

Norwegian Nynorsk

(a very brief introduction [adapted for reddit /r/norsk])

Introduction

This document has been assembled to help you learn the basics of writing and reading Norwegian Nynorsk. Most learners of Norwegian will have already learned Bokmål in order to take exams such as the *Bergenstest* or *Trinn 3* exam at Norwegian universities. A minority will know Nynorsk.

This document is primarily aimed at those with a background in Norwegian Bokmål.

There are Nynorsk users across Norway – around 600,000 in total – even in large cities like Oslo and Bergen which are traditional Bokmål strongholds. There are Nynorsk users who are from rural areas in the west, and there are Nynorsk users who live in larger towns in the east.

Don't feel that you have to imitate a particular dialect of Norwegian when you write in Nynorsk – write what feels natural to the way you, and the Norwegian speakers around you, speak.

Whether you are learning Nynorsk in order to better understand what you are reading, or because you want to write in Nynorsk, the important thing to remember is that spoken Norwegian should guide you and aid you along the way.

Both Nynorsk and Bokmål are standardised languages which are continually regulated by *Språkrådet* – the Norwegian Language Council. As a result, today's Nynorsk is not necessarily the same Nynorsk that was written a few decades ago due to spelling and grammar reforms. It's good to freshen up on what you already know and to correct the mistakes you may make.

Nynorsk users themselves make mistakes and don't always know what they can write and what they shouldn't. The pressure of Bokmål being the dominating written form also is responsible for these occasional errors.

However you feel about how good you are at writing in Nynorsk, you won't be alone in making the occasional typo.

How does Nynorsk differ from Bokmål?

Nynorsk is characterised by many features that are historically linked to the linguistic variety found in Norway's dialects.

Unlike more conservative forms of Bokmål you may read in national newspapers, you know you are reading something in Nynorsk when:

- you consistently see diphthongs like *ei*, *øy* and *au*
 - *Ein sein laurdagskveld. Eg drøymer ofte om sjokoladecake.*

- instead of seeing the pronoun *jeg*, you see *eg*
 - *Eg lurar på om du har høve¹ til å lesa CV-en min.*
- you will see words that you may not immediately recognise
 - *Kva tykkjer² du?*
- words you may have not seen before appear, like *kjærleik*, *kjensle* and *skilnad³*
- *ikkje* is used instead of *ikke*, *mykje* is used instead of *mye*
 - *Det er ikkje mykje gale⁴ med det du har skrive, ærleg talt.*
- certain plural endings will be *-ar* or *-a* instead of *-er* or *-ene*
 - *Eg elsker kaffikoppene⁵ mine – dei har bilete av søte kattungar på utsida.*
- you notice that many common gender words use the feminine grammatical gender instead
 - *Ei kvinne sa til meg at eg burde kjøpe nye klede⁶.*
- there are fewer formalisms – sentences are usually shorter and written in a more spoken style

If you find Nynorsk difficult at first, a silver lining is that there are usually several ways to write the same thing in Nynorsk due to its relatively large freedom of lexical and stylistic choice.

1 høve: chance, opportunity

2 å tykkja: to think/have an opinion about something

3 love, feeling, difference

4 gale: wrong (cf. galt in Bokmål)

5 kaffi: coffee (cf. kaffe)

6 klede: clothes (cf. klær)

Pronouns (pronomen)

In Nynorsk, pronouns differ from their Bokmål counterparts:

	1st person singular	1st person plural	2nd person singular	2nd person plural	3rd person singular	3rd person plural
Subject (nom)	eg	vi / me	du	de / dokker	han, ho, det, hen⁷	dei
Object (acc/dat)	meg	oss	deg	dykk / dokker	han, ho / henne, det, hen	dei

You will notice that the 1pl., 2pl. and 3sg. forms offer more than one alternative. Choose whatever form feels most natural for you, and be consistent.

Use of the *-s genitive* is largely reduced in Nynorsk. This is because many Norwegian dialects traditionally use a form of *si/sin/sitt/sine* which follows after the noun, as well as a construction with the preposition *til* (example: *Boka **til** Fredrik er skriven på tysk*).

Using the feminine grammatical gender is compulsory in Nynorsk.

In Nynorsk it is expected that we place possessive pronouns after the noun – we only place it before if we want to emphasise possession.

1st person singular	1st person plural	2nd person singular	2nd person plural	3rd person singular reflexive	3rd person singular non-reflexive	3rd person plural
min / mi / mitt / mine	vår / vårt / våre	din / di / ditt / dine	dykkar / dokkar	sin / si / sitt / sine	hans – hennar	deira

In Bokmål, we use a referent pronoun, *den*, when referring to a non-living object (like a book or a computer) whose gender is not neutral. In Nynorsk, we try to not use *den*, instead using the relevant masculine or feminine pronoun. See example 4.

