

Writing in Runes (with a linguist)

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Skalat maðr rúnar rísta, nema ráða vel kunni

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Some basic things to think about:

1. Runes are not a coded version of the Latin alphabet.

What this means - When writing in runes, start from the sound, not how that sound is written in the Latin alphabet. This is where we will be spending a lot of our time.

2. Match age to age.

What this means - Don't mix Elder Futhark with Urnes-style art. There's a guide to the "ages" of Norse art at the end of this document.

3. Many of these are more what you'd call "guidelines" than actual rules.

What this means - Because there wasn't a standardized orthography for the early Germanic languages, it is impossible to make hard and fast statements about what was definitely the most correct. Items #1 and 2 are the exception to this.

4. Use the þorn!

What this means - You don't need to spell out the 'th' in thorn, you can use þ. Same with ð for 'ng'.

5. Geminate symbols aren't really a thing.

What this means - Double letters (like the -tt- in letters) are rendered with a single glyph, even when they cross syllable boundaries. So, glottal would be glotal.

6. In very early inscriptions /ē/ is often spelled -ai.

What this means - They -ey- sound in vacation can be rendered with runes for -ai when you're working with Elder Futhark and very early art.

7. Nasals are frequently not written before homorganic (a consonant sound articulated in the same place of articulation) obstruents (a speech sound that is formed by obstructing airflow - plosives/stops, fricatives, and affricates). This may either be omission of an expressed nasal, or convention for transcribing a nasalized vowel.

What this means - Wow, that's a lot of linguistics talk, Kinehild, do you hate us? No. No, I do not. I share the linguistics talk because I love.

Basically, English has three nasals, /m/, /n/, and /ŋ/. The obstruents associated with these nasals are provided in the table below. What this rule is saying is that if you have a sound cluster like /nt/, it would be transcribed /t/. Likewise, /bump/ would be transcribed /bup/.

	Bilabial	Alveolar	Velar
Nasal	/m/	/n/	/ŋ/

Obstruents	/b/, /p/	/d/, /t/, /s/, /z/	/k/, /g/
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8. After /s/ some voiced consonants are written with the unvoiced symbol.

What this means - Where you have runes for both the voiced and unvoiced consonants (consider, for example k/g, b/p, and t/d), you will sometimes find the unvoiced symbol used for the voiced consonant after /s/.

9. Writing direction isn't fixed.

What this means - Writing direction (left to right, right to left, top to bottom, bottom to top, or boustrophedon. Runes could also be written upside down. Good rocks are hard to find and there's no use wasting space.



(Image from <http://www.hurstwic.org/history/articles/literature/text/literature.htm>)

10. Futhorc (Anglo-Saxon) runes appear alongside Latin characters in early medieval poetic contexts.

What this means - With conversion to Christianity, the Anglo-Saxons adopted book culture much earlier than their Norse cousins. With book culture came Latin characters. But the Anglo-Saxons weren't quite willing to give up their runes, so you have poems like Solomon and Saturn where the futhorc runes stand in for Old English words (a logogram). Check out the poem here: <https://anglosaxonpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/solomon-saturn/>.

Other fun things to do with runes:

1. Bindrunes

Bindrunes are a ligature of two or more runes. They appear rarely in surviving inscriptions from the Viking Age, but more frequently in both pre- and post-Viking Age examples. The example to the right is the Bluetooth logo, a bindrune of h and b for Harald Bluetooth.

2. Single Stave Runes

Similar to a bindrune, single stave runes consist of multiple runes combined on a single stave, not unlike Ogham. Sometimes, single stave runes appear as part of a ship (Sö 158 at Årsta and Sö 352 in Linga, Södermanland, Sweden) or as waves under a ship (DR 220 in Sønder Kirkeby, Denmark).

3. Cipher or Cryptic Runes

These are GREAT! Runic ciphers are essentially Polybius square cyphers relying on the standard order of runes within the three traditional ætts. I've included ætt tables (and cipher rune examples) towards the end of this packet so you can play with cryptography.

