



Gaelic for “son of,” Mac is the most common element of Scottish and Irish surnames. In both countries, Mc is *always* an abbreviation of Mac.

There is no factual basis to the American myth that Mac is Scottish, and Mc is Irish.

In the United States, early census takers were often instructed to abbreviate Mac to Mc. Sometimes Mac was abbreviated M' although this spelling is uncommon now. At times, all three versions can be seen. (In a book on Highland music, the author spelled his name three different ways on the first two pages: "MacDonald", "McDonald", and "M' Donald.")

Persons researching a name spelled “Mc” need to remember that it is a conventional abbreviation for “Mac.” Black's *The Surnames of Scotland* and MacLysaght's *The Surnames of Ireland* both treat “Mac” in the same way--as the only and original spelling. This same advice is shared in the 1984 book, *Tartan for Me!* To find “McDougall” (or McDougald or any

other variation of the spelling) look for “MacDougall.” The same applies to McDowall or McDowell: look for the original spelling, MacDowall.

Regardless of spelling, Mac or Mc is always considered an addition to a name. Before there was a MacDougall (son of Dougall or Dugal) there was of course, Dougall (Dugal).

Some clans made other adaptations. For example, some MacDonalds who spoke Gaelic translated their names from MacDonald to Donaldson. In Scotland and Nova Scotia, names beginning with Mac were traditionally alphabetized under the first letter of the second name – e.g., MacArthur under “A.” Many Scots dropped 'Mac' as they emigrated.

In some cases, it became the practice in both the south of Scotland and in Ireland to write the two words (e.g., Mac and Gill) that had been combined into a single name (MacGill) as just one condensed word (Magill).

So, does it really matter? Whether your name begins with Mac or Mc, be proud of your Scottish heritage and your clan lineage!