Denne and *dette* remain the same in Nynorsk, but we use **desse** for the plural form – not *disse*.

Do not use the 3sg. Bokmål pronoun *man* in Nynorsk. We use *ein* instead. (When writing Bokmål, you are in fact allowed to use *en* instead of *man*.)

Noe/noen (meaning something or someone) in Bokmål has several forms in Nynorsk too depending on grammatical gender and number.

Something (neut.)	Something (masc.) / someone	Something (fem.)	Some (plural)
noko	nokon	noka	nokre / nokon

⁷ Although relatively new, you can use gender-neutral pronoun *hen* in circumstances you may find appropriate.

Examples:

1. Eg trur ikkje ho kjem i kveld. Ho må jobba.
2. Det hadde vore fint å høyra frå han.
3. Har dokker spist brødskiva mi?
4. Kven si bok ligg på bordet? Ho er ikkje mi.
5. Det er ikkje noko nytt.

Question words (spørsmålord)

Hv-words from Bokmål, as a rule, become kv-words in Nynorsk.

What?	Kva?
When?	Når?
Who?	Kven?
How? (process/condition)	Korleis?
Whose?	Kven si/sin/sitt/sine?
Where? (location)	Kvar?
How? (gradient adjective)	Kor?
Why?	Kvifor? or Korfor?

Examples:

6. Korfor må du snakka så mykje?
7. Eg føler meg ganske dårleg. Korleis går det med deg?
8. Æsj, kvar er mobilen min?
9. Kor gamal er dette universitetet?
10. Han der borte? Eg veit ikkje kven han er – eg tør ikkje snakka med han.

Nouns (substantiv)

As previously stated, the use of the feminine grammatical gender is compulsory in Nynorsk. This is usually marked by the use of indefinite pronoun *ei* and definite ending *-a*. It is also compulsory in Nynorsk to use the double definite forms of nouns (example: **det** nyttige uttrykket, not *det nyttige uttrykk).

	Singular pronoun	Singular definite	Plural indefinite	Plural definite
Masculine	ein	-en	-ar	-ane
Feminine	ei	-a	-er	-ene
Neutral	eit	-et	–	-a

Examples:

11. Ei ung kvinne frå Oslo.
12. Til jul fekk eg bøker om (den) andre verdskrigen.
13. Har du snakka med dei nye studentane?
14. Desse utlendingane er veldig flinke til å skriva norsk.
15. Desse nye toga er ganske store, ikkje sant?

It is often thought that Nynorsk looks and reads better when ‘more Nynorsk’ words are used like *kjensle* instead of *følelse*.

The truth is that both words are perfectly acceptable, and you shouldn’t feel that you have to use one alternative over another.

Verb (verb)

Like in Bokmål, all conjugated verbs remain in the same form regardless of grammatical gender or number in the subject.

The Bokmål *-s passive* is also largely avoided, though you will see it occasionally as *-st verbs* in Nynorsk – usually in instructions and set phrases.

When writing in passive voice in Nynorsk, we prefer to use a form of *bli/verta + verb* in its compound past tense form (example: *det blir sagt at*, instead of **det seiest*).

Verbs in their infinitive/dictionary form can end in either *-a* or *-e*, or depending on your spoken dialect, a mix of both. (This document only uses *-a* endings).

Norwegian verbs are traditionally either strong or weak. Strong verbs are conjugated to a set pattern particular to that verb. Weak verbs are more consistent in their conjugation, and usually take the following endings:

Present indicative	Simple past (preterite)	Compound past
-er or -ar	-a or -te/-et/-de	har + -a/-t/-d
<i>Eg snakkar</i>	<i>Eg snakka</i>	<i>Eg har snakka</i>
<i>Eg analyserer</i>	<i>Eg analyserte</i>	<i>Eg har analysert</i>

A very common error amongst people who are new to Nynorsk is that they will use *-ar* in all circumstances where *-er* would be used in Bokmål. *-er* and *-ar* endings however have to be learned and usually have something to do with the word root.

Verbs which take an *-er* ending in present indicative usually have a root ending in F K L P R S and T. All verbs whose infinitive ends in *-era/ere* are *-er* verbs.