- The **tent runes** are based on strokes added to the four arms of an X shape: Each X represents two runes and is read clockwise, starting with the top left arm. The strokes on the first arm representing the ætt, the strokes on the second arm denote the order within that ætt.
- The **branch runes** are similar, the strokes being attached to a vertical stem and branching upwards. Strokes on the left indicate the ætt, and strokes on the right the order within the ætt. **Tree runes** and **hook runes** are like branch runes, with the strokes pointing downward diagonally and curving downward, respectively.



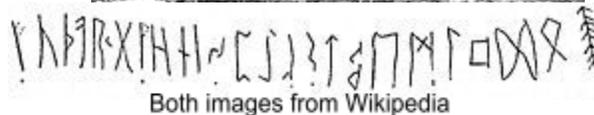
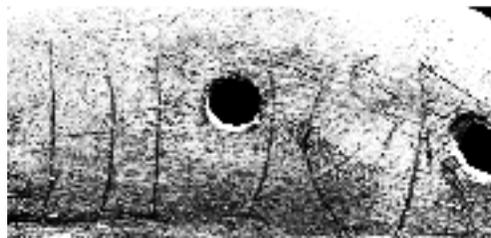
The bluetooth logo is a bindrune of  (Hagall) and  (Bjarkan)



A single stave rune for the word *runar* on the Sønder Kirkeby Runestone in Denmark
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bind_rune#/media/File:S%C3%B8nder_Kirkby_bindrune.jpg

Elder Futhark

- Used to write Proto-Germanic, Proto-Norse, Gothic, Alemannic, Old High German, and Old Norse.
- The earliest datable inscription is the Vimose comb, which dates to c. 160 CE. (Housed in the Danish National Museum, enhanced image to right.)
- The Kylvar Stone (Sweden, c. 400 CE) is notable for the earliest sequential listing of the 24 runes of the Elder Futhark. (Sketch of the inscription to right.)
- The Elder Futhark was replaced by the Younger Futhark by the 8th Century.
- ◊ **ng** for [ng] appears later in the life of Elder Futhark, earlier it was an allophone of *n* before velars.
- ʀ **z** is often transcribed *R*. This highlights continuity with Old Norse, since by the time of ON the PGmc phoneme /z/ has rhotacized to /r/ in certain environments. It shows no alternation with ʀ /r/ until the North Germanic period.
- The three stroke **s** replaces the four stroke **s** around the 5th century.



Both images from Wikipedia

Rune	Translit.	IPA	Rune	Translit.	IPA	Rune	Translit	IPA
ƒ	f	/f/ father	h	h	/h/ hat	↑	t	/t/ tap
u	u	/u(:)/ goose	n	n	/n/ no	b	b	/b/ bite
þ	þ	/θ/ thin /ð/ that	i	i	/i(:)/ feet	m	e	/e(:)/ may
a	a	/a(:)/ hat	j	j	/j/ yes	ʀ	m	/m/ may
r	r	/r/ trilled r	ī (æ)	ī (æ)	/æ:/(?) cat	l	l	/l/ let
k, c	k, c	/k/ cake	p	p	/p/ pie	ŋ	ŋ	/ŋ/ sing
g	g	/g/ gulp	z, later R	z, later R	/z/ zap later /r/ trilled r	o	o	/o(:)/ okay
w	w	/w/ wine	s	s	/s/ snake	d	d	/d/ do

Table from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elder_Futhark

Younger Futhark

- Used to write Old West Norse (Old Norwegian and Old Icelandic) and Old East Norse (Old Swedish and Old Danish).
- Evolved from Elder Futhark beginning around the 7th century and stabilized in the 9th century.
 - Basically, these are the Viking Age runes.
- There are significantly fewer characters than there are sounds, so a number of minimal pairs and distinct sounds are represented by the same character.

