

Ten Secrets for Practising Irish Every Day



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Third Edition

Bitesize Irish Gaeilge Gach Lá www.bitesize.irish

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GAELGE GACHERISH

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INTRODUCTION



It's hard to find ways to practise

You might be already learning the Irish language, but how do you find ways to practise it? You started with the fire in your belly to learn the Irish language, right? But for many language learners, lack of day-to-day practice

is the greatest barrier to fluency. And what is "fluency" anyway?

At <u>Bitesize Irish</u>, we say the key to learning Gaeilge is practising **Gaeilge Gach Lá** - Irish every day.

What we mean by "practice"

When we say "practice", we aren't necessarily referring to exercises in a book or an app. While those are useful for learning how the language works – the nuts and bolts, as it were – they don't generally challenge you to THINK in the language you're learning...nor do they give you sufficient practice in speaking and listening.

If you're lucky enough to have people around you speaking Irish, make use of it! Chances are, though, you don't have such access. So then what? How do you practise the Irish language every day if there aren't people actively speaking to you in Irish? That's where *Gaeilge Gach Lá* and the techniques in this book come in.

How these secrets will help you

Each secret offers you a way to practise your Irish, so as to make it a part of your **regular thinking process** – which, ultimately, is **the key to becoming a speaker of Irish**.

As author Robert Greene has described in Mastery, you can move to being a speaker by being a *practitioner* for long enough. This book is most suitable for active learners of Gaeilge, such as those attending classes or doing self-study.

Not each technique will apply to your current context and abilities, and that's OK. Some of the techniques described here will become useful as your grasp of the language grows. All have been used to good effect by other Irish language learners.

Links get out-dated over time, and new resources are always popping up. If you've

feedback on this book, please email info@bitesize.irish

PRACTISE WITH OTHERS

This is a shortcut tip! Our members of Bitesize Irish learn at their own pace, and also practice in the company of others. Bitesize Pobal is our private online learners community where our fluent staff encourage you with daily challenges. Grow members can also avail of weekly practice calls.

LET'S GET GOING

The rest of the book is made up of ten sections – each describing a secret to practising Gaeilge Gach Lá (plus a bonus secret!).

These aren't sequential "lessons." You don't have to learn how to do one before you can do another. Feel free to skip around, trying whatever method seems most interesting, useful, or doable at the moment.

By the way, we refer to the Irish language as simply "Irish" in this book.

Bain sult as! (Enjoy!)

SECRET 1: LABELS, LABELS, LABELS



For this you will need:

- 1. A package of sticky notes
- 2. A pen
- 3. An English-Irish dictionary (see below for online dictionaries)

THE METHOD

Pick one room in your home, and using the sticky notes, label everything you see with its Irish name (if you don't know the Irish word for something, look it up in your dictionary).

For example, in your bedroom you might label your *leaba* (bed), your *drisiúr* (dresser), your *almóir* (closet), your *piliúr* (pillow), etc.

In any given room, you will certainly have at least one *balla* (wall), a *fuinneog* (window), an *urlár* (floor).

Tip

Do NOT write the English translation on the label...just the Irish.

For the next week, every time you enter that room, look at your labels and say each word aloud.

Tip

Don't mentally "translate." In other words, don't look at the label on the wall and think "balla = wall." Just look at the object, read the word on the label, and say it aloud. The idea is for your brain to connect the look and sound of the Irish word directly with the object, without going through the medium of English.

After a week of this, move on to another room in your home and repeat the exercise.

ADVANCED STEPS

As you get more practiced at this, you can make it more complicated. For example, go into a room you've already labeled once and re-label everything using the definite article (**the** bed, **the** chair, etc.).

If you're advanced enough already, make sure that you *inflect* the word properly according to its grammatical gender (if necessary, look the word up in your dictionary to determine if it's masculine or feminine...don't just guess!). Remember, the pronunciation of the word may change (for example, *fuinneog* – window (pronounced "FWIN-yug") – will become *an fhuinneog* – the window (pronounced "un IN-yug").

