

3rd edition

Swedish

An Essential Grammar

Ian Hinchliffe and
Philip Holmes



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Swedish

This fully revised third edition of *Swedish: An Essential Grammar* incorporates changes proposed to Swedish grammar by *Svenska Akademiens grammatik*. Examples have been fully updated and the bibliography has been expanded.

Swedish: An Essential Grammar provides a fresh and accessible description of the language. Explanations are free of jargon and emphasis has been placed on areas of Swedish that pose a particular challenge for English-speaking learners.

The book offers:

- a clear, accessible format;
- authentic examples of language use, taken from a range of media;
- clear, jargon-free explanations of grammar.

Suitable for independent study or for class-based tuition, *Swedish: An Essential Grammar* continues to be an invaluable source to all learners looking to improve their knowledge of Swedish grammar.

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Swedish

An Essential Grammar

Third edition



**Ian Hinchliffe and
Philip Holmes**

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Preface

In this book we hope to do two things: first, to provide learners of Swedish with a concise description of the structure of the language, as well as some account of spelling, punctuation, word formation and the differences between spoken and written Swedish; and second, to describe in detail those areas of Swedish that in our experience may pose a challenge for English-language learners.

The book is largely traditional in its approach and terminology. Most of the linguistic and grammatical terms used are explained in a separate glossary at the end of the book. There is also an index that should in many cases serve as a starting point for a search.

With its many tables and charts, the book is intended to be easy to use; it will often be possible for the learner to predict patterns in many new words from just a few simple rules.

Translations of many of the examples are provided. These translations have been kept fairly literal in order to help the learner see contrasts and correlations between Swedish and English.

We would like to thank Olle Kjellin for his invaluable help in preparing the sections on pronunciation, stress and accent, and Claes Christian Elert for permission to use ideas and examples from his *Ljud och ord i svenskan 2* (Stockholm, 1981). Many other students and colleagues, including Brita Green, Jyrki Pietarinen and Vera Croghan, have provided valuable suggestions.

Learners who have progressed to an intermediate level or simply seek more thorough explanations of points of grammar and usage may wish to refer to our much more detailed *Swedish: A Comprehensive Grammar* (Routledge, third edition 2013).

Second edition

The first edition of this book came out in 1997, which preceded the publication of *Svenska Akademiens Grammatik* in 1999. The second edition involves a number of changes, not least a new categorization of noun declensions in Chapter 3 according to the new scheme proposed in *Svenska Akademiens Grammatik*.

There are also numerous changes of details and examples throughout, all made with the aim of clarifying the explanations and updating the idioms and advice on current usage.

Third edition

This fully revised third edition of *Swedish: An Essential Grammar* incorporates many changes of details in order to reflect significant new developments in the language. Many examples have been updated, and many more translations added throughout.

Chapter 7 'Verbs' has been given a new structure. A new introduction has been provided to Chapter 12, while Chapters 1, 5, 13 and 16 have all been substantially revised.

The Short bibliography and the section on Linguistic terms have been updated, and a Note on Finland-Swedish has been added.

In memory of Philip Holmes (1944–2019)

Phil Holmes, co-author not only of *Swedish: An Essential Grammar* but also of four other Routledge books on Swedish grammar and usage, as well as comprehensive grammars of both Danish and Norwegian, passed away shortly before the manuscript for this book was submitted for publication.

As lecturer, Head of Department and later Reader in Scandinavian Studies at the University of Hull (1969–2003), Phil was instrumental in teaching generations of students how to read, write and speak Swedish, Danish and Norwegian. Some have gone on to work and live in Scandinavia, while others have themselves become teachers, translators or interpreters. None can fail to have been impressed by the passion for the languages, literature and

cultures of Scandinavia that Phil shared with such generosity, enthusiasm and expertise.

His skills as a teacher, his diverse publications and the impact his work has had on facilitating communication and cultural exchange between the English-speaking world and Scandinavia serve as an enduring legacy to the scholarship and social engagement of Phil Holmes – educator, colleague, mentor and friend.