Rune	Translit.	IPA	Rune	Translit.	IPA	Rune	Translit.	IPA
ƿ	f/v	/f/ fish /v/ vale	h	h	/h/ help	↑	t, d, z	/t/ tap /d/ down /ts/ fits
u	u/w, y, o, ø	/u(:)/ goose /y(:)/ über* /o(:)/ caught /w/ win Appears as the lead sound in viking on a number of stones	n	n	/n/ no	β	b,p	/b/ bop /p/ bop
þ	þ, ð	/ð/ that /θ/ thin	i, e	i, e	/i:/ feet /j/ yes /e:/ may	ʝ	m	/m/ men
ā	a, o, æ	/ã/gourmand* /o(:)/ okay /ø/ schön*	a, æ, e	a, æ, e	/a/ hat /æ/ cat /o/? thought	l	l	/l/ let
r	r	/r/ rise	s, x	s, x	/s/ snake /ks/ tax	R	R	/r/ trilled r /ɹ/ raw
k, g	k, g	/g/ go /k/ cake /ɟ/* /c/*				* not a sound in English		

Table adapted from <https://omniglot.com/writing/runic.htm>

Danish long-branch runes and Swedish/Norwegian short-twig runes.

ƿ ƿ þ ƿ ƿ * ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ
 ƿ ƿ þ ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ ƿ
 fuþark hnias tbmlr

Image from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Younger_Futhark

Gothenburg/Bohuslan Runes

- Contemporaneous with Younger Futhark, used specifically in southwestern Sweden.

ƒ	ᛃ	<	ᛞ	ᛞ	ƒ	X	H	I	ᛚ	ᛚ	ᛚ	ᛞ
a	b	k	d	i	f	g	h	i	j	ng	l	m
†	ᛚ	ᛚ	Y	Σ	↑	ᛚ	ᛚ	ᛚ	<	ᛚ	ᛚ	ᛚ
n	u	p	r	s	t	u	v	ee	oh	ur	th	R

Table from <https://omniglot.com/writing/runic.htm>

Futhorc

- Used to write Old English and Old Frisian beginning around the 5th century.
- Used in England until the 9th century, though some examples are as late as the 10th or 11th century.
- Replacement by the Latin alphabet began in the 7th century.
- The vowel sound of eo (𐌺) is uncertain, as is the pronunciation of cweorð (𐌺).
- The letter stan (𐌺) only appears once in Futhorc writings, and the letters cweorð (𐌺) and ior (✱) appear only in ABC lists.
- The letter ger (✱) is sometimes written ϕ in manuscripts.
- Runes in the shaded section do not appear in the Rune Poem, but do appear elsewhere.

Rune	Translit.	IPA	Rune	Translit.	IPA	Rune	Translit.	IPA
ƿ	f	/f/ fun /v/ vine	𐌺	ī, 3	/i:/? feet /x/ loch /ç/ nicht*	𐌺	a	/ɑ(:)/ father
ᚱ	u	/u(:)/ rune	ᚦ	p	/p/ pal	ᚦ	æ	/æ(:)/ cat
ᚲ	þ	/θ/ thick /ð/ this	ᚦ	x	/ks/ fix	ᚱ	y	/y(:)/ über*
ᚳ	o	/o(:)/ okay	ᚱ/ᚲ	s	/s/ sleep /z/ zap	✱	ia, io	/ia(:)/ * /io(:)/?*
ᚴ	r	/r/ trilled r	ᚵ	t	/t/ tap	ᚴ	ea	/æɑ/* /æ:ɑ/*
ᚵ	c	/k/ cake /kʲ/ * /tʃ/ church	ᚶ	b	/b/ bop	ᚵ	k	/k/ cake
ᚷ	g	/g/ grip /ɣ/ * /j/ yes /x/? loch /gʲ/?*	ᚷ	e	/e(:)/ may	ᚷ	k̄	/k/? cake
ᚸ	w	/w/ win	ᚸ	m	/m/ may	ᚸ	ḡ	/g/ grip /ɣ/ *
ᚹ	h	/h/ horse /x/ loch /ç/ nicht*	ᚹ	l	/l/ lay	ᚹ	q	/k/? cake /cw/?* basically queen
ᚺ	n	/n/ night	ᚺ	ŋ	/ŋg/ sing god /ŋ/ sing	ᚺ	st	/st/ first
ᚻ	i	/i(:)/ feet	ᚻ	œ	/ø/? schön* /e:/? may	ᚻ	ę	/ə/? comma
✱/ϕ	j	/j/ yes	ᚻ	d	/d/ do	ᚻ	□	/eo/? * /io/? *