The more advanced you become, the more you can vary this exercise. Try labeling objects using possessive adjectives ("my bed," for example, or "his dresser"), for example. Try adding descriptive adjectives ("the brown door,"

for example, or "the ugly chair"). Don't worry if you don't know how to say these things – just use it as a goal for something new to learn to say when you get there.

As you grow more adept, you can even do this without using physical labels (such as when you're out and about). If you're walking or driving around and see something you know the Irish word for, say it aloud (if possible), or at least think of the Irish word (without including an English translation). As your vocabulary grows, so will the possibilities!

ONLINE DICTIONARIES

When you're serious about learning the language, please do invest in a printed dictionary. Learners even say that looking up a physical dictionary is more active and engrossing.

In the meantime, there are several online Irish dictionaries that you can use:

Foclóir.ie

www.focloir.ie

The go-to resource for translating from English to Irish online. You can find their app as well.

Teanglann

www.teanglann.ie

Online versions of the two most comprehensive Irish dictionaries available. This is more advanced than focloirie.

Téarma.ie

www.tearma.ie

The National Database of Irish Words - this is where you'll find all the newest words and terminology

Focal.ie

www.focal.ie

More of a terminology dictionary, but with lots of single words.

SECRET 2: THE PRIMER METHOD



The "primer" method is an expansion on the label idea, and makes use of a proven technique for teaching children simple sentences.

THE METHOD

Go into one of the rooms that you have previously labeled. Pick one of the labeled objects at random and see how many simple sentences you can make up about it. Try to make up at least five.

For example, choose an balla (the wall):

- **Tá balla ann.** (There is a wall.)
- Tá an balla crua. (The wall is hard.)
- Tá an balla bán. (The wall is white.)
- Tá an balla mín. (The wall is smooth.)
- Tá an balla láidir. (The wall is strong.)

If you're in a setting where it's possible, say the sentences aloud.

Once again, try NOT to work through the medium of English. Try to use descriptive

adjectives you already know. If you must look something up (and of course you will need to), be sure repeat the Irish several times while looking at the object (without adding the English definition...for example, say **tá an balla bán**. NOT "tá an balla bán. the wall is white").

ADVANCED METHOD

As your facility with the language grows, practice doing this with increasingly complex sentences.

For example:

- Is bord é sin. (That is a table.)
- Tá an bord mór. (The table is big.)
- Tá an bord go deas. (The table is nice.)
- Is bord mór deas é. (It's a big, nice table.)
- Is maith liom an bord. (I like the table.)
- **Tá mo chupán ar an bhord.** (My cup is on the table.)
- Bíonn mo spéaclaí ar an bhord go minic.
 (My spectacles are often on the table.)



It doesn't matter if your sentences are rather silly sounding (even VERY silly sounding...even childish) at this stage. The goal is to begin to train yourself to think and speak directly in Irish, without going through the medium of English. When you were a young child, just learning to speak (and later, just learning to read), you did this unselfconsciously. Now, as a language learner, it's time to let your inner child come out to play!

SECRET 3: JUST THE FACTS, PLEASE



This is a bit of an expansion on the "primer" method, and is a fun game to play while you're

waiting in line at the store, out for a walk, or wandering around the house.

THE METHOD

Say you're waiting in a long line at the grocery store. Pick a person in the next line. Take a quick look at him or her; then look away.

Now imagine that person has disappeared! And you have to describe what they looked like to someone else, someone WHO SPEAKS ONLY IRISH!

Initially, you'll probably need to resort to very simple, present-tense sentences. Don't worry if you can't do this yet. Just remember this method for when you do start to make sentences. For example:

Is fear é. Tá sé óg. Tá sé ard. Tá sé tanaí. Tá gruaig rua air. Tá léine bhán air. (He is a man. He is young. He is tall. He is thin. He has red hair. He is wearing a white shirt).

This activity will of course stretch your abilities. You'll probably immediately come up against things you'd *like* to say but can't. Use this as an opportunity, and don't beat yourself up about it. Look up the new words and phrases to help you. Author Caoimhín De Barra of the book *Gaeilge: A Radical Revolution* has made this point. The goal is to be *thinking* in Gaeilge, rather than Béarla.