Here are some basic verbs in Nynorsk that differ considerably from their Bokmål counterparts. They are worth memorising, and note that **some of these verbs have alternative forms due to freedom of choice**. I've included in this list the forms I use:

å **arbeida** (to work) – eg arbeider, eg arbeidde, eg har arbeidd

å **bu** (to live) – eg bur, eg budde, eg har budd

å **eta** (to eat) – eg et, eg åt, eg har ete

å **finna** (to find) – eg finn, eg fann, eg har funne

å **gjera** (to do) – eg gjer, eg gjorde, eg har gjort

å **gje** (to give) – eg gjev, eg gav, eg har gjeve

å **hjelpa** (to help) – eg hjelper, eg hjelpte, eg har hjelpt

å **koma** (to come) – eg kjem, eg kom, eg har kome

å **lesa** (to read) – eg les, eg las, eg har lese

å **sjå** (to see) – eg ser, eg såg, eg har sett

å **skriva** (to write) – eg skriv, eg skreiv, eg har skrive

å **sova** (to sleep) – eg søv, eg sov, eg har sove

å **ta** (to take) – eg tek, eg tok, eg har teke

å **tregja** (to need) – eg treng, eg trong, eg har trunge

å **vera** (to be) – eg er, eg var, eg har vore

å **verta** (to become) – eg vert, eg vart, eg har vorte

å **ønskja** (to wish) – eg ønskjer, eg ønskte, eg har ønskt

The verbs *bli* and *verta* are the same verb in meaning. You can choose which form you prefer, and some mixing is allowed, but you must be consistent. The most common choices Nynorsk users make are the following:

Eg **vert**, eg **vart** / **blei**, eg **har vorte**

Eg **blir**, eg **vart**, eg **har vorte** / **blitt**

Eg **blir**, eg **blei**, eg **har blitt**

Adjectives and adverbs (adjektiv og adverb)

Nynorsk differs from Bokmål due to adjectival suffixes like *-leg*, *-sam* and *-laus*. You'll note this in words like *vanskeleg*, *truleg*, *arbeidslaus*, *takksam*, *mogleg* etc. Like Bokmål, adjectives must agree with their subject or object in both number and grammatical gender.

Examples:

18. Den raude boka.

19. Eit blått skrivebord.

20. Ein gam(m)al mann tok ein liten prat med to andre menn frå Flekkefjord.

The adjectival ending *-ende* in Bokmål becomes *-ande* in Nynorsk.

Examples:

21. I skrivande stund ...

22. Den noverande presidenten i USA er Donald Trump.

Gradial adjectives in Nynorsk are also marked by their use of *-are* and *-ast*.

Examples:

23. Han er vel merkelegare enn meg. Har du sett han?!

24. Denne songen er jo den venaste eg har nokon gong høyrte.

Note also that Nynorsk has adjectives, like Bokmål, which change when we are using them either for comparison or in superlative phrases.

Examples:

25. Det er fleire nynorskingar i Oslo enn det var i fjor.

26. Er kjærasten din betre enn eksen din?

27. Folk flest bur i Kina. (NB: we do not write *fleist!*)

The freedom to choose (valfridom)

The sentence "We welcome you" in Nynorsk can be written in 16 different ways:

Me ynskjer dykk velkomne

Me ønskjer dykk velkomne

Me ynskjer dokker velkomne

Me ynsker dykk velkomne

Me ynsker dokker velkomne

Me ønsker dokker velkomne

Me ønskjer dokker velkomne

Me ønsker dykk velkomne

Vi ynskjer dykk velkomne

Vi ønskjer dykk velkomne

Vi ynskjer dokker velkomne

Vi ynsker dykk velkomne

Vi ynsker dokker velkomne

Vi ønskjer dokker velkomne

Vi ønsker dykk velkomne

Vi ønsker dokker velkomne

This is for a reason. Spelling reforms since the 1900s have provided Nynorsk users with a range of alternative forms to choose from. The 16 sentences above cater to people who speak particular dialects too. Someone from the north or the east of Norway may prefer writing *Vi ønsker dokker velkomne*, whilst someone from the west may be more inclined to write *Me ynskjer dykk velkomne*. This being said, there are no rigid expectations.

This guide does not intend to teach all the possible forms, but it is important that any Nynorsk user is consistent with whatever forms they choose when they write.

Here are some alternatives:

å lyta / å måtta	to have to
å vona / å håpa	to hope
att og fram / fram og tilbake	to and fro / there and back
begge / både	both
ein / ei dialekt	a dialect
gammal / gamal	old
grad / mon	degree (example: <i>i kva grad...</i> [to what degree])
hos / hjå	cf. French <i>chez</i>
i våre dagar / no til dags	these days
no / nå	now
òg / også / ogso	also
så / so	so
skole / skule	school

tilbake / attende	back
venn / ven	friend

The 2012 spelling reform (2012-*rettskrivinga*) was meant to slim down the choices available in Nynorsk, such as removing *-i* endings. Bokmål itself has freedom of choice, but this is largely overshadowed by dominant trends in formal writing.