* Sound not used in English

Tables from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Saxon_runes

Combination	IPA	Word	Attestation
Xk	/dʒ/? judge	blagcmon	Maughold Stone
ŋh	/xs/ lochs /ks/ fix	wohs	Brandon Antler
ƿX	/ŋg/ sing god /ŋ/ sing	hring	Wheatley Hill Silver-Gilt Finger-Ring
lX	/ij/ see ya	modig	Ruthwell Cross
ƿh?	/xs/? lochs	BennaREis?	(a coin of Beonna of East Anglia)
hk	/sk/ whisk /ʃ/ fish	fisc	Franks Casket
ƿf	/eo/ * /e: o/ *	eoh	Kirkheaton Stone
MX	/ej/ may you /eɪ/ face	legdun	Ruthwell Cross
ƿj	/eɪ/? face	eateþnne (Eadthegn?)	Thornhill Stone 2
ƿf	/æa/ * /æ: a/ *	eadbald	Santi Marcellino e Pietro al Laterano Graffiti
ƿi	/ai/? pie	desaiona (gibberish?)	(a gold shilling from Suffolk)
ƿl	/eu/? * /æu/? *	dæus (Latin <i>deus</i>)	Whitby Comb
ƿf	/æa/ * /æ: a/ *	æadan	Mortain Casket

The International Phonetic Alphabet

THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET (revised to 2015)

CONSONANTS (PULMONIC)

© 2015 IPA

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d		ʈ ɖ	c ɟ	k ɡ	q ɢ		ʔ
Nasal	m	ɱ		n		ɳ	ɲ	ŋ	ɴ		
Trill	ʙ			ʀ					ʀ		
Tap or Flap		ⱱ		ɾ		ɽ					
Fricative	ɸ β	f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ	ʂ ʐ	ç ʝ	x ɣ	χ ʁ	ħ ʕ	h ɦ
Lateral fricative				ɬ ɮ							
Approximant		ʋ		ɹ		ɻ	j	ɰ			
Lateral approximant				l		ɭ	ʎ	ʟ			

Symbols to the right in a cell are voiced, to the left are voiceless. Shaded areas denote articulations judged impossible.

The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is an alphabetic system of phonetic notation based primarily on the Latin alphabet. It was devised by the International Phonetic Association (founded in Paris in 1886 under the name Dhi Fonètik Títcerz' Asóciécon [The Phonetic Teachers' Association]) in the late 19th century as a standardized representation of the sounds of spoken language. IPA symbols are composed of one or more elements of two basic types, letters and diacritics. For example, the sound of the English letter ⟨t⟩ may be transcribed in IPA with a single letter, [t], or with a letter plus diacritics, [t^h], depending on how precise one wishes to be. Often, slashes are used to signal broad or phonemic transcription; thus, /t/ is less specific than, and could refer to, either [t^h] or [t], depending on the context and language.

Consonants in American English

Allophone	At the beginning of a word	In the middle of a word	At the end of a word
[p]	place [¹ pleɪs]	company [¹ kʰʌmpəni]	group [¹ ɡru:p]
[b]	be [¹ bi]	number [¹ nʌmbə]	job [¹ dʒʌb]
[t]	today [tə ¹ deɪ]	still [¹ stɪl]	get [¹ ɡet]
[r]	-	water [¹ wɔrə]	-
[ʔ]	-	certain [¹ sɜːʔn]	-
[d]	day [¹ deɪ]	words [¹ wɜːdz]	need [¹ nid]
[k]	quite [¹ kwɑɪt]	next [¹ nɛkst]	like [¹ laɪk]
[g]	row [¹ rou]	together [tə ¹ ɡeðə]	big [¹ bɪg]

