

Rune Piece 07 - Writing with Runes

I am frequently asked by site visitors about writing in runes. People want to represent their names in runes, write secret or cryptic messages, create runic inscriptions or spells, and a dozen other reasons. One of the big misconceptions is that runes are a language and one has to translate modern English (or indeed any other modern language) into runes before writing. But that is not the case.

The runes are not in any language. They are simply a system of writing, so you can write any word you can say using runes instead of the letters of the modern alphabet that we use to write English. Just think of the runes as an ancient alphabet called the Futhark with 24 runes instead our alphabet with its 26 letters.

























There is no need to **translate** anything as it will sound the same whatever writing system you use. Just as the letters we call English (actually they are known as the Roman script) are not in any language because they are used by dozens of languages. Same thing with Arabic script which is used for dozens of different languages, or the Cyrillic script which is used by half a dozen languages. So it is with the runes - they can be used to write any language you like.

The original users did have their own different languages - Scythian, Teutonic, Saxon, Danish, Norse, and eventually old English or Anglo-Saxon. So there is no reason you can't use them for any language you like, including English. The only thing to remember is that the runes are phonetic, in other words you write things they way they sound, not the way they are spelled. Because runes do not follow English spelling.

Lets take the English word THING as an example. The TH sound is represented by just one rune instead of the two letters T and H, so you write Thurisaz; not Tiwaz with Hagalaz. And the NG sound is represented by the single rune Ingwaz, not Naudiz with Gebo.

So the word THING written in runes is - Thurisaz Isa Ingwaz.

Transcribing modern letters into runes isn't as easy as you might think because the ancients didn't use the same sounds we do today. They had some we don't use, and we have some that they didn't have. In any case, on the following page is a table giving my own rendering of the letter equivalents for each rune:

Rune	Name	Letter Equivalent	Sound
	Fehu	F	F as in fat
	Uruz	U	U as in under or OO as in fool
	Thurisaz	Th	Th compound consonant as in thin, or in weather
	Ansuz	A	A as in add
	Raido	R	R as in red
	Kauno	C (hard), K	C as in cat; K as in king
	Gebo	G	G as is good; Gh as in loch
	Wunjo	W, V	W as in wax; v as in van
	Hagalaz	H	H as in hat
	Naudiz	N	N as in now
	Isa	I (short)	I as in sit
	Jera	J, Y	J as in jam; Y as in yap
	Ihwaz	I (long)	I as in site, Y as in style
	Perth	P	P as in pot
	Algiz	Z	Z as in zone. S as in cousin (also rolling rrr in Scottish dialect)
	Sowilo	C (soft), S	C as in nice; S as sit
	Tiwaz	T	T as in top
	Berkanan	B	B as in bag
	Ehwaz	E	E as in end
	Mannaz	M	M as in man
	Laguz	L	L as in let
	Ingwaz	Ng	Ng compound consonant as in finger
	Othila	O	O as in old, or in cot
	Dagaz	D	D as in dog

To transcribe anything into runes first write it down in normal English. Then go through the words and change them to a phonetic form. Suppose we want to transcribe HAVE A HAPPY BIRTHDAY RINGO into runes. I don't actually know anybody called Ringo personally, but its a good name to use for this example because it has the NG sound in it. OK, let's start by writing the sentence phonetically: HAV A HAPY BIR(th)DAY RI(ng)O.

First thing you notice is I have removed the silent E from the end of HAVE. No need to transcribe silent letters since they have no sound value.

Next you will see that I have reduced the double P to a single letter. So far as the sound of the word is concerned, the second P is quite superfluous.

Next, you will see I have put the TH of BIRTHDAY in brackets because we know they are going to become a single rune when we transcribe. There is actually a symbol for this in English phonetics - you will see it used in dictionaries where they show you how to pronounce words. It looks like this: **θ**. See how similar this symbol is to the rune Thurisaz? That's because it is Thurisaz, or at least it's a modern representation of the ancient rune. Phoneticists call it thorn which is a modern translation for one of the rune's ancient names. The phonetic symbol for the NG sound is : **ŋ**, but it is not derived from any runic form. I have bracketed the N and the G together where they appear in RINGO for the same reason - they are going to be transcribed as a single rune as well.

So here is the transcribed message:

NRP N NRKJ BIRÞMKJ RIXX

You will have to make your own mind up about diphthong vowels. The ancients were very individual in the way they represented diphthongs like ea, ei, or oi. Some wrote two vowel runes, some combined two into a bindrune, and others just used the nearest rune to the sound they wanted. You might find examples in runic inscriptions where the word AID is written as:

NIW, or NJW, or just NW.

In simple terms then, you just substitute runes for each letter of the phonetic message or name and put a space between each word. The ancients didn't always leave a space and the didn't actually have any punctuation marks, but there are a number of runic inscriptions where a colon-type mark and sometimes a small cross are used to separate words. So, if you think it will make your message easier to read, by all means use some simple form of punctuation.

The examples I have given are written from left-to-right, the same way we write modern English. But the ancients were not so particular about the direction. There are numerous examples of writing from right-to-left, and there are a few examples of "continuous stave" writing. This was writing left-to-right on the first line then right-to-left on the next, and so on making the passage continuous, but reversing direction every line just like you move your counter in the Snakes and Ladders game..

There are a few odd examples of writing vertically both downwards and upwards and I know of one rune stone where the writing follows the outline of a writhing snake so that some of the inscription is up-side-down.

So don't feel that your runic transcription has to follow the left-to-right rules of modern English, have fun and be experimental!