

## Hard and Soft vowels in Swedish

**The information in this document is also available as a video in English at:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=9GUJelguQis&ab\\_channel=LingoLib](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=9GUJelguQis&ab_channel=LingoLib)

Starting with the vowels. There are nine vowels in Swedish: -a, -e, -i, -o, -u, -y, -å, -ä, and -ö. You'll notice, if you're an English speaker, that they look pretty similar except for those additional vowels at the end. Those nine vowels though, can be separated into what are traditionally known as hard (hårda) and soft (mjuka) vowels.

The hard vowels are: -a, -o, -u, -å. The soft vowels are: -e, -i, -y, -ä, -ö. They are also sometimes referred to as front and back vowels. The hard vowels are the back vowels and the soft vowels are the front vowels. This describes where in your mouth that you articulate the vowels.

So, to review:

Hard/back vowels: -a, -o, -u, -å

Soft/front vowels: -e, -i, -y, -ä, -ö

With all that in mind, let's take a look at the consonants. The few we'll be looking at all change depending on the vowels that follow it. Here is a list of a few words as examples that demonstrate each change in pronunciation.

We'll start with -g.

The hard -g sound is similar to how you would pronounce the -g in the English word, gift.

- Gata (street)
- God (good)
- Gul (yellow)
- Gåva (gift)

Notice the -a, -o, -u, and -å that follow the -g.

The soft -g sound is similar to the -y sound in the English word, yawn.

- Ge (give)
- Gick (walked)
- Gymnasium (high school)
- Gärna (gladly)
- Göra (do)

This time, notice the -e, -i, -y, -ä, and -ö that follow the -g.

Next, the –k.

The hard –k sound is similar to the –c sound in the English word cookie.

- Kaka (cookie)
- Koka (boil)
- Kul (fun)
- Kår (corps, group)

The soft –k sound is similar to the –sh sound in the English word, shopping.

- Kemi (chemistry)
- Kikare (binoculars)
- Kyckling (chicken)
- Kärlek (love)
- Köra (drive)

And finally, the –sk.

The hard –sk sound is similar to the –sch sound in the English word, school.

- Skatt (tax, treasure)
- Skola (school)
- Skugga (shadow)
- Skål (bowl, cheers)

The soft –sk sound is similar to the sound of the wind on the ocean. This is one of the more difficult sounds to make in Swedish for a lot of students. And that's ok. The pronunciation differs a bit depending on dialect. I prefer the wind on the ocean sound. The sound that many people try to say is most similar is the –sh sound in the English word, shoe. Now take that sound and move your tongue further back in your mouth and you'll get closer to that wind on the ocean sound.

- Skepp (ship)
- Skinka (ham, butt)
- Skynda (hurry)
- Skära (cut)
- Skön (beautiful)