <i>two cars</i>	<b>två minúter</b> <i>two minutes</i>	<b>två árbéten</b> <i>two jobs, works</i>	<b>två ár</b> <i>two years</i>
<b>mä'nniskorna</b> <i>the human beings</i>	<b>bilarna</b> <i>the cars</i>	<b>minúterna</b> <i>the minutes</i>	<b>árbétena</b> <i>the jobs, works</i>	<b>árren</b> <i>the years</i>

There are also some irregular nouns in Swedish, like in English, which do not follow this model (e.g. 'en man' / 'två män', 'en fot' / 'två fötter', for 'man' and 'foot' respectively). Many of them are very common and will therefore be easy to remember. Lists like the one above may look rather terrifying, even in this simplified form, but should not cause you any discomfort. It is not primarily by word lists and grammars that you learn a language and its structure, but by reading, listening, and repeating.

There are some general rules of thumb for what ending to take – for instance that the most common ending for *en* words is -ar – but, after all, in the end your choosing the right ending will most likely be because you have met the word in different contexts several times before, not because of grammatical charts.

In many dictionaries you will find the nouns listed with the singular endings in the definite and the plural endings in the indefinite form, which is enough to know for most nouns: 'frå'g/a -n -or (*en* = question) shows that the word 'fråga' has the following forms:

- **en fråga** = a question (*indefinite form singular*)
- **frågan** = the question (*definite form singular*)
- **frågor** = (any) questions (*indefinite form plural*)
- **frågorna** = the questions (*definite form plural*)

### SENTENCES TO STUDY

**Jag vet inte var cyklarna står. Jag ser dem [pronounced 'dom'] inte, i alla fall.**

I know not where the bikes are. I see them not, in all cases (i.e. anyway).

**De [pronounced 'dom'] kánske stár bákóm húsen där bórtá. De/dom var där förút.**  
*They maybe stand behind the houses over there. They were there before.*

**Kan vi inte ta bussen istället?**  
*Can we not take the bus instead?*

**Bússarna går inte längre härifrån, tyvärr.**  
*The buses go not longer herefrom, unfortunately/"I'm sorry"*

**Vet du var stationen ligger då? Vi kan ta tåget istället, fast det är sent. Vad tycker du?**  
*Know you where the station lies, then? We can take the train instead, even-though it is late. What think you?*

**Det går bra. Det tar en timme längre hem, men jag har inte bråttom.**  
*It goes well (i.e. "It's fine/OK"). It takes a/one hour longer (to) home, but I have not hurry (i.e. "I'm in no hurry").*

**Vi är ändå hemma snart.**  
*We are still (at) home soon.*

## NOTES

- The regular verbs in Swedish end in -r in the present. The irregular verbs, often the most frequent ones, can also have other endings: 'vet' (a distant relative of the English word 'wit') = know, 'kan' = can.
- 'Dem' (the objective form of the personal pronoun 'they') is pronounced the same way as 'they': 'dom'.
- Nouns like 'cykel' lose their -e when forming the plural: en cykel, cykeln, två cyklar, cyklarna.
- 'Ta' (in "kan ta" = can take) is a form of the verb which is called the infinitive (see chapter 7).
- 'Hem' means 'home' as in "Home, sweet home" and is also used as an expression of direction (like in "Let's go home"), while 'hemma' is the equivalent to "at home".

## NUMBERS

The numbers are very frequent in Swedish, as in English, and should therefore be memorized at an early stage. There are two types of numbers: *Cardinal numbers* (one, two, three etc.), and *ordinal numbers* (first, second, third etc). With the exception of 'en, ett' – both old acquaintances by now – all numbers have only one form and do not change with the gender or the number of the noun. The pronunciation of some numbers often differs somewhat from the spelling in everyday speech, as shown within brackets, but only 40 is never pronounced the way it is spelled: 'fyrtio' always becomes 'förtio'.

	Cardinal numbers	Ordinal numbers		Cardinal numbers	Ordinal numbers
0	noll	–	21	tjugoén, tjugoétt ["tju-"]	tjugoförsta ["tju-", "tjugi-"]
1	en, ett	första	22	tjugotvå ["tjugi-"]	tjugoförsta ["tju-", "tjugi-"]
2	två	andra	23	tjugotré ["tjugi-"]	tjugoförsta ["tju-", "tjugi-"]
3	tre	trede	24	tjugofyra ["tjugi-"]	tjugoförsta ["tju-", "tjugi-"]
4	fyra	fjärde	25	tjugofem ["tjugi-"]	tjugoförsta ["tju-", "tjugi-"]
5	fem	femte	26	tjugosix ["tjugi-"]	tjugoförsta ["tju-", "tjugi-"]
6	sex	sjätte	27	tjugosju ["tjugi-"]	tjugoförsta ["tju-", "tjugi-"]
7	sju	sjunde	28	tjugoförsta ["tjugi-"]	tjugoförsta ["tju-", "tjugi-"]
8	åtta	åttonde	29	tjugoförsta ["tjugi-"]	tjugoförsta ["tju-", "tjugi-"]

9	níó ["níe"]	níonde	30	tréttio ["trétti"]	tréttionde
10	tíó ["tíe"]	tíonde	40	fýrtio ["fö'rti"]	fýrtionde [fö'rtionde]
11	élva	élfte	50	fémtio ["fēmti"]	fémtionde
12	tolv	tólfte	60	séxtio ["séxti"]	séxtionde
13	tréttón	tréttionde	70	sjúttio "sjútti"]	sjúttionde
14	fjórtón	fjórtionde	80	á'ttio ["á'tti"]	á'ttionde
15	fémton	fémtonde	90	níttio ["nítti"]	níttionde
16	séxton	séxtonde	100	[étt]hundra	húndrade
17	sjútton	sjúttionde	150	[étt]hundrafémtio	[étt]hundrafémtionde
18	árton	ártonde	1,000	[étt-]tusen	túsende
19	nítton	níttionde	1,000,000	[en] miljón	miljónste
20	tjúgo ["tjúgi"]	tjúgonde		1997	<i>as an ordinary number:</i> 'ettuseniohundra-níttionio';  <i>when referring to the year:</i> 'nittonhundraníttionio'

## Chapter 5:

# What is yours like?

By now you have met, in one form or another, around 100 frequent Swedish words. That may not sound like much to you, but what you have learned so far will enable you to decipher many

Swedish texts on your own by using a good dictionary – the normal vocabulary of everyday speech actually rarely comprises more than 1,000–1,500 words. There are, however, a few more things about Swedish grammar you should know before plunging into deep water, among them: a) How adjectives are formed, and b) How verbs change in different tenses. In this chapter we will deal with the adjectives; at the same time we will introduce the so-called possessive pronouns (mine, yours, his, hers etc.), since some of them follow the same pattern as the adjectives.

You may find this chapter rather heavy, but do not worry. Take one thing at a time and you will find that it is not that complicated after all; there are only some things you need to memorize. And besides, it is not a serious problem if you happen to mix the endings of the adjectives up occasionally, since people will understand you anyway.