Symbols and abbreviations used in the text

[i:]	Phonetic script. The phonetic symbols used are those of the International Phonetic Alphabet
rølig	long stressed vowel, long consonant
røll	short stressed vowel
köpə	unstressed vowel
'kalla, stu'dera	stressed syllable
lite(t), (att)	letter, syllable or word may be omitted
ringer	stem ring plus ending -er
förr/förut	alternatives
hann (← hinna)	hann derives from hinna
x → y	x becomes y , e.g. when an ending is added
*	irregular forms
adj.	adjective
adv.	adverb
C	consonant
CA	clausal adverbial
conj.	conjunction
cons.	consonant
FE	first element
FV	finite verb
IP	infinitive phrase
itr.	intransitive
L	link
Lit.	literally
MC	main clause
NFV	non-finite verb
NP	indefinite noun phrase
OA	other adverbial
Obj/comp,	O/C object/complement
Part.	verb particle

prep.	preposition
S	subject
SC, subcl	subordinate clause
T	topic
tr.	transitive
V	vowel
V-question	question introduced by an interrogative pronoun (V-word)
W	word(s) brought forward, as being more important
X ¹ , X ¹ .	extra position

Symbols and
abbreviations
used in the
text



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Introduction

Some advice for the beginner

In our opinion the secret to being able to speak and write Swedish well lies in three main areas: pronunciation, stress and word order; but an ability to manipulate the language also requires familiarity with several other basic areas of grammar.

Learning Swedish pronunciation is aided by the fact that Swedish is a phonetic language – that is to say, a particular group of letters nearly always corresponds to a particular sound (unlike English which is notorious for its lack of this correspondence). It is possible to learn a few simple rules for Swedish pronunciation, outlined in Chapter 1, which are accurate predictors in nearly all cases except for foreign loanwords.

Stress is important, too, both in regard to which words in the sentence have stress and where, within a particular word, the stress comes. This is explained in 2.1 f.

Swedish has two word accents, which is why Swedes seem to ‘sing’ when they pronounce some words. The rules for the occurrence of these accents are detailed in 2.3 ff.

Word order and sentence structure are basic building blocks of the language, a sure foundation that cannot be ignored if the learner wishes to speak and write Swedish beyond a very basic level. Swedish main clause word order, for example, is much more flexible than English order: the sentence more often begins with a word (or words) other than the subject, and sentence elements may appear in several different positions in main and subordinate clauses. Some simple rules are given at the beginning of Chapter 12, but to master word order requires familiarity with the detail found in the rest of that chapter.

0.2 Similarities between Swedish and English

This is a comparative grammar: by concentrating on the differences between Swedish and English it specifically addresses the needs of English-speaking learners. However, it should also be kept in mind just how *similar* these two languages are. A few major similarities that will help the learner acquire a knowledge of Swedish are outlined here.

0.2.1 Vocabulary

- 1 Both Swedish and English are Germanic languages and possess a large core vocabulary of words that are identical or almost identical.

arm, fot, finger, gräs, hus, knä, lamm, oss, skarp, son, två, tre, vi
arm, foot, finger, grass, house, knee, lamb, us, sharp, son, two, three, we

- 2 Many English words have been borrowed into Swedish.

baby, bestseller, cykel, deodorant, jeans, jobb, match, potatis, reporter, service

0.2.2 Grammar

- 1 In both languages only nominative and genitive cases are found for nouns.

skepparen i båten	the skipper in the boat
skepparens katt	the skipper's cat

- 2 Both languages have subject and object forms of pronouns.

vi	we
oss	us

- 3 A similar distinction is found between adjectives and adverbs.

dyr	dear
dyrt	dearly

- 4 The languages have similar methods for comparing adjectives:

(a) with inflexional endings

fet	fat
fetare	fatter
fetast	fattest

(b) without inflexional endings

typisk	typical
mer typisk	more typical
mest typisk	most typical

- 5 Both languages have weak verbs with a dental ending (incorporating -d/-t) in the past tense.

Vi cyklade.	We cycled.
De kysste mig.	They kissed me.

- 6 Both languages have strong verbs with a vowel change in the past tense.

Vi sitter.	We sit.
Vi satt.	We sat.

- 7 The languages have similar modal auxiliary verbs.

kan, ska, måste	can, shall, must
De kan komma.	They can come.

- 8 The languages have a similar use of tenses.