ADVANCED METHOD

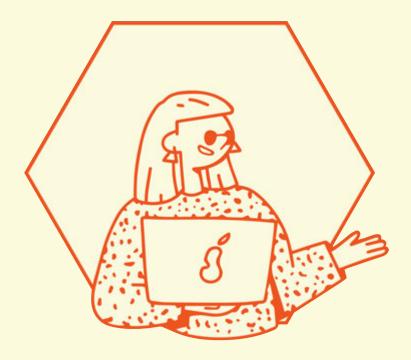
As your facility with the language grows, and as you become more accustomed to playing this game, your sentences can become more complex and include different tenses. For example:

Fear óg tanaí a bhí ann. Bhí sé an-ard, agus bhí gruaig rua air. Bhí seanléine bhán shalach air. (It was a thin young man. He was very tall, and he had red hair. He was wearing an old, dirty, white shirt).

Tip

This is an especially good game to play when you're on your own at home, you can say your lines aloud. You can also pick other things to describe...for example, did they look happy or sad, and what were they doing at the time.

SECRET 4: SHOP 'TIL YOU DROP



We're not talking about shopping 'til you drop for Irish language products! You may not think of shopping as a vehicle for language practice, but it really is amazing just how much day-to-day language you can assimilate by pushing yourself to think in Irish as much as possible. Food and clothing are terms that are among the earliest that most people learn, and so are very easy to incorporate into your daily routine.

THE METHOD

Let's say you're going grocery shopping. Make your grocery list in Irish! If there are words you don't know, you can look them up in a dictionary.

If you're worried you won't remember what the list says when you get to the store, draw a little picture of what you want to buy next to the word or words to remind you. When you get to the store, look back and forth between what you buy and its name on the list several times, to cement the relationship between the word and the object without resorting to English.

If you're not the self-conscious type, you can even have a little conversation with yourself as you're shopping. For example: **Tá úlla de dhíth orm. Cá bhfuil na hulla? Tá siad ansin, in aice leis na prátaí.** (I need apples. Where are the apples? They're there, next to the potatoes).

If you ARE the self-conscious type, wear a Bluetooth headset and anyone who happens to hear you talking to yourself in a foreign language will simply think you're having a phone conversation!

SECRET 5: READING IS FUN-DAMENTAL



Reading is an excellent day-to-day way to practise your Irish. There are many excellent, easy novels and story collections geared specifically toward adult learners (and some that are geared toward children can also be very worth reading). There's even a graphic novel collection available based on Irish myths and legends!

Reading silently can be a good way to acquire vocabulary and to get a feel for idioms, and is something you can do just about anywhere...on the bus, on your lunch break, in the evening when others in the house are watching TV, etc.

THE METHOD

One important step that many learners neglect, however, is **reading aloud**. When we learned to read as children, we quickly internalized the lesson that "silent reading is better," and we often forget that, when learning a new language, reading out loud is a very good way to make a mental connection between how a word looks on paper and how it sounds when spoken.

As you become more comfortable with reading aloud, you'll find that your speech will flow more naturally in conversation as well.

Start slowly at first. Pick a passage from a book you're reading and read it aloud slowly. Read it a couple more times, speeding up toward normal conversational speed as you get comfortable with it. At first you will stumble over the words, but the more you practice this, the better you will become at it.

TipPopular sources for Irish language books are:

<u>www.litriocht.com</u>

<u>www.siopagaeilge.ie</u>

SECRET 6: SING A SONG



Educators and parents have known this for years – music facilitates learning (if you've ever found yourself humming "the alphabet song" while looking up a listing in the phone book,

you know first-hand just how well it works!). Even if you don't have the world's greatest voice, if you like to sing in the shower (or sing along with the radio in the car), you'll find that learning to sing in Irish will pay great dividends.

Music is such a powerful learning tool, it's hard to describe the many ways in which learning to sing in Irish can be helpful to the learner, but here are a few things you can expect:

- You will learn to connect the sound of the language with its appearance much more quickly by singing it than you will by simply saying it.
- You will become accustomed to the way the language feels in your mouth much more quickly than you will by simply speaking.
- As you learn more songs from fluent or native speakers, your own accent and pronunciation will improve.
- The more songs you learn, the more natural-sounding idioms you will pick up.