So what is an adjective? Adjectives are simply quality words, words that describe things or people, like *red*, *high*, *angry*, and *small*. In Modern English there is one form only left for each adjective, regardless of its position in a sentence or the number of things/person it is you are referring to:

- A *long* day.
- The days are *long*.
- Two *long* days.
- The *long* days

Most Swedish adjectives have three endings, depending on whether they are used together with an *en* word or an *ett* word or are in the plural:

With en words	With ett words	With words in the plural
En svensk sómmar. <i>A Swedish summer.</i>	Ett svenskt namn. <i>A Swedish name.</i>	Två svénska sómrar/namn. <i>Two Swedish summers/names.</i>
En kall v́nter. <i>A cold winter.</i>	Váttnet [indef. 'vátten'] <u>är</u> kallt. <i>The water is cold.</i>	Víntrarna/váttnen <u>är</u> kálla. <i>The winters/waters are cold.</i>
En lång v́ar. <i>A long spring.</i>	Rúmmet <u>är</u> langt. <i>The room is long.</i>	Lá'nga v́arar/rum. <i>Long springs/rooms.</i>
En varm säng. <i>A warm bed.</i>	Ett varmt tack. <i>A warm thank.</i>	Várma sá'ngar/tack. <i>Warm beds/thanks</i>
Nátten <u>är</u> lugn. <i>The night is calm/quiet.</i>	Ett lugnt lív. <i>A calm/quiet life.</i>	Lúgna ná'tter/lív. <i>Calm/quiet nights/lives.</i>
En hel síða. <i>A whole/entire page/side.</i>	Ett <u>hel</u> folk. <i>A whole/entire people</i>	Héla sídor/folk. <i>Whole pages/peoples.</i>
En stor dörr. <i>A big door.</i>	Ett stort land. <i>A big country.</i>	Dö'rrarna/lá'nderna <u>är</u> stóra. <i>The doors/countries are big.</i>
En sterk kvinna. <i>A strong woman.</i>	Ljúset <u>är</u> starkt. <i>The light is strong</i>	Kvinnorna/ljúsen <u>är</u> stárka. <i>The women/lights are strong.</i>

## IRREGULAR ADJECTIVES

En líten bil. <i>A little/small car.</i>	Fö'nstret [indef. fönster] <u>är</u> lítet. <i>The window is little/small.</i>	Smá bílar/fö'nster. <i>Little/small cars/windows.</i>
Hö'sten <u>är</u> vácker. <i>The autumn is beautiful.</i>	Ett váckert <u>ánsíkte</u> . <i>A beautiful face.</i>	Má'nga váckra hö'star/ <u>ánsíkten</u> . <i>Many beautiful autumns/faces.</i>
En god tánke. <i>A good thought.</i>	Gott slút! <i>A good end (to the old year)!</i>	Góða tánkar/slút. <i>Good thoughts/ends.</i>
Bóken <u>är</u> bra. <i>The book is good.</i>	Ett bra <u>árbéte</u> . <i>A good work/job.</i>	Bra bö'cker/ <u>árbéten</u> . <i>Good book/jobs.</i>
En kort stund. <i>A short/brief while/moment.</i>	Ett kort <u>ö'gonblíck</u> . <i>A short/brief moment.</i>	Stúnderna/ <u>ö'gonblícken</u> <u>är</u> kórta. <i>The moments are short/brief.</i>
Frá'gan <u>är</u> lätt. <i>The question is easy/light.</i>	Ett lätt steg. <i>An easy/light step.</i>	Lá'tta frá'gor/ <u>steg</u> . <i>Easy/light questions/steps.</i>
En trött kropp. <i>The tired body.</i>	Ett trött <u>húvud</u> . <i>A tired head.</i>	Trö'tta kroppar/ <u>húvuden</u> . <i>Tired bodies/heads.</i>
En ný tíð. <i>A new time/era.</i>	Ett nytt hem. <i>A new home.</i>	Nýa tíðer/hem. <i>New times/homes.</i>
Mánnen <u>är</u> gámmal. <i>The man is old.</i>	Ett gámmalt par. <i>An old couple/pair.</i>	Gámla män/ <u>par</u> . <i>Old men/couples.</i>
En glád nýhét. <i>A glad/happy (piece of) news</i>	Ett glátt beskéð. <i>A glad/happy information/answer.</i>	Gláða nýhétar/ <u>beskéð</u> . <i>Happy news/informations.</i>

As you can see the regular adjectives receive the ending -t when used together with *ett* words. There is only one plural ending, regardless of gender: -a (stor, stort, stora).

You should not be discouraged by the fact that some of the adjectives above are slightly irregular. They are very common and will therefore be easy to learn.

## NOTES

'Natt' ('night') has a special plural form – 'nätter' – but is otherwise formed regularly. The Swedish word 'man' is, like its English counterpart, irregular:

- Singular indefinite: En man (a man)
- Singular definite: Männen (the man)
- Plural indefinite: Två män (two men)
- Plural definite: Männen (the men)

This 'man' should not be mistaken for the common pronoun 'man'. In English you can use the words 'one' or 'you' when talking about things in general, when not referring to a specific person: "One/you would think that etc.", "One has (you have) to accept that one is (you are) only human" and so on. The Swedish indefinite pronoun 'man' has the same function – "Man lär så länge man lever" ("one learns as long as one lives") – and exists only in this form. (Compare with the German 'man' and the French 'on'.)

The English word 'good' can be translated both 'god' (the 'o' pronounced like 'oo' in 'tool') and 'bra'. The latter is actually related to the English 'brave' and functioned for a while as kind of an 'amplifier' (like 'awfully good', 'very strong'), and only lately did it become used as an adjective as well, something which explains its total lack of endings. 'Bra' is very common and can be used about practically anything, while 'god' nowadays primarily refers to food and drinks, or to personal qualities, sometimes even with religious connotations: "En bra människa" would be a decent, trustworthy person, whereas "en god människa" more would convey the impression of a Mother Theresa, so to speak.

The adjective 'liten' ('little, small') is also irregular, and has no plural form of its own; instead another word is used in the plural: liten, litet, små. After an identifying word (see below) 'liten' is changed to 'lilla': 'Den lilla bilen' ('the/that little car').

### Some colors in Swedish:

Colour	With en words	With ett words	With words in the plural
black	svart	svart	svårta
blue	blå	blått	blå (a)
brown	brun	brunt	bruna
green	grön	grönt	gröna
red	röd	rött	röda
white	vitt	vitt	vita
yellow	gul	gul	gula

## Adjectives and identifying words

All adjectives follow the above pattern when placed directly before a noun in the indefinite form ('en gammal man') or after a form of the Swedish verbs for 'be' (in this case the word 'är'), 'become', and 'make' ("huset är vitt"). But here comes the tricky part:

When an adjective is preceded by a word that points out or identifies the noun in question is a specific thing or person, or belonging to somebody/something, the adjective is weakened, and will only take the ending -a, no matter if it refers to an *en* word or an *ett* word or is in the singular or the plural. (With one exception: If the noun is a male person, the ending will formally be -e instead, a remnant of the old three-gender system, but this distinction nowadays usually applies to written Swedish only.)

For the sake of clarity, a rather intimidating list of such identifying or 'pointing-out' words is included below. The simple key to it all is that the *adjective, when preceded by an 'identifying' word, takes an -a.*

### 1. The possessive pronouns

	With en words	With ett words	With words in the plural
<i>my, mine</i> <i>your, yours [sing.]</i>	<i>min</i> (gámbla bil) <i>din</i> (våckra sýster [sister])	<i>mitt</i> (nýa hus) <i>ditt</i> (vita fö'nster)	<i>mína</i> (gámbla bilar/nýa hus) <i>dina</i> (våckra sýstrar/vita fö'nster)
<i>his</i>	<i>hans</i> (rö'da cykel)	<i>hans</i> (éngelska [English] namn)	<i>hans</i> (rö'da cýklar/éngelska namn)



<i>her, hers</i>	hénnes (stóra säng)	hénnes (váarma tack)	hénnes (stóra sä'ngar/váarma tack)
<i>its</i>	dess (lilla hand)	dess (víta ljús)	dess (små hä'nder/víta ljús)
<i>our, ours</i>	vår (gláda nýhét)	vårt (lúgna liv)	våra (gláda nýhéter/lúgna liv)
<i>your, yours [plural]</i>	er (lilla dóttir [daughter])	ert (váckra barn)	era (små dö'ttrar/váckra barn)
<i>their, theirs</i>	déras (lá'nge son [son])	déras (stóra rum)	déras (lá'nga sö'ner/stóra rum)

Only the "us" pronouns (my, your, ours) have separate forms for *en* words and *ett* words, similar to the endings for the adjectives; for the others there is only one form. The possessive pronouns in Swedish can also stand independently, without any change, in contrast to English: "Är det din bil? Ja, den är min." ("Is it your car? Yes, it's mine.")

There is also a common pronoun without a counterpart in English which is also treated in a similar way: 'sin' (with *ett* words: 'sitt', in the plural: 'sina'). It is closely related to the possessive pronouns – it is actually a so-called reflexive form of them – and can mean either 'his', 'her', 'its', or 'their'. Even most Swedes many times find it difficult to tell when to use 'sin' or a regular possessive pronoun when a sentence becomes more complex, so you need not to be overly concerned about mastering it at this stage. The rule of thumb is:

'Sin' refers to the person or thing that does something, and is used every time you could insert 'own' in English.