[m]	me [¹ mi]	women [¹ wɪmən]	same [¹ seɪm]
[n]	know [¹ noʊ]	another [ə ¹ nʌðə]	then [¹ ðen]
[ŋ]	-	think [¹ θɪŋk]	thing [¹ θɪŋ]
[f]	few [¹ fju]	often [¹ ɔfən]	life [¹ laɪf]
[v]	voice [¹ vɔɪs]	ever [¹ evə]	give [¹ gɪv]
[θ]	three [¹ θri]	nothing [¹ nʌθɪŋ]	death [¹ deθ]
[ð]	there [¹ ðer]	mother [¹ mʌðə]	smooth [¹ smuð]
[s]	say [¹ seɪ]	also [¹ ɔt̩,soʊ]	yes [¹ jes]
[z]	zone [¹ zoʊn]	music [¹ mju:zɪk]	does [¹ dʌz]
[ʃ]	she [¹ ʃi]	social [¹ soʊʃəl]	fish [¹ fɪʃ]
[ʒ]	genre [¹ ʒɑnrə]	decision [dɪ ¹ sɪʒən]	garage [gɑ ¹ ˌrɑʒ]
[h]	how [¹ haʊ]	perhaps [pə ¹ hæps]	-
[tʃ]	child [¹ tʃaɪəld]	teacher [¹ ti:tʃə]	much [¹ mʌtʃ]
[dʒ]	just [¹ dʒʌst]	major [¹ meɪdʒə]	age [¹ eɪdʒ]
[j]	yet [¹ jet]	million [¹ miljən]	-
[w]	when [¹ wɛn]	away [ə ¹ weɪ]	-
[ɹ]	right [¹ raɪt]	through [¹ θru]	-
[l]	last [¹ læst]	believe [bə ¹ liv]	-

Vowels and Diphthongs in American English

Allophone	At the beginning of a word	In the middle of a word	At the end of a word
[i]	even [ˈi:vən]	these [ˈði:z]	we [ˈwi]
[ɪ]	if [ɪf]	which [ˈwɪtʃ]	many [ˈmeni]
[e]	-	vacation [veˈkeɪʃən]	-
[ɛ]	any [ˈɛni]	said [ˈsed]	-
[æ]	ask [ˈæsk]	back [ˈbæk]	-
[u]	oozing [ˈuzɪŋ]	school [ˈsku:l]	who [ˈhu]
[ʊ]	-	good [ˈɡʊd]	-
[o]	okay [oˈkeɪ]	November [noʊˈvembə]	-
[ɔ]	all [ˈɔ:t]	want [ˈwɔnt]	saw [ˈsɔ]
[ɑ]	October [akˈtəʊbə]	not [ˈnɔt]	grandma [ˈɡrændˌmɑ]
[ə]	about [əˈbaʊt]	people [ˈpi:pəl]	idea [aɪˈdiə]
[ʌ]	other [ˈʌðə]	one [wʌn]	-
[aɪ]	eyes [ˈaɪz]	time [ˈtaɪm]	why [ˈwaɪ]
[aʊ]	out [ˈaʊt]	down [ˈdaʊn]	now [ˈnaʊ]
[ɔɪ]	oil [ˈɔɪl]	point [ˈpɔɪnt]	boy [ˈbɔɪ]
[eɪ]	able [ˈeɪbəl]	make [ˈmeɪk]	way [ˈweɪ]
[oʊ]	over [ˈoʊvə]	both [ˈboʊθ]	so [ˈsoʊ]

