

# Notes on the Anishinaabemowin Person Prefixes<sup>1</sup>

## Basic Forms of Person Prefixes

Person	Prefix
1 <sup>st</sup>	ni
2 <sup>nd</sup>	gi
3 <sup>rd</sup>	o

These prefixes show considerable variation in their individual pronunciations, depending on the first sound of the stem (word) that they are attached to. The notes which follow lay out in detail points of person prefix variation.

**First Person Prefix.** The form of the **first person** prefix is as follows.

im	before	b
in	before	d, j, z, zh
in [ɪ]	before	g
ni	before	m, n, w, p, t, k, s, sh
ind	before	i, o, a, e, aa, ii, oo (all vowels)

At first glance these patterns may seem very complex and difficult, but they actually reduce to a few simple rules.

## The First Person Prefix with Weak Consonants

The first person prefix is spelled «in» before a weak consonant.

Recall that there is a set of consonants that form strong and weak pairs. These pairs are as follows:

Weak	Strong
b	p
d	t
j	ch
g	k
z	s
zh	sh

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In many dialects of Anishinaabemowin, the form of the first person prefix is /nin/ before a weak consonant. The second /n/ is perhaps added to reinforce the difference between strong and weak consonants. In Wisconsin and Minnesota Anishinaabemowin, the first nasal is then deleted (not pronounced), producing the form «in», which looks very different from the prefix form «ni».

### Pronunciation of First Person Prefix Before /b/ and /g/.

#### Adjust /n/ to /m/ before /b/.

This is a rule of pronunciation that is found widely among the languages of the world. For example, English has a prefix «in-» that means ‘not,’ as in *inaccurate* and *indirect*. This prefix is pronounced and spelled as «m» before a word that begins with a /b/, as in *imbalance*. English does the same thing with words that start with /p/ and /m/, as in *impossible*, and *immature*. The reason for this shift is that /m/, unlike /n/, is made with one lips, just as /b/ (and /m/ and /p) is. Example, **im**baabaa, ‘my father’; **im**bakazhaawe, ‘I clean fish.’

#### Adjust /n/ to /ŋ/ before /g/.

This rule is common, too, and is found in English. The phonetic symbol /ŋ/ (which is called eng) represents a nasal sound that is pronounced by putting the back of the tongue against the soft palate, which is the same place where the sound /g/ is made. The sound /ŋ/ is the last sound of the English word *ping*, as opposed to that of *pin*, which is an /n/. Notice that although the sounds /ŋ/ and /n/ are clearly different, English spells them with the same letter, «n», as in *looking*, and *something*, where in careful speech, they are both pronounced as /ŋ/. But in fast speech, most speakers of American English drop the final /g/, and then, how is the final nasal pronounced? It is pronounced as an /n/.

Examples: **in**gozis, ‘my son’; **in**googii, ‘I dive.’

#### Examples of First Person Prefix with Stems Beginning with Weak Consonants

Stem-Initial Sound	Prefix Form	Example	Gloss
/b/	im	<b>im</b> bakade	‘I am hungry’
/d/	in	<b>in</b> dagoshin	‘I arrive’
/g/	in [ŋ]	<b>in</b> giwe	‘I go back/go home’
/z/	in	<b>in</b> zagaswaa	‘I smoke’
/zh/	in	<b>in</b> zhooshkwaada’e	‘I skate’

## Stems Beginning with a Vowel

For a stem that begins with a vowel, add a /d/ before adding a person prefix.

This accounts for the patterns of all vowel-initial stems (except for one minor detail discussed below).

It also accounts for the main variant forms of the second and third person prefixes:

The form of the **second person** prefix is

gid	before	a vowel initial stem
gi		everywhere else

The form of the **third person** prefix is

od	before	a vowel initial stem
o		everywhere else

## Some Examples of Prefixes Added to Vowel-Initial Stems

**ind**emikwaan ‘my spoon’    **gid**emikwaan ‘your spoon’    **od**emikwaan ‘ANs’s spoon’

**inda**aagim ‘my snowshoe’    **gida**aagim ‘your snowshoe’    **oda**aagiman ‘ANs’s snowshoe’

See below for more extensive examples.