The following examples might help you to see the difference:

**Han kysser sin unga hustru passionerat.**

*He kisses his (own) young wife passionately.*

**Han kysser hans unga hustru passionerat.**

*He kisses his (i.e. someone else's) young wife passionately.*

## 2. Names and nouns showing possession:

"John's [old watch]" – "Jóhans [gámla klócka]"  
 "the woman's [white car]" – "kvinnans [víta bil]"  
 "Mom's [new job]" – "mámmas [nýa jobb/árbéte]"

The genitive denotes a person or thing that possesses something, and is formed by adding an -s to the name or the noun, like in English, but without the apostrophe. Swedish uses the genitive construction more often than English; basically the usage is the same, though. English also often favors a construction with 'of', mainly when referring to thing, but Swedish is in many cases quite happy to use the -s form even there:

the new rector of the school  
 skólans nýa réktor

the city of Stockholm  
 Stóckhólms stad

## 3. Other words designating/indicating a specific thing or person

With en words	With ett words	With words in the plural
den (váckra kvinnan) <i>the (beautiful woman)</i>	det (gámla húset) <i>the (old house)</i>	de/dom (váckra kvinnorna/gámla húsen) <i>the (beautiful women/old houses)</i>
den här (váarma sómmaren) <i>this (warm summer)</i>	det här (stóra rúmmet) <i>this (big room)</i>	de/dom här (váarma sómrarna/stóra rúmmen) <i>these (warm summers/big houses)</i>
den där (unge mánnen) <i>that (young man)</i>	det där (lilla fönstret) <i>that (little window)</i>	de/dom där (unga má'nnen/små fö'nstren) <i>those (young men/small windows)</i>

In the second chapter you learned that there is no definite article like the English 'the' in Swedish; instead special endings are attached to the nouns to show that they are in the definite form. There is only one exception to the rule:

When an adjective is followed by a noun in the definite form, like above, a special definite article is placed in front of the adjective. This is quite easy, really: These ‘articles’ are old acquaintances, identical to the pronouns ‘den’, ‘det’, and ‘de’ (‘dom’) you met in the first chapter (see the first example under paragraph 3 above):

**det svenska folket**  
*the Swedish people*

‘Den’, ‘det’, and ‘de’ have a strong demonstrative quality and can also be used as synonymous to ‘den där/det där/de där’:

**Jag vill ha den (där) bilen.**  
*I want (to) have that car.*

## NOTES

‘This/that/these/those’ are in colloquial Swedish formed by adding a ‘här’ (‘here’) and ‘där’ (‘there’) respectively to the pronouns ‘den/det’ (‘it’) and ‘de’ (‘they’). The noun it refers to is then always in the definite form: “Den här gamla bilen/De där gamla bilarna” (“This old car/Those old cars”); please observe that ‘de’ is also here pronounced ‘dom’. In more formal written Swedish the following forms still take precedence, however:

- ‘denne’ (this [male person])
- ‘denna’ (this [female person], this [thing]) [for en words]
- ‘detta’ (this [thing]) [for ett words]
- ‘dessa’ (these/those [people/things]) [plural]

After one of these words the noun must be in the indefinite form: “Denna gamla bil” (“This old car”).

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## Chapter 6:

# To compare and to be compared

It is very easy to compare things in Swedish, almost as easy as it is in English: You just add a special ending to show that something is not just good but better, or even the best:

Positive (basic form)	Comparative (both singular & plural)	Superlative, indefinite form (both singular & plural)	Superlative, definite form (after "identifying" words, both singular & plural)
stark, starkt, stárka <i>strong</i>	stárkare <i>stronger</i>	stárkast <i>strongest</i>	stárkaste <i>(the) strongest</i>
svag, svagt, svága <i>weak</i>	svágare <i>weaker</i>	svágast <i>weakest</i>	svágaste <i>(the) weakest</i>
hård, hårt, hå'rda <i>hard</i>	hå'rdare <i>harder</i>	hå'rdast <i>hardest</i>	hå'rdaste <i>(the) hardest</i>
ful, fult, fúla <i>ugly</i>	fúlare <i>uglier</i>	fúlast <i>ugliest</i>	fúlaste <i>(the) ugliest</i>
dyr, dyrt, dýra <i>expensive</i>	dýrare <i>more expensive</i>	dýrast <i>most expensive</i>	dýraste <i>(the) most expensive</i>
vacker, vackert, vackra <i>beautiful</i>	väckrare <i>more beautiful</i>	väckrast <i>most beautiful</i>	väckraste <i>(the) most beautiful</i>
énkel, enkelt, énkla <i>easy, simple</i>	énklare <i>easier, simpler</i>	énklast <i>easiest/simplest</i>	énklaste <i>(the) easiest/simplest</i>

Unlike the basic form, which changes depending on gender and number, the comparative has only this form. That is also true for the superlative, with the exception of when the adjective is preceded by an identifying word (like 'this', 'that', 'my'); the ending *-ast* will then receive an extra *-e*.

## SENTENCES TO STUDY

**Din bil är verkligen mycket ful, men den är inte fulare än min.**

*Your car is really very ugly, but it is not uglier than mine.*

**Fast deras bil är absolut fulast, den fulaste jag sett, faktiskt.**

*Though their car is absolutely ugliest, the ugliest I (have) seen, actually.*

**Vad tycker du? Det här är min finaste jacka. Är den tillräckligt fin för festen i kväll?**

*What think you? This is my finest jacket. Is it enough/sufficiently fine for the party tonight?*

**Den är jättefin! Ingen annan har någon finare, det vet jag.**

*It is "giant"-fine (i.e. absolutely beautiful)! Nobody other (i.e. nobody else) has anyone finer.*

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## NOTES

Like in English, some adjectives prefer or even require the words 'mer' ('more') or 'mest' ('most') instead, to show that they are in the comparative or superlative form. To this group belong all adjectives ending in *-isk*, which cannot take the endings *-are* and *-ast*, and some longer adjectives, none of them very frequent, though.

Since the adjective itself remains its basic form when it is combined with ‘*mer*’ and ‘*most*’, it will change like any other adjective, depending on if it is referring to an *en* word, an *ett* word, or a word in the plural (cp. chapter 5): “*mer praktisk*” (more practical [singular]), but “*mer praktiska*” (more practical [plural]).

In colloquial Swedish many adjectives are often combined with the word ‘*jätte*’ (which literally means ‘giant’) to add emphasis:

- ‘*jättestor*’ – very big, huge
- ‘*jätteliten*’ – very small, tiny
- ‘*jättebra*’ – very good, great

## Irregular comparative forms

Some of the most common adjectives have irregular forms in the comparative and the superlative. These irregularities consist mainly of a change of vowel, sometimes also a reduced length of vowel. Even though the endings differ from the chart above, they are throughout the same: *-re* in the comparative, *-st* and *-sta* in the superlative.