Even if you don't understand them at first, when you encounter them later, they will stick more firmly in your mind because you know them from songs.

Tip

Because music is so powerful, it's absolutely vital that you use only music CDs and books produced by fluent Irish speakers, if not native speakers...that is, by people who actually do SPEAK the language and haven't just learned off a few songs. If you learn to mispronounce the words in a song, it can be very hard to correct your pronunciation later.

THE METHOD

There are several ways you can go about learning Irish songs.

YouTube is a mixed bag, but certainly a place where you can find some gems.

A favourite book of ours is **Peigin Leitir Mór** by Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin, which is accompanied by a CD. It's a collection of traditional songs and poems for kids, recorded by native Irish speakers. It's <u>on Spotify</u> and the book can be ordered <u>on litriocht.com</u>.

Another book in the same series is *Icí Picí* by Nellie Nic Giolla Bhríde and Doimnic Mac Giolla Bhríde. This one is a set of newly-composed songs rather than traditionally-known ones. It's also available <u>at litriocht.com</u>, and at <u>siopagaeilge.ie</u>.

Yet another way is to buy a performance CD with good liner notes, such as Pádraigín Ní Uallacháin's *A Stór is A Stóirín* (also available at litriocht.com or at siopagaeilge.ie).

If you're using a CD and songbook set that doesn't include a spoken version, or a CD with

liner notes, listen to the song several times while following along with the printed version. Then try singing along, using the printed words as a guide.

Once you've sung a particular song several times, try singing it from memory.

Once you've memorized a particular song, **sing** it often: In the shower, while tidying the kitchen, while walking the dog, etc. The more you sing it, the more firmly entrenched its sounds will be in your mind and voice, and the more you will benefit from knowing it.

Take it easy on yourself. Start with learning **the chorus**. You can always add additional verses later.

More singing at Bitesize Irish

If you're a Bitesize Member you have access to the "Sing a Song in Irish" course where Siobhán goes through three songs word-for-word with translations and accompanying videos. Siobhán brings you through each song in the spoken word first, then digs into the finer points of lyrics in the songs, and finally includes a full rendition of each song.

SECRET 7: NEWS AND WEATHER



Daily listening practice is an important part of language learning...we all know that. What's particularly important, however, especially as you progress, is listening to the language as it's spoken naturally.

Language learning recordings are helpful when you're just starting to get the sounds of the language, or to help you refine your own pronunciation, but they're not always helpful when it comes to understanding day-to-day speech. People who make learning recordings speak slowly and precisely, so that you can learn to emulate their pronunciation.

When people speak naturally, however, they tend to speak quickly. They may leave off word endings or run words together, use unfamiliar terms, or even throw in a bit of English here and there. If you want to achieve fluency in a language, it's important that you **get practice listening** to it as it's spoken naturally.

Fortunately for Irish learners, we have the Irish television channel **TG4**, which is available to anyone in the world online. TG4 offers a full roster of programs, ranging from documentaries to soap operas, reality shows and children's programming, most of which also have English subtitles (unfortunately, some of their shows are restricted presumably due to licensing).

The subtitled programs are good for "passive listening" practice (where you just listen to a show and let it wash over you without struggling to understand what you're hearing). Passive listening is an important part of language learning, and something you should do every day.

A couple of times a week, however, you should practice "active listening" (where you actually try to follow what's being said)...and the ideal vehicle for doing that is the daily news and weather reports.

News and weather reports tend to be short, which is important because this kind of listening practice can be tiring. They typically aren't subtitled, so you are forced to rely more heavily on your ears. They do, however, usually offer visual cues to help you work out what's being talked about. And the weather reports especially tend to use a lot of **repetitive terminology** that beginners learn early on, so you have a better chance of picking out words you know.

THE METHOD

To start, make a list of terms you already know that you might expect to hear on a news or weather report. Think of countries and people who have been in the news lately, for example.

Don't be discouraged if you can't catch many at first. This is challenging for everyone, and takes time and practice. Use what you see on the screen as a visual aid. For example, if the presenter says something that sounds like "bahsh" or "mahsh" or "wahsh" and he's pointing

at an image of raindrops or clouds on a map, there's a good chance that he said "báisteach" (rain) or "báistiúil" (rainy)...possibly in one of the mutated forms.