***Anbehetelse* and Nynorsk written style (*anbehetelse-orda og nynorsk skriftleg stil*)**

None of this is to say that Nynorsk is a completely liberal or lawless written language. Nynorsk has its own puristic tendencies, and the result is that Nynorsk dictionaries will **usually** not include words that include affixes such as *an-*, *be-*, *-he(i)t* or *-else*.

These affixes stem from Hanseatic Low German which has had a large influence on urban Norwegian and Danish. Some words, like *følelse*, are part of the Norwegian lexicon, but a word like *kjærlighet* (cf. Danish *kærlighed*) is dispreferred as an older Norwegian word already exists – *kjærleik*. Compare this with Swedish *kärlek*.

The resulting Nynorsk style is one with certain lexical choices, as well as a dispreference for passive structures. It is easier to incorporate dialect words in Nynorsk too.

Usual Nynorsk words (**vanlege nynorskord**)

The following is a selection of words from Kristin Fridtun's *Nynorsk for dumskallar* (Det Norske Samlaget, Oslo, 2013), pp. 30-43. This book is worth consulting as a more rigorous introduction to Nynorsk.

These words in particular are fundamental to recognise as they are commonly used across Nynorsk written material.

<i>Nynorsk</i>	<i>Notes</i>	<i>English</i>
aftan	M, aftnar	evening
allereie	-	already
annleis	-	different/differently
auge	N, augo / auge	eye
berre	-	only
bilete	N, bilete	picture
bustad	M, bustadar / bustader	residence (cf. bolig)
byrjing	F, byrjingar	beginning
draum	M, draumar	dream
å døy	døyr, døyde, døydd/tt	to die
einsemd	F, einsemder	loneliness
etter kvart	-	after a while
førebudd	-	prepared
frå	-	from
framleis	-	still
fridom	M, fridom(m)ar	freedom
frukost	M, frukostar	breakfast
å gje	gjev, gav, gjeve/gitt	to give
glas	N, glas	glass
å gløyma	gløymer, gløynde, gløynt	to forget
grøn	-	green
å halda fram	held, haldt, halde	to continue
haust	M, haustar	autumn
heil	-	whole
heim	M, heimar	home
helsing	F, helsingar	greeting
hending	F, hendingar	event

å hugsa	hugsar, hugsa, hugsa	to remember
hovud	N, hovud	head
høg	-	high
høgre	-	right (cf. høyre)
kjærleik	M, kjærleikar	love
klede	N, klede	clothes
kvit	-	white
kyrkje	F, kyrkjer	church
laurdag	M, laurdagar	Saturday
leik	M, leikar	game
likskap	M, likskapar	similarity
meir	-	more
medvit	N, medvit	awareness/consciousness
merksemd	F, merksemder	attention
morgon	M, morgonar/morgnar	morning
månad	M, månadar/er	month
måndag	M, måndagar	Monday
namn	N, namn	name
nase	M, nasar	nose
nedanfor	-	below
nærleik	M, nærleikar	closeness
omgrep	N, omgrep	term (cf. begrep)
å omsetja	omsetjer, omsette, omsett	to translate
open	-	open
å overtyda	overtyder, overtydde, overtydd/t	to convince
raud	-	red
rett	N, rettar/er	right (cf. rettighet)
rørsle	F, rørsler	movement (cf. bevegelse)
røyndom	M, røyndom(m)ar	reality
røyste	F, røyster	voice
saman	-	together
sanning	F, sanningar	truth
å seia	seier, sa, sagt	to say

sjeldan	-	seldom
å skildra	skildrar, skildra, skildra	to describe
song	M, songar	song
å spørja	spør, spurde, spurt	to ask
stad	M, stadar/stader	place
storleik	M, storleikar	size
sundag	M, sundagar	Sunday
svolten	-	hungry
tal	N, tal	number
tolmod	N, tolmod	patience
å tru	trur, trudde, trudd	to believe
trøytt	-	tired
tyding	F, tydingar	meaning
tysdag	M, tysdagar	Tuesday
utan	-	without
utdanning	F, utdanningar	education
veke	F, veker	week
å velja	vel, valde, valt	to choose
vêr⁸	M, vêrar	weather
verd	F, verder	world
åleine	-	alone

8 The use of the circumflex is to differentiate the word from the word *ver* which has a different meaning.