Due to the high frequency of these adjectives, you would do well in memorizing them before going any further, especially the first four of them:

Positive (basic form)	Comparative	Superlative	Superlative, definite form (after an “identifying” word)
<b>bra</b> <i>good</i>	<b>bä'ttre</b> <i>better</i>	<b>bäst</b> <i>best</i>	<b>bä'sta</b> <i>(the) best</i>
<b>då'lig</b> <i>bad</i>	<b>sä'mre</b> <i>worse</i>	<b>sämst</b> <i>worst</i>	<b>sämsta</b> <i>(the) worst</i>
<b>liten</b> <i>little/small</i>	<b>mindre</b> <i>smaller</i>	<b>minst</b> <i>smallest/least</i>	<b>minsta</b> <i>(the) smallest/least</i>
<b>gammal</b> <i>old</i>	<b>ä'ldre</b> <i>older</i>	<b>äldst</b> <i>oldest</i>	<b>ä'ldsta</b> <i>(the) oldest</i>
<b>hög</b> <i>high</i>	<b>hö'gre</b> <i>higher</i>	<b>högst</b> <i>highest</i>	<b>hö'gsta</b> <i>(the) highest</i>
<b>låg</b> <i>low</i>	<b>lä'gre</b> <i>lower</i>	<b>lägst</b> <i>lowest</i>	<b>lä'gsta</b> <i>(the) lowest</i>
<b>lång</b> <i>long, tall</i>	<b>lä'ngre</b> <i>longer/taller</i>	<b>längst</b> <i>longest/tallest</i>	<b>lä'ngsta</b> <i>(the) longest/tallest</i>
<b>stor</b> <i>big/large</i>	<b>stö're</b> <i>bigger/larger</i>	<b>störst</b> <i>biggest/largest</i>	<b>stö'rsta</b> <i>(the) biggest/largest</i>
<b>tung</b> <i>heavy</i>	<b>týngre</b> <i>heavier</i>	<b>tyngst</b> <i>heaviest</i>	<b>týngsta</b> <i>(the) heaviest</i>
<b>ung</b> <i>young</i>	<b>yngre</b> <i>younger</i>	<b>yngst</b> <i>youngest</i>	<b>yngsta</b> <i>(the) youngest</i>

### NOTE

When denoting one male person the *-sta* in the definite form of the superlative is changed to *-ste* (this rule is often ignored in everyday spoken Swedish, though):

**Han är min bä'ste vän. Han och hans bror är mina bä'sta vä'nner.**  
*He is my best friend. He and his brother is/are my best friends.*

## Some useful pronouns: Nobody – Somebody – Everybody – Another

Since you already are acquainted with the rules for using the adjectives, you will have no problems in learning the Swedish equivalents of pronouns like ‘nobody/nothing’ and ‘somebody/something’ – they follow a very similar pattern.

	Referring to persons and en words	Referring to ett words	Referring to any words in the plural
<i>Nobody/nothing:</i>	ingen	inget	inga
<i>Somebody/something:</i>	någon	något	några
<i>All, everything/everybody</i>	(all [rarely used])	allt	alla

## EVERY

‘Vårje’, the word for ‘every’, has like its English relative only one form (for natural reasons there is no plural form):

**Jag läser tidningen en timme vårje morgon.**  
*I read the paper one hour every morning.*

**Vi åker till landet på sommaren vårje år.**  
*We go to the countryside on the summer every year.*

## Adverbs – the ”how/when/where” words

When a descriptive word in English is linked to a verb – the ‘action’ word – or an adjective, instead of the person or thing that does something, it usually receives the ending *-ly*:

**She is beautiful pianist. He is slow. You are amazing.**

But:

**She plays beautifully. He walks slowly. You are amazingly clever.**

These forms are called adverbs, and describe *how*, *when*, and *where*. In Swedish adverbs of this kind are identical to the *ett* word form of the adjective (with the ending *-t*) in the positive, comparative, and superlative, which you have already met in the previous chapter:

**Han går långsamt. Hon spelar vackert. Du är otroligt smart.**  
*He walks slowly. She plays beautifully. You are amazingly clever.*

There is also another type of adverbs, which have the same function as the ones above, even though they do not have a special ending. The word ‘igår’ (‘yesterday’) answers the question ‘when?’ and is therefore an adverb. ‘Hemma’ (‘at home’) shows *where* something takes place, while ‘sakta’ (another word for ‘slowly’) defines *how* something is done. The English words ‘very’ and ‘rather’ are also adverbs, like their Swedish equivalents ‘mycket’ and ‘ganska’, respectively.

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## Chapter 7:

# Doing and being

You have already met a few verbs in the previous chapters. Verbs are "doing-or-being words", words that show what is happening or what someone/something is or does: "I *am*", "it *was raining*", "they *screamed*".

In old Indo-European languages like Latin and Greek each verb could have a hundred different forms or more. One single verb could at the same time show when something happened, who did it or who did what to whom, whether the action was completed or not, and if it actually had happened at all. And all that just by adding a specific ending and/or slightly changing the stem of the verb.

In English and in Swedish there is fortunately very little left of this, even though English, in contrast to Swedish, in some cases still has a separate ending if there is a 'he', 'she', or 'it' doing something: "I sing" ("jag sjunger"), but "she sings" ("hon sjunger"). Instead of inflecting the verb, that is modifying it through a change of vowels or through various endings or other ways, these two languages – like many other modern languages – mainly use "helping" verbs (auxiliary verbs) to show the exact meaning of the verb:

**I speak. I will speak. I have spoken.**  
**Jag talar. Jag ska tala. Jag har talat.**

Verbs are traditionally divided into groups, based on the time aspect, the 'tense', of the verb. ('Tense' is derived from the Latin word 'tempus', which means just 'time'.) In the sentence "I spoke", the word 'spoke' is a past form of the verb 'speak', while "I will have spoken" points to an action that will have been completed sometime in the future. (Please note that not all forms of a verb carry this temporal meaning.)

The Swedish verb system is somewhat more complex than the English. Depending on which ending a verb takes in some tenses, it is referred to one of four groups. The fourth group consists of irregular verbs, of which many are very common. To learn all or almost all possible variants of a Swedish verb you should in theory memorize five forms: the infinitive, the present, the past, the supine, and the past participle; if you know these you will be able to easily deduce the rest. Such memorizing is facilitated by the fact that most verbs follow an overall-pattern, but is still a rather dreary procedure.

There is an easier and more effective and entertaining way of learning the verb forms, though: By reading Swedish texts, newspaper articles, comic strips, and novels written in an everyday language (translations of Agatha Christie crime novels or love-stories by Barbara Cartland or whatever you personally prefer), you will soon meet all the common verbs – they are actually not that many – in a meaningful context, you will see their function in different sentences, how they are used in idiomatic phrases, and you will not have to spend time on the numerous verb forms that theoretically exist but are rarely used. The first pages of such a book in Swedish may for natural reasons take some time to tackle, but it will not be long before you will be able to recognize and understand an amazingly large number of words. With a basic knowledge of the verb system in Swedish it will be even easier.

## THE SWEDISH VERB FORMS

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### The imperative [Imperatív]

The imperative expresses a command or an exhortation, that is you tell someone to do something: "Be quiet!", "Come here!", "Run!". The imperative is the basic form of the verb in both English and Swedish. English uses this basic form also for the infinitive (see below), whereas the Swedish imperative has a unique form and therefore should be learned separately.

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## The infinitive [Infinitiv]

The infinitive is a 'timeless' form of the verb, the form given in the dictionaries. It is formed by adding an *-a* to the imperative (the main exception to this rule is when the basic form already ends in an *-a*; in such case no further ending is added). It is often used together with the word 'att', which usually has the same function as the English 'to' when it is combined with an infinitive:

**Att vára eller [att] inte vára, de~~t~~ är frå<sup>´</sup> gan.**  
*To be or not to be, that is the question.*

### NOTE

*In some cases English prefers or requires a verb with the ending -ing (e.g. after prepositions, that is "direction/position" words like 'on', 'under', 'with', 'to'), where Swedish would use the infinitive:*

**I'm looking forward to [here used as a preposition] going to Stockholm.**  
**Jag ser fram emö<sup>t</sup> att resa till Stö<sup>c</sup>khö<sup>l</sup>m.**  
*I look forward towards to go/travel to Stockholm.*

**He has problems (with) getting up in the mornings.**  
**Han har svå<sup>´</sup>rt att kl<sup>i</sup>va upp på mö<sup>r</sup>gnarna.**  
*He has difficult to step up on the mornings.*

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## The present tense [Présens]

A verb in the present tense is sometimes a bit carelessly described as referring to an action taking place now, but should more accurately be seen as showing a continuous action or state or a series of actions that is not completed, or something which someone usually do: "I play football" will most likely mean that you sometimes play football, or that you can or know how to play football, not necessarily that you are playing football at this very moment. To show that something is happening right now, English, by using an auxiliary verb and by adding the ending *-ing* to the main verb, has a special "progressive" form: "I *am playing* football". In Swedish there is strictly speaking only one form for the present that you will have to pay attention to, however, a form that almost always end in an *-r*.