## Stems Beginning with a Strong Consonant (Dependent Nouns)

Note that there is only a tiny number of words that begin with a strong consonant.

Strong Consonants: k    p    s    sh    t

Examples	<b>ni</b> kaad	‘my leg’
	<b>ni</b> pan	‘my lung’
	<b>ni</b> sayenh	‘my older brother’
	<b>ni</b> shiime	‘my younger sibling’
	<b>ni</b> tawag	‘my ear’
	<b>gi</b> kaad	‘your leg’
	<b>gi</b> pan	‘your lung’
	etc.	
	<b>o</b> kaad	‘her/his leg’
	<b>o</b> pan	‘her/his lung’

Note also that all of the stems that begin with a strong consonant are **dependent nouns** (that is, they **require** a person prefix, which effectively means that the strong consonant is never the first sound of the word). All of these dependent nouns take the basic prefix forms (/ni/, /gi/, /o/), as can be seen above.

No independent noun begins with a strong consonant, except those that have a reduced form of *gichi-* ‘big, great,’ such as

**chi**-mookomaan            ‘American’

But even these restore the long form when adding prefixes:

in**gichi**-mookomaaniw        ‘I am an American’

### Dependent Noun Stems Beginning with /ii/ and /oo/.

There is a handful of **dependent** nouns which have stems that begin with the long vowels /ii/ or /oo/. These stems take the following prefixes:

	First Person	Second Person	Third Person
Stems that begin with ii	n	g	w
Stems that begin with oo	n	g	(no prefix)
Examples			
stem /iibid/	<b>n</b> iibid ‘my tooth’	<b>g</b> iibid ‘your tooth’	<b>w</b> iibid ‘her/his/its tooth’
stem /ookomis/	<b>n</b> ookomis ‘my granny’	<b>g</b> ookomis ‘your granny’	ookomisan ‘her/his granny’

### Lengthening of /o/ after a Person Prefix

Any word, noun or verb, that starts with a short /o/ is pronounced (and spelled) with a long /oo/ after a person prefix.

<b>o</b> pwaagan	‘pipe’	<b>indoop</b> pwaagan <b>gidoo</b> pwaagan <b>odoo</b> pwaaganan	‘my pipe’ ‘your pipe’ ‘his/her pipe’
<b>o</b> damino	‘play’	<b>indoo</b> damin <b>gidoo</b> damin <b>o</b> damino <sup>2</sup>	‘I am playing’ ‘you are playing’ ‘s/he is playing’

<sup>2</sup> Remember that this first /o/ is not a person prefix, but a part of the basic word, *odamino*, ‘play.’

## Forms of First Person Prefixes, Organized by First Letter of Stem

	First Person	Second Person	Third Person
a	(n)ind	gid	od
aa	(n)ind	gid	od
b	(n)im	gi	o
ch	-	-	-
d	(n)in	gi	o
e	(n)ind	gid	od
g	(n)in [ŋ]	gi	o
h	-	-	-
'	-	-	-
i	(n)ind	gid	od
ii <sup>3</sup>	n	g	w
j	(n)in	gi	o
k	ni	gi	o
m	ni	gi	o
n	ni	gi	o
o	(n)ind	gid	od
oo <sup>4</sup>	n	g	—
oo <sup>5</sup>	(n)ind	gid	od
p	ni	gi	o
s	ni	gi	o
sh	ni	gi	o
t	ni	gi	o
w	ni	gi	o
y	-	-	-
z	(n)in	gi	o
zh	(n)in	gi	o

<sup>3</sup> Almost all words that begin with /ii/ are dependent nouns, such as *niibid*, 'my tooth.'