Timeline of Norse Animal Styles

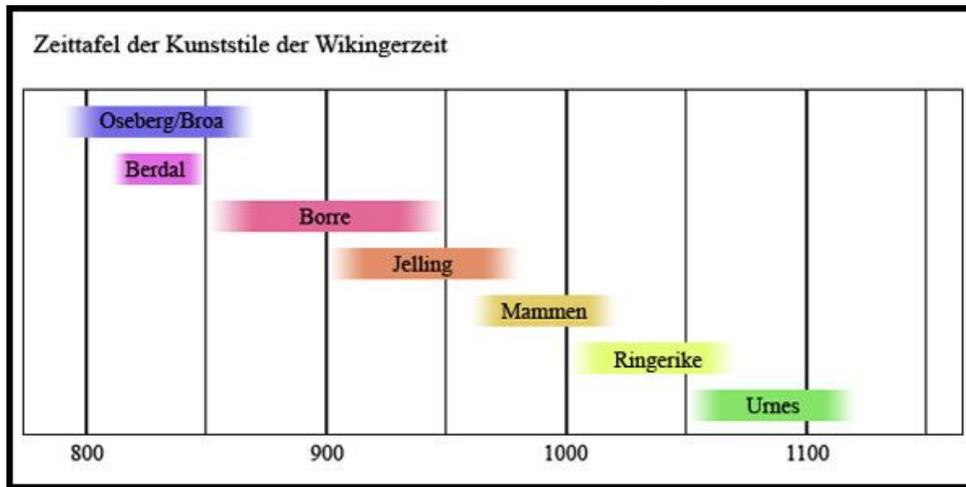


Image from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viking_art#/media/File:Kunststile_der_Wikingerzeit.jpg

Ætt Tables

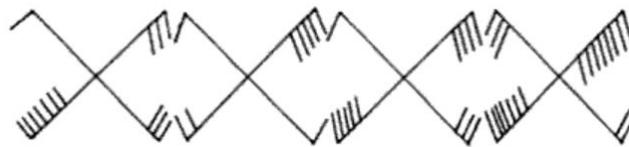
Elder Futhark

First ætt	ƿ	ᚠ	ᚢ	ᚦ	ᚨ	ᚫ	ᚱ	ᚷ
Second ætt	ᚨ	ᚦ	ᚠ	ᚫ	ᚨ	ᚱ	ᚷ	ᚨ/ᚱ
Third ætt	ᚠ	ᚢ	ᚦ	ᚨ	ᚫ	ᚱ	ᚷ	ᚨ

Younger Futhark

First ætt	ƿ	ᚠ	ᚢ	ᚦ	ᚨ	ᚫ
Second ætt	ᚦ	ᚠ	ᚠ	ᚦ	ᚨ	
Third ætt	ᚠ	ᚢ	ᚦ	ᚫ	ᚱ	

Cipher Rune Examples



Tent runes for the name ᚦᚨᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱ *Thorvaldr*
 1x3=th, 3x7=o, 1x5=r, 1x2=u, 1x4=a, 3x5=l, 3x8=d, 2x7=R



Branch runes for ᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱᚱ *ek vitki* "I, Magician" (*ek* is written in straightforward branch runes, but *vitki* is written with the ætts as hooks and the order as branches.) 3x3=e, 1x6=k, 1x8=w, 2x3=i, 3x1=t, 1x6=k, 2x3=i

Practice!

Write the following sentences using Elder Futhark

Oertha is the best principality!

The weather there is perfect.

If you like snow.

Write the following sentences using Younger Futhark

A quill is good for paper.

Runes are better for stone.

And cunning poets.

Write the following sentences using Futhorc

They are very smart.

Who wrote these runes.

Resources

- <https://ordstirr.wordpress.com/runes/younger-futhark-vowels-%E1%9A%A2-u-%E1%9B%81-i-and-%E1%9B%85-a/> - This guy really digs into the vowel quality of three Younger Futhark runes and **I AM HERE FOR IT.**
- <http://www.hurstwic.org/history/articles/literature/text/literature.htm> - I love Hurstic's stuff, they do a great job.
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cipher_runes - Honestly, the most cogent and least ~*mystical*~ write up on runic ciphers that I could find.
- https://lrc.la.utexas.edu/eieol_toc/norol - The University of Texas at Austin's Linguistic Research Center is keeping dead languages alive and **I AM A FAN.**
- <https://www.omniglot.com/writing/runic.htm> - Omniglot is a great resource for finding fun alphabets. Not always correct, but fun.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7Z65582ex4> - The viking cowboy (Dr. Jackson Crawford, Director of Nordic Studies, University of Colorado) does a great video series on Old Norse (and other Viking Age stuff) including the Cowboy Hávamál (<https://jacksonwcrawford.com/the-cowboy-havamal/>).
- <https://rundata.info/>