The endings of the verbs in the present are, to be more specific:

- Group 1: *-ar* (or *-[a]r*, since the *a* technically speaking is a part of the stem of the verb and not the ending)
- Group 2A and 2B: *-er*
- Group 3: *-r*
- Group 4: The verbs in this group often – but not always – end in *-er* and *-r* as well.

It may be comforting to know that the third group is quite small and only comprises a couple of more frequent verbs.

### NOTE

*The 'on-going' (progressive) -ing form in English can in Swedish often be expressed by adding an additional verb:*

**Jag sp<sup>e</sup>lar fö<sup>t</sup>bö<sup>l</sup>l. Jag hå<sup>´</sup>ller på att sp<sup>e</sup>la fö<sup>t</sup>bö<sup>l</sup>l.**  
*I play football. I hold on (i.e. I am busy with) to play football.*

**Vi tit<sup>t</sup>ar på tv. Vi sit<sup>t</sup>er och tit<sup>t</sup>ar på tv.**  
*We watch on TV. We sit and watch on TV.*

**Han lä<sup>g</sup>ar mat. Han st<sup>å</sup>r och lä<sup>g</sup>ar mat.**  
*He cooks food. He stands and cooks food.*

**Hon sö<sup>v</sup>er. Hon lig<sup>g</sup>er och sö<sup>v</sup>er.**

*She sleeps/is asleep. She lies and sleeps.*

This way of showing that the action is progressive can also be used in other tenses in Swedish.

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## The past [Pretéritum ("Ímperfékt")]

The past tense is used in different ways in different languages. In German, for instance, the perfect has assumed some of the function of the past ("Ich hab' ihn gesehen" – "I saw him"), in Swiss German has the past tense been replaced entirely by the perfect. A Romance language like Spanish does not only focus on the time aspect of the verb when forming the past, but also on whether the action is seen as demarcated and completed (pretérito: "Grité" – "I shouted") or not completed, alternatively repeated (imperfecto: "Gritaba" – "I was shouting", "I shouted [several times]", "I began to shout" etc.). In spoken French the old preterite (passé simple) has disappeared in favour of the passé composé (resembling the German perfect), while the imperfect tense has a similar usage as in Spanish. Swedish, in spite of its close relationship to German, uses the past tense just about the same way as English, however.

The past is formed by adding the ending *-de* or *-te* to the basic form (the imperative); the *-te* ending is used after any of the voiceless consonants p, t, k, and s. (Some irregular verbs form the past by changing their vowel instead.)

**Jag árbétade [basic form: arbeta] hårt förra véckan.**  
*I worked/was working hard previous the week [i.e. last week].*

**Jag läste [basic form: läs] en ny bok varje dag únder seméstern.**  
*I read a new book every day during the vacation.*

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## The supine and the past participle [Supinum och péfekt particíp]

**I have closed the door. The door is closed.**

In these two sentences the word 'closed' is a form of the verb which is called the past participle. Combined with the auxiliary verb 'have' (as above) it forms the perfect tense, and with the same "help" verb in the past you have the pluperfect form: "I *had closed* the door."

'Perfect' is derived from a Latin word for 'complete(d), finished', which fairly well describes the primary function of the perfect tense, namely to show that a certain action or state is completed in relation to the present time. The pluperfect refers to an action or state that was completed in relation to an event in the past "The door *was* [past] closed; he *had closed* [pluperfect] the door." That sounds more complicated than it is. The usage of the perfect and the pluperfect tenses is on the whole the same in English and Swedish.

Now, Swedish has actually two forms for the English past participle: The supine and the past participle.

### THE SUPINE

The supine, which is made by adding a *-t* to the basic form (the imperative), is always used after the auxiliary verb 'have'.

**Jag har stängt dörrén.**  
*I have closed the door.*

### THE PAST PARTICIPLE

The past participle is composed by adding *-d*, *-t*, or *-dd* to the basic form (depending on the final letter). is used like an adjective, and takes endings similar to the adjectives:



With an <i>en</i> word:	<b>Pósten är stängd idag.</b> <i>The post office is closed today.</i>
With an <i>ett</i> word:	<b>Allt är stängt.</b> <i>Everything is closed.</i>
With a word in the plural:	<b>Till och med affärerna är stängda.</b> To and with (i.e. even) the shops/stores are closed.
After an "identifying" word:	<b>De ["dom"] stängda dörrarna</b> <i>The closed doors</i>

## NOTE

Some verbs exist only in compound forms in the past participle, often with a preposition (a 'direction' word: *in, out, from, to* etc) as a prefix. The meaning of the verb is then also many times changed. See the list below, where the prefixes have been put within square brackets for the sake of clarity.

## The future tense [Futurum]

English and Swedish have several ways to show that something will take place in the future, since they both lack a proper future tense.

Please note that the Swedish and English variants of the future are not synonymous, and that the chart below only gives a rough outline of the usage of the future in Swedish. It is not always easy to tell why one way of expressing a future action is favored instead of another. But since they all convey a clear future sense, you will not have any problems in making yourself understood, regardless of which variant you choose.

Future construction	Swedish	English
1. <i>kómm</i> er att + <i>infinitive</i> : neutral, 'pure' future [very common]	<b>Jag kómm</b> er att studéra. <i>I come to study.</i>	I will study.
2. <i>ská</i> (formal: <i>skall</i> ) + <i>infinitive</i> : future (neutral, intention)	<b>Jag ská</b> studéra. <i>I will study.</i>	I am going to study.
3. <i>tá</i> 'nker + <i>infinitive</i> : showing intention	<b>Jag tá</b> 'nker studéra. <i>I think/intend [to] study.</i>	I am going to study.
4. <i>present tense</i> : future (neutral, intention) [very common]	<b>Jag á</b> 'ker till Stóckhólm ná'sta vécka. <i>I go to Stockholm next week.</i>	I will go to Stockholm next week.

## The passive [Pássiv]

All the verbs you have met so far have been active, i.e. someone or something is doing something. If you want to show that something is being done in English and the person who does it is either not identified or mentioned after the word 'by', you use a form of the verb 'be' together with the past participle:

**The car has been repaired.**  
**They were killed in an accident.**  
**We have not been informed by anyone.**

This passive construction is very simple to make in Swedish: You just add an *-s* to the other endings of the verb. The main exception is the present tense, where the final *-r* disappears before the *-s*.

**Bilen reparérades (instead of: Hon reparérade bilen).**  
*The car was repaired. (She repaired the car.)*

**Skólan ska stängas (instead of: Réktorn ska stänga skólan).**  
*The school is going to be closed. (The headmaster is going to close the school.)*

**Han behandlas illa av sin chef (instead of: Hans chef behandlar honom illa).**  
*He is treated badly by/of his boss. (The boss treats him badly.)*

In everyday Swedish an active construction is often preferred on the expense of the passive: "De ska stänga skolan" ("They are going to close the school"). It is also very common to use a construction with the verb 'bli' (become) instead, without any significant change in meaning:

**Bilen blev reparerad.**  
*The car became repaired.*

**Han blir illa behandlad av sin chef.**  
*He becomes badly treated by/of his boss.*

There are a few verbs, which, in spite of having this -s form characteristic for the passive, always have an active function. Three of the most common are:

- *finnas* (to be, exist): "Finns det någon mjölk?" ("Is there any milk?")
- *hoppas* (to hope): "Jag hoppas det" ("I hope it", i.e. "I hope so.")
- *minnas* (to remember): "Jag minns inte" ("I remember not.")

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## Reflexive verbs [Réflexiva verb]

In the sentence "I wash myself" English uses the pronoun 'myself' to show that the action is reflexive, that it is I who is the object of the washing. Some Swedish verbs are likewise used together with a special pronoun, which is identical with the objective forms of the personal pronouns (see chapter 1), with one exception: The reflexive pronoun for the persons 'he', 'she', 'it', and 'they' is always 'sig' (in spite of its spelling pronounced like the English word 'say').