<sup>4</sup> When the /oo/ is the first sound of a dependent noun such as *nookomis*, 'my grandmother.'

<sup>5</sup> With the very few independent nouns that start with /oo/, e.g., *ookwemin*, 'chokecherry.'

## Examples of Each Variant of the First Person Prefix

<b>im</b>	before	<b>b</b>	<b>im</b> baabaa	‘my father’
(or <b>nim</b> )			<b>im</b> boodawe	‘I build a fire’

<b>in</b>	before	<b>d</b>	<b>in</b> daanis	‘my daughter’
(or <b>nin</b> )			<b>in</b> debwe	‘I speak the truth’
		<b>j</b>	<b>in</b> jaanzh	‘my nose’
			<b>in</b> jiibaakwe	‘I cook’
		<b>z</b>	<b>in</b> zid	‘my foot’
			<b>in</b> zoongide’e	‘I am brave’
		<b>zh</b>	<b>in</b> zhishenh	‘my cross-uncle’
			<b>in</b> zhaagode’e	‘I am cowardly’

<b>in [iŋ]</b>	before	<b>g</b>	<b>in</b> gozis	‘my son’
(or <b>nin</b> )			<b>in</b> googii	‘I dive’

<b>ni</b>	before	<b>m</b>	<b><u>ni</u>misad</b>	‘my belly’
			<b><u>ni</u>minode’e</b>	‘I am kind’
		<b>n</b>	<b><u>ni</u>nik</b>	‘my arm’
			<b><u>ni</u>nibaa</b>	‘I sleep’
		<b>w</b>	<b><u>ni</u>waagaakwad(om)</b>	‘my axe’
			<b><u>ni</u>waakaa’ige</b>	‘I build a house’
		<b>p</b>	<b><u>ni</u>pan</b>	‘my lung’
		<b>t</b>	<b><u>ni</u>tawag</b>	‘my ear’
		<b>k</b>	<b><u>ni</u>kaad</b>	‘my leg’
		<b>s</b>	<b><u>ni</u>sayenh</b>	‘my older brother’
		<b>sh</b>	<b><u>ni</u>shiime</b>	‘my younger sibling’

<b>ind</b>	before	i	<b>ind</b> ikidowin	‘my word’
(or <b>nind</b> )			<b>ind</b> inaada’e	‘I skate there’
		o <sup>6</sup>	<b>ind</b> oopwaagan	‘my pipe’
			<b>ind</b> oonjibaa	‘I come from there’
		a	<b>ind</b> akik	‘my kettle’
			<b>ind</b> agoodoo	‘I set a snare’
		e	<b>ind</b> eshkan	‘my ice chisel’
			<b>ind</b> ezhishin	‘I leave a mark’
		oo	<b>ind</b> ookwemin	‘my black cherry’
		aa	<b>ind</b> aagim	‘my snowshoe’
			<b>ind</b> aakoz	‘I am ill’

<sup>6</sup> Recall that a word beginning with a short /o/ lengthens the /o/ after a person prefix.



<b>n</b>	before	a few dependent nouns that have stems beginning with long vowels, such as...						
		<table><tr><td data-bbox="747 378 893 441"><b><u>n</u>ookomis</b></td><td data-bbox="1071 378 1369 493">'my grandmother' stem /ookomis/</td></tr><tr><td data-bbox="747 546 844 609"><b><u>ni</u>ibid</b></td><td data-bbox="1071 546 1369 661">'my tooth' stem /iibid/</td></tr><tr><td data-bbox="747 714 844 777"><b><u>ni</u>inim</b></td><td data-bbox="1071 714 1369 879">'my sibling-in-law of the opposite sex' stem /iinim/</td></tr></table>	<b><u>n</u>ookomis</b>	'my grandmother' stem /ookomis/	<b><u>ni</u>ibid</b>	'my tooth' stem /iibid/	<b><u>ni</u>inim</b>	'my sibling-in-law of the opposite sex' stem /iinim/
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