HOW TO WATCH AND LISTEN

TG4 News (Nuacht)

Go to Nuacht on TG4. That page features the latest published news shows from TG4 television.

TG4 Weather (An Aimsir Láithreach)

Go to <u>An Aimsir Láithreach on TG4</u>. That page features the latest published weather forecasts from TG4.

Check out **Secret 8: On The Radio** in the next chapter for information about how to catch Irish language radio, where you'll of course hear regular news and weather updates.

ADVANCED METHOD

Once you get a bit more practiced with this, you can try it with subtitled programs as well. Often the subtitles don't translate exactly what the person says, but rather express the same thing using a more familiar English idiom. You'll be very proud of yourself when you're watching a program and realize that what the subtitler translated as "Oh my God!" was actually "A Mhaighdean!" (O Virgin!).

If you don't have high-speed internet, you can still practice this using DVDs. Some of TG4's programming is available on DVD, including some syndicated children's shows that aren't available on the internet, such as "Dora the Explorer" and "Spongebob Squarepants." These are available from TG4's on-line shop of DVDs. Be aware that, if you live in the U.S. or Canada, you may have to play such DVDs on your computer rather than on your TV's DVD player, as they may not be all-region.

SECRET 8: ON THE RADIO



In addition to having Irish-language television available to us, we have several choices of Irish-language radio stations available via the internet. Radio can also work well for "active listening" practice. It's quite a bit more difficult than television, not only because you don't have the visual cues (or subtitles) but because radio shows often feature a rapid-fire delivery, or interviews with people who may have unfamiliar accents.

THE METHOD

The same principle applies as with TV programs: Start by making a list of words that you know, then listen carefully to the broadcast and see how much you can pick up. If you know what programs are likely to be available when you're able to listen (Raidió na Gaeltachta has podcasts available of lots of their shows, so this might be a great place to start), you can tailor your list to that type of program: for example, political or weather terms for a news broadcast, musical terms for an interview with a musician, etc.

Radio programs are also good for practising "passive listening" (where you just let the sound wash over you without actively struggling to understand). Without the additional input that pictures and subtitles give you, your ear will begin to pick up on the rhythms of the language much more quickly. It's also easier to make time for this kind of passive listening practice, as you can listen as you go about your regular work at home or at a desk.

RADIO ONLINE

Raidió na Gaeltachta

www.rte.ie/radio/rnag/

The state-run national Irish language radio station. Plenty of <u>podcasts</u> available. Look for the link that says "**RnaG Beo**". Beo means "live".

Raidió na Life

<u>www.raidionalife.ie</u>

Station based in Dublin.

Raidió Rí-Rá

www.rrr.ie

"Charts radio".

By the way, if you like podcasts, do check out our <u>Bitesize Irish Podcast</u> (it's discontinued, but you can access the whole back-catalogue). It's not for immersing in Irish. It's rather a discussion show that digs deep into the finer points of the language learning journey.

SECRET 9: JUST BLOG IT



Keeping a blog can be an excellent way to practise your Irish, especially if you're good about keeping it up day after day.

This approach will only work for you once you have started to be able to put together some simple sentences. Another option might be to set up an Instagram page where you only speak Gaeilge. You could also follow the Twitter approach of some users who create an account to specifically practice their Irish and connect with others about Gaeilge.

THE METHOD

At first, you may not be able to say much for your blog. Perhaps you can talk about where you live or what you do for work. You can probably describe your pets and family members. Or post a photo and describe it. Don't worry too much about what you say (if you're worried about people being critical, you can always choose to keep your page private unless and until you want input).

The important thing is to write directly in Irish, without trying to translate from English, so keep it simple. Don't worry too much about

grammar either...your grammar will improve with practice, and right now your goal should be to get the Irish flowing naturally from you. Let the mistakes fall where they may. Children tend to do this unselfconsciously when they're learning a language, but we adults tend to be self conscious and afraid of making mistakes, which can actually hinder learning.

As your facility grows, you may want to open your page to others, asking them to correct your grammar and usage...or you may not. While objective correction can be a useful learning tool, if you're very self-conscious about making mistakes, it can sometimes do more harm than good. That's something you'll need to decide for yourself.