<b>Jag tvättar mig (mej).</b>	<i>I wash myself.</i>
<b>Du tvättar dig (dej).</b>	<i>You [singular] wash yourself.</i>
<b>Han tvättar sig (sej).</b>	<i>He washes himself.</i>
<b>Hon tvättar sig (sej).</b>	<i>She washes herself.</i>
<b>Den/det tvättar sig (sej).</b>	<i>It washes itself.</i>
<b>Vi tvättar oss.</b>	<i>We wash ourselves.</i>
<b>Ni tvättar er.</b>	<i>You [plural] wash yourselves.</i>
<b>De tvättar sig (sej).</b>	<i>They wash themselves.</i>

The use of verbs with reflexive pronouns is more frequent in Swedish than in English.

## THE FOUR MAIN VERB GROUPS IN SWEDISH

All the following verbs can be found in lists of the most common words in Swedish, based on the press from 1995 and 60 novels from 1980–81, compiled by Språkbanken, Department of Swedish, at the Göteborg University (<http://logos.svenska.gu.se/lbgrafsv95.html>, and [/lbgrafbonn80.htm](http://logos.svenska.gu.se/lbgrafbonn80.htm)).

### Group 1: -ar verbs

Infinitive	Imperative	Present	Past	Supine	Past participle
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berä'tta (to) tell	Berä'tta! Tell!	berä'ttar (I) tell	berä'ttade (I) told	(här) berä'ttat (I have) told	(är) berä'ttad, berä'ttat, berä'ttade (It i/they are) told
brúka (to) use/cultivate	Brúka! Use!/Cultivate!	brúkar (I) use to/cultivate	brúkade (I) used to/cultivated	(här) brúkat (I have) used to/cultivated	(är) brúkad, brúkat, brúkade (It i/they are) used/cultivated
bö'rja (to) begin	Bö'rja! Begin!	bö'rjar (I) begin	bö'rjade (I) began	(här) bö'rjat (I have) begun	(är) [pá']bö'rjad, [pá']bö'rjat, [pá']bö'rjade (It is/they are) started
frá'ga (to) ask	Frá'ga! Ask!	frá'gar (I) ask	frá'gade (I) asked	(här) frá'gat (I have) asked	(är) [ti'li]frá'gad, [ti'li]frá'gat, [ti'li]frá'gade (It is/they are) asked
klára (to) manage	Klára (av deð)! Manage (it)!	klárar (I) manage	klárade (I) managed	(här) klárat (I have) man- aged	(är) [áv]klárad, [áv]klárat, [áv]klárade (It is/they are) taken care of
lä'mna (to) leave	Lä'mna (den)! Leave (it)!	lä'mnar (I) leave	lä'mnade (I) left	(här) ä'mnat (I have) left	(är) lä'mnad, lä'mnat, lä'mnade (It is/they are) left
práta (to) talk [colloquial]	Práta! Talk!	prátar (I) talk	prátade (I) talked	(här) prátat (I have) talked	
stánna (to) stop	Stánna! (Stop!)	stánnar (I) stop	stánnade (I) stopped	(här) stánnat (I have) stopped	(är) stánnad, stánnat, stánnade (It i/they are) stopped [rarely used; replaced by the regular verb 'stoppa' (group 1) in the past participle]
tála (to) speak, talk	Tála! Speak!/Talk!	tálar (I) speak/talk	tálade (I) spoke/talked	(här) tálat (I have) spoken	[tíli]tálad, [tíli]tálat, [tíli]tálade (It is/they are) ad- dressed
títta (to) look	Títta! Look!	títtar (I) look	títtade (I) looked	(här) títtat (I have) looked	(är) [út]títtad, [út]títtat, [út]títtade (It i/they are) stared at
úndra (to) wonder	(Undra!) Wonder!	úndrar (I) wonder	úndrade (I) wondered	(här) undrat (I have) won- dered	(är) [fö]undrad, [fö]undrat, [fö]undrade (It is/they are) won- dered
vérka (to) seem, act	Verka! Seem!/Act!	vérkar (I) seem, act	vérkade (I) seemed, acted	(här) vérkat (I have) seemed, acted	(är) [fö]vérad, [fö]vérat, [fö]vékade (It is/they are) for- feited.
vísa (to) show	Vísa! Show!	vísar (I) show	vísade (I) showed	(här) vísat (I have) shown	(är) vísad, vísat, vísade (It is/they are) shown
vá'nta (to) wait	Vá'nta! Wait!	vá'ntar (I) wait	vá'ntade (I) waited	(här) vá'ntat (I have) waited	(är) vá'ntad, vá'ntat, vá'ntade (It is/they are) expected
ö'ppna (to) open	Ö'ppna! Open!	ö'ppnar (I) open	ö'ppnade (I) opened	(här) ö'ppnat (I have) opened	(är) ö'ppnad, ö'ppnat, ö'ppnade (It is/they are) opened

## Group 2 A: -er verbs

Infinitive	Imperative	Present	Past	Supine	Past participle
behö́va (to) need	Behö́v! Need!	behö́ver (I) need	behö́vde (I) needed	(här) behö́vt (I have) needed	(är) behö́vd, behö́vt, behö́vda (It is/they are) needed
fö́lja (to) follow	Följ (mig)! Follow (me)!	fö́ljer (I) follow	fö́ljde (I) followed	(här) följt (I have) fol- lowed	(är) följd, följt, fö́ljda (It is/they are) followed
hö́ra (to) hear	Hö́r! Hear!	hö́r (I) hear	hö́rde (I) heard	(här) hö́rt (I have) heard	(är) hö́rd, hö́rt, hö́rda (It is/they are) heard
kä́nna (to) feel, (to) know [someone]	Kä́nn! Feel (it)!	kä́nner (I) feel, know	kä́nde (I) felt, knew	(här) kä́nt (I have) felt, known	(är) kä́nd, kä́nt, kä́nda (It is/they are) felt, known
léva (to) live	Lév! Live!	léver (I) live	lévde (I) lived	(här) levt (I have) lived	(är) [út]lévad, [út]lévat, [út]lévade (It is/they are) decrepit
lä́ra [sig] (to) teach [reflexive: to learn]	Lär [dig]! Teach [reflexive: Learn]!	lä́r [mig] (I) teach [reflexive: (I) learn]	lä́rde [mig] (I) taught [reflexive: (I) learned]	(här) lärt [mig] (I have) taught [reflexive: (I) have learned]	(är) lärd, lärt, lä́rda (It is/they are) taught/learned
stä́lla (to) put	Ställ (den där)! Put (it there)!	stä́ller (I) put	stä́llde (I) put	(här) ställt (I have) put	(är) ställd, ställt, stä́llda (It is/they are) put

## Group 2 B: -er verbs

Infinitive	Imperative	Present	Past	Supine	Past participle
försö́ka (to) try	Försö́k! Try!	försö́ker (I) try	försö́kte (I) tried	(här) försö́kt (I have) tried	
hjä́lpa (to) help	Hjälp! Help!	hjä́lper (I) help	hjä́lpte (I) helped	(här) hjälpt (I have) helped	(är) hjälpt, hjälpt, hjä́lpta (It is/they are) helped
kö́pa (to) buy	Köp! Buy!	kö́per (I) buy	kö́pte (I) bought	(här) köpt (I have) bought	(är) köpt, köpt, kö́pta (It is/they are) bought
lä́sa (to) read	Läs! Read!	lä́ser (I) read	lä́ste (I) read	(här) läst (I have) read	(är) läst, läst, lä́sta (It is/they are) read
sö́ka (to) seek	Sök! Seek!	sö́ker (I) seek	sö́kte (I) sought	(här) sökt (I have) sought	(är) sökt, sökt, sö́kta (It is/they are) sought
týcka (to) have an opinion about something, (to) think	Tyck! Have an opin- ion (about something)!	týcker (I) have an opinion (about something), (I) think	týckte (I) had an opinion (about something), I thought	(här) tyckt (I have) had an opinion (about something), (I have) thought	(är) ómtýckt, ómtýckt, ómtýckta It is/they are) well- liked
tä́nka (to) think	Tänk! Think!	tä́nker (I) think	tä́nkte (I) thought	(här) tänkt (I have) thought	(är) tänkt, tänkt, tä́nkta (It is/they are) thought
á́ka (to) go	Åk! Go!	á́ker (I) go	á́kte (I) went	(här) åkt (I have) gone	

