

Fifty easy proverbs for Icelandic learners selected from Sölvi Sveinsson, *Íslenskir málshættir með skýringum og dæmum* (Reykjavík: Iðunn, 1995).

See for further resources relating to these proverbs http://www.alarichall.org.uk/teaching/icelandic_proverbs.php

proverb	literal translation	meaning / equivalent
að kveldi skal maður dag lofa	at evening must a person praise (the) day	don't count your chickens before they hatch
að hika er sama og tapa	to hesitate is (the) same as to lose	to hesitate is to lose
af illum brunni kemur óhreint vatn	from a bad well comes unclean water	
aldrei er góð vísa of oft kveðin	never is a good verse too often sung	you can't have too much of a good thing
allir bera eitthvað mein til grafar	all carry some kind of harm to the grave	no-one goes through life without suffering
best er að smíða meðan jánið er heitt	it's best to work while the iron is hot	
betra er að vera góðs manns frilla en gefin illa	it's better to be a good man's mistress than (to be) married badly	
betra er að vera ógiftur en illa giftur	it's better to be unmarried than badly married	
betra er brjóstvit en bókvit	breast-wisdom is better than book-wisdom	intuition is better than learning
betra er lán en liggjandi fé	a loan is better than wealth lying (around)	better to lend money out than to hoard it
betra er ólofað en illa efnt	unpromised is better than badly done	
betri er friður en bardagi	peace is better than war	
betri er lítill fiskur en tómur diskur	better a little fish than an empty dish	better a little than none at all
betri er raun góð en raup mikið	better a good reality than a big boast	
betur mega tveir en einn	two can better than one	
blindur er bókláus maður	blind is a bookless person	
blindur er dauðadagur	blind is (the) day of death	you can't see death coming
blindur ratar sjaldan rétt	a blind (man) seldom navigates straight	
daufur er barnlaus bæ	dull is a childless farm	
dóttir fer í móður serk	a daughter fits in (her) mother's shirt	like mother like daughter
dropinn holar harðan stein	the drop hollows the hard stone	a little axe can cut down a big tree
eigi fellur tré við hið fyrsta högg	a tree doesn't fall at the first blow	Rome wasn't built in a day
einn er litur allra kúa um nætur	one is the colour of all cows at night	all cows are the same colour at night
eins dauði er annars brauð	one's death is another's bread	every cloud has a silver lining
ekki dugir úlfs hár að gylla	it's not enough to gild a wolf's hair	a leopard can't change its spots
ekki er allt gull sem glóir	not all is gold that glitters	all that glitters is not gold
ekki eru allir fuglar haukar	not all birds are hawks	people aren't all the same
ekki sigla allir sama byr	not all sail the same breeze	people don't all have the same opportunities
ekki skína allir dagar eins heitt	all days don't shine as hot	you have good days and you have bad days
engar fréttir eru góðar fréttir	no news is good news	
engin nótt er svo dimm að eigi komi dagur á eftir	no night is so dark that day won't come after	
enginn er alheimskur ef þegja kann	no-one is entirely stupid if [they] know how to shut up	
enginn er meiri en maður	no-one is greater than a person	there's only so much that it's humanly possible to do
enginn er of gamall gott að læra	no-one is too old to learn (something) good	
enginn skyldi hafa tvær tungur í einu höfði	no-one should have two tongues in one head	don't talk differently about someone behind their back from how you'd talk to them in person
ég þakka það þegar ég smakka það	I'll thank (for) that when I taste it	I'm dubious about this ostensibly good thing you're offering me
far þú í dans en gættu hvar þú stígur	go in the dance but watch where you step	
flest er hey í harðindum	most (stuff) is hay in hard times	necessity is the mother of invention
góður dagur byrjar að morgni	a good day begins at morning	the early bird catches the worm
hver hefur sína byrði að bera	everyone has his/her burden to bear	
illt er betra en ekki	badly is better than not	better to try and fail than not to try at all
lífið er stutt en listin löng	life is short but art (is) long	
maður er manns gaman	a person is a person's joy	people need company
oft er grey í góðs manns ætt	there's often a wretch in a good person's family	
oft er vitur maður seinn til svars	often is a wise person slow to answer	
oft eru þau sárin verst sem ekki blæða	often are those wounds worst which don't bleed	people bottle up their worst sufferings
oft gefur gamall maður góð ráð	often an old person gives good advice	
oft kemur skin eftir skúr	often comes (sun)shine after a shower	
sannleikurinn bítur best	the truth bites best	the truth hurts (more than lies)
skíts er von úr rassi	there is an expectation of shit from an arse	