Vi är här nu.	We are here now.
Vi kom i april.	We came in April.
Vi ska flyga hem nästa vecka.	We will fly home next week.
Han har studerat i England.	He has studied in England.

- 9 The languages have a similar use of the formal subject (Swedish **det** = 'it/there').

Det är kallt här.	It is cold here.
Det finns ett museum där.	There is a museum there.

- 10 Both languages have inverted (verb-subject) word order for questions.

Var är vi?	Where are we?
Är du sjuk?	Are you sick?

- 11 Both languages have only pre-positioned attributive adjectives.

en varm sommar	a warm summer
den varma sommaren	the warm summer

Chapter I

Pronunciation

The phonetic script used here is that of the International Phonetic Association; English equivalents are those of educated southern British English. Long vowels, as well as long consonants (those following a short stressed vowel) are marked with an underline.

I.1 Vowels

The contrast between stressed and unstressed vowels is important in Swedish. Stressed vowels may be either long or short.

mat	[mɑ:t]	matt	[mat]
food		dull	

Unstressed vowels are always short.

ställe	[stɛlə]	köper	[çø:pər]
place		buys	

Short vowels are very short, shorter than in English. Long vowels are very long, longer than in English.

I.1.1 Stressed vowels and their pronunciation

Nine different letters represent 21 different vowel sounds.

Back vowels

A		Å		O			
[ɑ:]	[a]	[o:]	[ɔ]	[ɔ:]	[ɔ]	[o:]	[ɔ]
glas glass	glass ice cream	hål hole	håll direction	rot root	rott rowed	ordna fix	kopp cup

Front vowels

U		E					Ä		
[ʊ ^w]	[u]	[e:]	[ɛ]	[æ:]	[æ]	[ɛ:]	[ɛ]	[æ:]	[æ]
brun	brunn	fet	fett	Per	herr	väg	vägg	bära	märka
brown	well	fat	grease	(name)	mister	road	wall	carry	mark
I		Y		Ö					
[i:]	[i]	[y:]	[y]	[ø:]	[ø]	[œ:]	[œ]		
fin	finns	myt	bytt	hög	högg	höra	förra		
fine	be	myth	changed	high	chopped	hear	previous		

Notes:

1 Pronunciation of letter O: When long, the pronunciation [ɔ:] is more common than [o:], e.g. **stor** [stɔ:r], 'big', is more usual than **ordna** [o:ɖna], 'fix'. When short, the pronunciation [ɔ] is more common than [o], e.g. **kosta** [kɔsta], 'cost', is more usual than **ost** [ɔst], 'cheese'.

2 In the pronunciation of some vowels, especially Ä, Å, Ö, U there is a marked difference in quality (position of tongue and lips) between long and short.

3 Pronunciation of E, Ä, Ö before R is more open than in other positions.

4 Some long vowels in Swedish are diphthongs ending in a fricative end-phase: i [iʲ], y [yʲ], u [uʷ], o [oʷ].

5 In the combination **eu** U is pronounced as V before a voiced consonant in some loanwords (**neuros** [nevro:s], 'neurosis') and as F before an unvoiced consonant in some loanwords (**terapeut** [teraɸɛft], 'therapist'). But notice also: **Europa** [erɔ:pä], 'Europe'

Approximate equivalent to pronunciation (here English = British English):

Long a	[ɑ:]	'a' in English 'father, dark'
Short a	[a]	'a' in English 'hat, hand'
Long å	[o:]	'a' in English 'all', but with lip-rounding
Short å	[ɔ]	'o' in English 'hot'
Long o	[ɔ ^w]	'oo' in English 'doom, moon', with extreme lip-rounding and w-like fricative end-phase
Short o	[ɔ]	'oo' in English 'book' with less extreme lip-rounding
Long u	[ʊ ^w]	Long u has no equivalent but is similar to 'u' in English 'futile, putrid'. With extreme lip-rounding and w-like fricative end-phase
Short u	[u]	'u' in English 'put', lax lip-rounding
Long e	[e:]	No equivalent in English, compare French <i>été</i>
Short e	[ɛ]	'e' in English 'pen, best'
Long ä	[ɛ:]	'ea' in English 'bear', but longer