### Group 3: –r verbs

Infinitive	Imperative	Present	Past	Supine	Past participle
<u>b</u> ö (to) live in (as in reside, dwell)	<b>Bö!</b> Live!	<u>bör</u> (I) reside	bódde (I) resided	( <u>h</u> ar) bott (I have) resided	( <u>ä</u> r) bebódd, bebótt, bebódða (It is/they are) inhabited
<u>t</u> ro (to) believe, think	<b>Tro!</b> Believe!	<u>trör</u> (I) believe, think	tródde (I) believed, thought	( <u>h</u> ar) trott (I have) believed, thought	( <u>ä</u> r) trodd, trott, tródða (It is/they are) believed

### Group 4: Irregular verbs

Infinitive	Imperative	Present	Past	Supine	Past participle
<u>b</u> lj (to) become	<b>Blj!</b> (Become!)	<u>bljir</u> (I) become	blev (I) became	( <u>h</u> ar) bljvit (I have) become	( <u>ä</u> r) bliven, blívet, blívna (It is/they are) become [rarely used]
<u>b</u> ä'ra (to) carry	<b>Bär!</b>	<u>bär</u> (I) carry	bar (I) carried	( <u>h</u> ar) búrit (I have) carried	( <u>ä</u> r) búren, búret, búrna (It is/they are) carried
<u>d</u> ra (to) draw, pull	<b>Dra!</b> Draw! Pull!	<u>drar</u> (I) draw, pull	drog (I) drew, pulled	( <u>h</u> ar) drágit (I have) drawn, pulled	( <u>ä</u> r) drágen, dráget, drágna (It is/they are) drawn, pulled
finnas [passive form, but active meaning] (to) exist, be		finns (it) exists, there is/are	fanns (it) existed, there was/were	( <u>h</u> ar) fúnnits (it has) existed, there has/have been	( <u>ä</u> r) fúnnen, fúnnet, fúnna (It is/they are) found
<u>f</u> órtä'tta (to) continue	<b>Fórtä'tt!</b> Continue!	<u>fórtä'tter</u> (I) continue	fórtätte (I) continued	( <u>h</u> ar) fórtsátt (I have) continued	( <u>ä</u> r) fórtsátt, fórtsátt, fórtsátta (It is/they are) continued
<u>f</u> á (to) receive, be allowed to, have to		<u>fär</u> (I) receive, am allowed to, have to	fick (I) received, was allowed to, had to	( <u>h</u> ar) fått (I have) received, have been allowed to, have had to	
<u>f</u> örstä' (to) understand	<b>Förstä'!</b> Understand!	<u>förstä'r</u> (I) understand	förstödd (I) understood	( <u>h</u> ar) förstä'tt (I have) understood	( <u>ä</u> r) förstä'dd, förstä'tt, förstä'dda (It is/they are) understood
<u>g</u> e (to) give	<b>Ge!</b> Give!	<u>ger</u> (I) give	gav (I) gave	( <u>h</u> ar) gett, gívit (I have) given	( <u>ä</u> r) gíven, gívet, gívna (It is/they are) given
<u>g</u> á (to) walk, leave	<b>Gå!</b> Walk! Leave!	<u>går</u> (I) walk, leave	gick (I) walked, left	( <u>h</u> ar) gått (I have) walked, left	( <u>ä</u> r) gå'ngen, gå'nget, gå'ngna (It is/they are) gone by, past
<u>g</u> ö'ra (to) do, make	<b>Gör!</b> Do! Make!	<u>gör</u> (I) do, make	gjörde (I) did, made	( <u>h</u> ar) gjort (I have) done, made	( <u>ä</u> r) gjord, gjort, gjórda (It is/they are) done, made
<u>h</u> a (to) have	<b>Ha!</b> Have!	<u>här</u> (I) have	háde (I) hade	( <u>h</u> ar) haft (I have) had	

há'lla (to) hold, give [a speech]	Háll! (Hold!)	há'ller (I) hold	höll (I) held	(har) há'llit (I have) hold	(är) há'llen, há'llet, há'llna (It is/they are) hold, given
kómma (to) come	Kom! Come!	kómmer (I) come	kom (I) came	(har) kómmit (I have) come	(är) [vä'l]kómmen, [vä'l]kómmet, [vä'l]kómna (It is/they are) welcome
kúnna (to) be able to		kan (I) can	kúnde (I) could	(har) kúnnat (I have) been able to	
lígga (to) be lying down, be situ- ated	Ligg! Lie (down)!	ligger (it) lies, is situated	låg (it) lied, was situated	(har) légat (it has) been lying, been situated	(är) [för]légad, [för]légat, [för]légna (It is/they are) anti- quoted
låt'a (to) let/permit, sound	Låt! Let!	låt'er (I) let/permit, sound	lät (I) let/permitted, sounded	(har) lå'tit (I have) let/permitted, sounded	(är) [till-]lå'ten (tilllå'ten), [till-]lå'tet, [till-]lå'tna (It is/they are) allowed
lä'gga (to) put, lay	Lägg! Put! Lay!	lä'gger (I) put, lay	lade (colloquial: lä) (I) put, laid	(har) lagt (I have) put, laid	(är) lagd, lagt, lágda (It is/they are) put, laid
se (to) see	Se! See!	ser (I) see	såg (I) saw	(har) sett (I have) seen	(är) sedd, sett, sédda (It is/they are) seen
sitta (to) sit	Sitt! Sit!	sitter (I) sit	satt (I) sat	(har) súttit (I have) been sitting	(är) [néd]súttin, [néd]súttet, [néd]súttina (It is/they are) saggin [only used about fur- niture]
skóla [very rarely used] (to) be going to		ská, skall (I) will, am going to	skúlle (I) was going to		
skriva (to) write	Skriv! Write!	skríver (I) write	skrev (I) wrote	(har) skrívit (I have) written	(är) skrívnen, skrívnet, skrívna (It is/they are) written
slá (to) beat, hit	Slá! Beat! Hit!	slár (I) beat, hit	slog (I) beat, hit	(har) slágit (I have) beaten, hit	(är) slágen, sláget, slágna (It is/they are) beaten, hit
stá (to) stand	Stá! Stand!	stár (I) stand	stod (I) stood	(har) státt (I have) stood	(är) [úpp]stá'nden, [úpp]stá'ndet, [úpp]stá'ndna (It is/they are) resur- rected
sä'tta [sig] (to) put [reflexive: to sit down]	Sätt [dig]! Put! [refl: Sit down!]	sä'tter [mig] (I) put [refl: (I) sit down]	sátte [mig] (I) put [refl: (I) sat down]	(har) satt [mig] (I have) put [refl: (I have) seated myself]	(är) satt, satt, sátta (It is/they are) put
ta (to) take	Ta! Take!	tar (I) take	tog (I) took	(har) tágit (I have) taken	(är) tágen, táget, tágna (It is/they are) taken
vára (to) be	Var! Be!	är (I) am	var (I) was	(har) várit (I have) been	
véta (to) know	Vet! Know!	vet (I) know	vi'sste (I) knew	(har) vétat (I have) known	
vilja (to) want, wish	(Vill!) Want!	vill (I) want, wish	vílle (I) wanted, wished	(har) vélat (I have) wanted, wished	



## Chapter 8:

# A guide to pronunciation

The Standard Swedish dealt with in these chapters is the official language used in radio and TV. There are other variants or dialects, but nowadays most of them differ mainly in their pronunciation. The Swedish language has some unusual sounds and the pronunciation is on the whole not as regular as one might wish, but you do not have to master all the peculiarities of this noble tongue to be able to communicate, to understand or to make yourself understood. Spoken Swedish comprises a broad variety of pronunciations, of which some are definitely very strange, and you would have to work to come up with a variant that the average Swede would not be able to interpret.