If you prefer not to put a blog out there on the web, keeping a written diary in Irish can also be useful.

Tip

You can get started very quickly with your own blog on one of several free blogging platforms. It doesn't take much technical skills to get started. To get you quickly started, we suggest registering your blog at wordpress.com. But there are other platforms for sure.

Or set up an **Irish-only Instagram account** with the Instagram app, or **a separate Twitter account**. If you're up for making the Irish language a bigger part of your identity though, you might instead consider posting more under your primary accounts.

By the way, <u>subscribe to Bitesize Irish on</u> <u>YouTube</u>, where we regularly publish videos to help you learn and practise Irish.

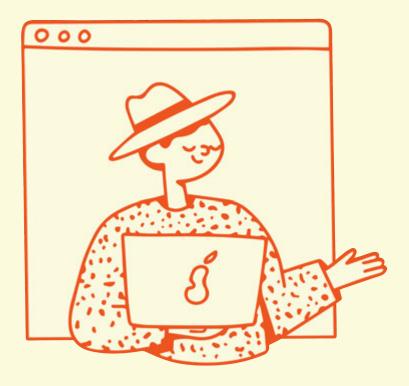
Some cool **Gaeilge Instagram accounts** to follow are below. (Accounts come and go, so let us know at info@bitesize.irish if you have more suggestions.)

- Múinteoir Meg <u>@muinteoirmeg</u>
- Caoimhe Ní Chathail <u>@caoimhechats</u>
- Póilín Nic Géidigh <u>@mise.poilin</u>
- Bloc TG4 <u>@bloc_tg4</u>
- Gripswitgaeilge <u>@gripswitgaeilge</u>
- Mo Food Blog @mofoodblog
- Molscéal @molsceal
- Gael Gals @gaelgals

Tip

Bitesize Irish Explore and Grow members get an invite to Bitesize Pobal, our private online learning community. There, members are welcome to post their own regular updates in Irish, and look for feedback from staff and other members on their Irish. Does it sound like fun? Check it out.

SECRET 10: ONLINE CONVERSATION



There's **no substitute for conversation** when it comes to language building. Language is ultimately about expressing yourself to others. Even if you attend a local Irish language class,

practising conversation once a week is really not enough.

Having live conversations online is a good approach, and it's getting more normal as each year passes. Some groups coordinate Skype or Zoom calls, which can be as good or better than a local conversation group. There are some **Facebook Groups** that might help you connect with other learners too, including Gaeilge Amháin.

Tip

A core part of Bitesize Pobal, the private online learning community at Bitesize Irish, is Bitesize Beo. The Biteize Beo calls are available weekly to Grow members. We also have a Beo Starter call monthly for Explore and Grow members. We've found a nice formula of scripted conversation, where each participant takes a role on a video call. This

gets you over the thinking of "I'm probably not good enough", and gets you to take action.

SUMMARY



There you have it, our top secrets for practising Gaeilge Gach Lá. The thing with learning a language is that it needs practice – and lots of it. We especially love it when people are attending local Irish language classes, or some group equivalent online. A class once a week is not enough to become a speaker of the Irish language. Have fun with your immersion into

Irish every single day. If there's only one secret you take away from this book, it's: Practice as often as you can, in little chunks.

To revise (revision being another secret weapon!), here are the methods we shared with you in this book:

- 1. Labels, Labels, Labels
- 2. The Primer Method
- 3. Just the Facts, Please
- 4. Shop 'Til You Drop
- 5. Reading is Fun-damental
- 6. Sing a Song
- 7. News and Weather
- 8. On the Radio
- 9. Just Blog it
- 10. Online Conversation

Sharing is caring. Do you attend a Gaeilge class, have an instructor, or are part of a study group or cultural group?

Please recommend to them our <u>Gaeilge Gach</u>
<u>Lá 1-week challenge</u>.

GAELGE GACHESIZE IRISH

ABOUT BITESIZE IRISH

Since 2010, we have been helping people make a deeper connection with Irish culture through the language, and a better sense of where they fit in the world.

Go raibh maith agat, thanks for being part of Bitesize Irish.