A characteristic of Swedish is the tone, or pitch, accent, which has disappeared in most other Indo-European languages. It is this tone-accent that gives Swedish its typical ‘singsong’ rhythm. The two pitches (acute/‘high’, and grave/‘low’) are not marked in written Swedish, and must be learned by listening to the spoken language. You should not worry too much about this admittedly difficult feature, since the choice of pitch very rarely would affect the meaning of a word. Something more important than using the correct pitch when speaking Swedish, though, is to carefully distinguish between short and long vowel. The Swedish words in this introduction have been marked with accent signs (no distinction has been made between acute and grave accents), to show which syllable should be more stressed than the others, and long vowels have been underlined.

Among other major idiosyncrasies can be mentioned the unexpected changes in pronunciation caused by the letter ‘r’: the vowels ‘ä’ and ‘ö’ change slightly when they are followed by an ‘r’, and the consonants ‘s’, ‘n’, ‘d’, ‘t’, and ‘l’ when preceded by an ‘r’ merge with the ‘r’ to form a new, dull sound (so-called retroflexes). But there are several dialects that do not pay attention to these rules, without being less intelligible.

Like in English some consonants can change when they are followed by a certain vowel (cp. ‘city’ – ‘café’; ‘gist’ – ‘gest’). These so-called *soft vowels* are the same in Swedish – ‘e’, ‘i’, ‘y’ – with the addition of two other vowels: ‘ä’, ‘ö’.

Letter	Pronunciation	Examples
a	long: <i>a</i> as in <i>bar</i>	tá la [speak, talk]; glás [glass]
b	as in English	brö́d [bread]
c	1. before a consonant or a hard vowel (a, o, u, å): as in <i>café</i> ; 2. before a soft vowel (e, i, y, ä, ö): as in <i>city</i>	1. café; 2. cýkel [bike]
d	like in English, but with the tip of the tongue pressed closer to the upper teeth	daɡ [day]
e	1. long: as French <i>é</i> (and like <i>e</i> in <i>café</i> ); 2. short: like <i>e</i> in <i>net</i>	1. hé ta [to be called], se [see]; 2. nej [no]
f	as in English	fre daɡ [Friday]
g	1. before a consonant or a hard vowel (a, o, u, å): as <i>g</i> in <i>go</i> ; 2. before a soft vowel (e, i, y, ä, ö): as <i>y</i> in <i>yes</i>	1. gá ta [street]; gå [walk, leave]; 2. Gissa! [Guess!]
h	as <i>h</i> in <i>ham</i>	hú vudvä́rk [headache], höst [autumn]
l	1. long: like <i>ee</i> in <i>keep</i> ; 2. short: like in <i>pit</i>	1. kni v [knife]; 2. sprín ga [(to) run], tí me [hour]



j	as <i>y</i> in <i>yes</i> (never as <i>j</i> in <i>jam</i> )	jä [yes]
k	1. before a hard vowel (a, o, u, å): as <i>k</i> in <i>keep</i> ; 2. before a soft vowel (e, i, y, ä, ö): like <i>ch</i> in <i>check</i> , but without the initial <i>t</i> sound	1. káffe [coffee]; 2. kǎ́rílék [love]
l	like in English, but with the tip of the tongue straight and pressed closer to the teeth	lǒ́rdag [Saturday]
m	as in English	mǎ́ndag [Monday]
n	as in English	natt [night]
o	1. long A: as <i>oo</i> in <i>tool</i> (normal); 2. long B: as <i>o</i> in <i>fore</i> (exception); 3. short A: as <i>o</i> in <i>not</i> ; 4. short B: (a short version of long A)	1. stól [chair]; 2. moln [cloud]; 3. kopp [cup]; 4. ost [cheese]
p	as in English	prís [price, cost]
q	as in English (rarely in use nowadays)	
r	a 'rolled' r, pronounced with a slight quiver of the tongue	rínga [(to) ring]
s	like in English	sómmar [summer]
t	like in English, but with the tip of the tongue straight and pressed closer to the teeth	te [tea]
u	long: somewhat similar to <i>u</i> in <i>rude</i> ; short: (no equivalent in English)	1. út [out]; 2. únder [under]
v	like in English	vǎ́r [spring], vínter [winter]
x	as in <i>exceed</i> (never as in <i>example</i> )	till exémpel [for example]
y	similar to the French <i>u</i> and German <i>ü</i>	1. dyr [expensive] 2. mýcket [much]
z	as <i>s</i> in <i>sing</i>	zoo
å	1. long: rather like <i>o</i> in <i>fore</i> ; 2. short: like <i>o</i> in <i>yonder</i>	1. sprǻk [language]; 2. ǻlder [age]
ä	1. long: like <i>ai</i> in <i>fair</i> ; 2. short: as <i>e</i> in <i>best</i>	1. bǎ́ra [(to) carry]; 2. vän [friend]
ö	1. long A: as <i>eu</i> in the French <i>deux</i> ; 2. long B (before an <i>r</i> ): like <i>u</i> in <i>fur</i> ; 3. short: like <i>e</i> in <i>her</i> (unstressed: <i>tell her!</i> )	1. röd [red]; 2. kö́ra [(to) drive]; 3. sö́nder [broken, in pieces]

## STRANGE SPELLINGS

The spelling of some Swedish words differ from their pronunciation. The conservative written language has preserved certain word combinations reflecting an older way of pronunciation, even though the actual sounds disappeared long ago in everyday speech. In English you can also find many examples of words with an archaic spelling; both 'blood' and 'flood', for instance, pronounced as they are spelled (with an *o* sound like *oo* in *tool*), show how they were pronounced during the Middle Ages – and how they are still pronounced in Swedish ('blöd', 'flöd').

Since the spelling of the words is not always phonetic, even native Swedes sometimes find it difficult to tell how a word should be written correctly. So do not despair. Many times the peculiar spellings, because of their old roots, can actually help you to see how closely they are related to words in English and German, which in turn will facilitate learning them.

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## The j sound

(like *y* in *yes*)

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<b>dj</b>	dj <u>ur</u> [animal; related to English 'dear' and German 'Tier']
<b>g</b>	(before the soft vowels e, i, y, ä, ö) g <u>ä</u> st [guest; German 'Gast']
<b>gj</b>	gj <u>ó</u> rde [did, made]
<b>hj</b>	hj <u>ä</u> 'lpa [(to) help; German 'helfen']
<b>j</b>	j <u>a</u> [yes]
<b>lj</b>	lj <u>u</u> s [light, candle; German 'licht']

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## The tj sound

(like *ch* in *check* but without the initial *t* sound)

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<b>ch</b>	check
<b>k</b>	(before the soft vowels e, i, y, ä, ö) k <u>j</u> lo [kilo]
<b>kj</b>	kj <u>o</u> l [skirt]
<b>tj</b>	tj <u>ú</u> go [twenty]

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## The sj sound

As *sh* in *shoe* but formed further back in the mouth. It is often also pronounced like a softer version of German *ch* in *ach*, or in the Scottish name Loch Lomond. It can be spelled:

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<b>ch</b>	ch <u>o</u> ck [shock]
<b>-ge</b>	gar <u>a</u> ge (mostly French loan-words) Note: Can only be pronounced like <i>sh</i> in <i>shoe</i> .
<b>rs</b>	ma <u>r</u> s [March] Note: Can only be pronounced like <i>sh</i> in <i>shoe</i> .
<b>sch</b>	sch <u>a</u> mpo [shampoo]
<b>sh</b>	sherry (only in loan-words)
<b>sj</b>	sj <u>u</u> [seven]
<b>sk</b>	(before the soft vowels e, i, y, ä, ö): sk <u>i</u> nn! [skin]. Before a consonant or a hard vowel (a, o, u, å) 'sk' is pronounced as two separate letters. (One important exception is 'mä'nniska' [human being], where 'sk' is pronounced as a <i>sj</i> sound, in spite of the following hard vowel; the word was originally spelled with an 'i' directly after 'sk'.) Before a consonant 'sk' is pronounced as two separate letters.
<b>skj</b>	skj <u>ó</u> rta [shirt]
<b>stj</b>	stj <u>ä</u> 'rna [star]

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## The ng sound

(as *ng* in *singer* – not like in *finger*!)

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<b>ng</b>	m <u>a</u> 'nga [many]
<b>g</b>	(before an n) reg <u>n</u> [rain]
<b>n</b>	bank