



LANGUAGE COURSE

Old English Reading 1

10 Chapters

Philip Osztromok

Generated with Claude

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Old English Reading 1

Chapter 1 · Reading Strategy

Reading Strategy

From Chapter 2 on, every chapter reads one real text. Before that, you need a routine. This chapter gives one, and practises it on short sentences. It assumes Old English Grammar 1; each step names the chapter of that course it comes from.

THE ROUTINE IN ONE BOX

Verb first, subject second, cases third, small words last. Find the verb and its clause type, find the subject, use the endings to work out who did what to whom, then fit in the prepositions and little words. Do not translate left to right.

Why not left to right?

In Modern English the order of the words tells you who did what. In Old English the endings do that, and the order is freer. Old English Grammar 1 (Chapter 10) gives the defaults: the verb is second in a main clause and last in a subordinate clause. So a line that looks scrambled to an English reader is usually following a pattern. Find the pattern first.

The routine, step by step

STEP	ASK	LOOK BACK AT
1. Verb	Where is the finite verb? Main clause (verb second) or subordinate clause (verb last)?	Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10
2. Verb type	Weak, strong, preterite-present or one of the odd verbs? Which person, number, tense and mood?	Old English Grammar 1, Chapters 8 and 9
3. Subject	Which nominative noun or pronoun agrees with the verb?	Old English Grammar 1, Chapters 3 and 7

STEP	ASK	LOOK BACK AT
4. Cases	What case is each remaining noun? Genitive "of", dative "to/for", accusative object.	Old English Grammar 1, Chapters 2 to 4
5. Agreement	Does each article and adjective match its noun in gender, number and case?	Old English Grammar 1, Chapters 5 and 6
6. Small words	Prepositions (which case do they take?), ne , pā , pe .	Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10
7. Read it again	Now put it into English, and check that it makes sense.	

Worked example 1: a sentence from the grammar article

Pā ic hām ēode, pā slēp ic.

then I home went, then slept I

"When I went home, I slept."

Source: Wikipedia, *Old English grammar*, Syntax section (read in Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10).
Gloss and layout as given there.

1. **Verbs:** **ēode** ends the first clause, so that clause is subordinate. **slēp** comes right after the second **pā**, so the second clause is the main one and the verb is second.
2. **Verb types:** **ēode** is the past of **gān** (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9). **slēp** is a past with no ending and first person singular.
3. **Subject:** **ic** both times. In the main clause it follows the verb, because the clause begins with **pā**.
4. **Small words:** the two **pā** are a pair: "when ... then". The article states that this is how "when X, Y" is built.

Worked example 2: a sentence with cases (mine)

Iċ sealde hire þone beall.

I gave her(dative) the(accusative) ball(accusative)

"I gave her the ball."

Mine: a sentence built from forms taught in Old English Grammar 1, Chapters 3 and 7. Not a quotation from a text.

1. **Verb: sealde**, a past singular, first person.
2. **Subject: iċ**.
3. **Cases: hire** is the dative, the person who receives. **þone beall** is the accusative, the thing that was given.

The order here happens to match English. Try reordering it: **þone beall sealde iċ hire** still means the same, because the endings, not the positions, give the roles. (This reordering is my own illustration of the principle in the Old English article, not a line from a text.)

Worked example 3: a question (mine)

Ġesāwe þū þæs hundes bān?

saw you the(genitive) dog's(genitive) bone(accusative)

"Did you see the dog's bone?"

Mine: built from forms taught in Old English Grammar 1, Chapters 3 and 10. Not a quotation from a text.

- The verb comes first and the subject **þū** follows it: a question made by inversion, with no helper verb.
- **þæs hundes** is genitive, "of the dog". It stands in front of **bān**, the thing seen.

Practical notes for real texts

- **Look up the base form.** A dictionary lists verbs by the infinitive and nouns by the nominative singular, so strip or change the ending before you look a word up.
- **Marks.** The macrons (**ā**, **ē**) and the dots on **ġ**, **ċ** are modern editors' marks (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 1). Many editions of a text leave them out, so a word may look

unfamiliar until you add them back in your head.

- **Spelling varies.** Manuscripts differ in how they spell the same word. Each chapter's *Watch out* box points out the differences in its text.

Watch out

A familiar-looking word may not mean what you expect. **hund** is "dog" (our *hound*), not "hundred". Check the gloss before you rely on a resemblance.



Quick Reference

DO THIS

BECAUSE

Find the verb first

Verb second in main clauses, last in subordinate clauses

Find the subject next

Nominative, agrees with the verb

Read the endings

Cases show roles; word order is freer

Treat **þā ... þā** as a pair

"When X, then Y"

Expect inversion in questions

No *do*-support



Try It Yourself

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. In **Þā ic hām ēode, þā slēp ic.** which clause is the main clause, and how can you tell?

▼ Show answer

The second one: its verb **slēp** is second, whereas **ēode** ends the first clause.

2. In **Ic sealde hire þone beall,** what case is **hire**, and what is its job?

▼ Show answer

Dative: the person who receives the ball ("to her").

3. What case is **þone beall**?

▼ Show answer

Accusative: the direct object.

4. Translate (mine): **þæt mægden rann**. Hints: **mægden** "girl", **rann** the past of **rinnan** "run".

▼ Show answer

"The girl ran." **þæt mægden** is the subject; **rann** is the verb, second in the clause.

5. In **Ġesāwe þū þæs hundes bān**? why does the verb come before the subject?

▼ Show answer

It is a question, and questions invert the subject and the verb.

6. What case is **hundes** in that question, and what does the ending mean?

▼ Show answer

Genitive: "of the dog", "the dog's".

7. Translate (mine): **hē ne wolde gān**.

▼ Show answer

"He did not want to go." **ne** stands before the finite verb **wolde** (past of **willan**); **gān** is the infinitive.

8. What does the pair **þā ... þā** mean?

▼ Show answer

"When ..., then ...".

9. Reorder (mine): can **þone beall sealde ic hire** mean "She gave me the ball"? Why or why not?

▼ Show answer

No. **ic** is nominative, so it is the giver, and **hire** is dative, so she is the receiver. The endings fix the roles whatever the order.

10. What is the first step of the routine?

▼ Show answer

Find the finite verb and decide whether the clause is main (verb second) or subordinate (verb last).

Note on sources

The first sentence is quoted from Wikipedia's *Old English grammar* (Syntax section), which I also read for Old English Grammar 1. Every other sentence in this chapter is mine, built from forms taught in that course, and the reordered sentence in Worked example 2 is my illustration. Several of these forms (**sealde**, **gesāwe**, **rann**) were taken from Wiktionary or the Wikipedia grammar article in the earlier course and are not checked against a printed grammar, so treat them as unverified. The advice about editors' marks and manuscript spelling restates Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 1.

Coming up in Chapter 2: The Lord's Prayer. A text you already know in outline, read in Old English with the routine from this chapter.

Old English Reading 1

Chapter 2 · The Lord's Prayer



The Lord's Prayer

You probably know this text in outline, so the vocabulary is easy to decode and you can concentrate on the grammar. It is also a good first text because it uses verbs in a way Modern English mostly does not: wishes and commands.

THE TEXT IN ONE BOX

A prose translation of the Lord's Prayer into Old English. The version printed here is in the standardised Early West Saxon dialect, as given in Wikipedia's *Old English* article. A Northumbrian translation of the same prayer is much older: the Wikipedia *Lord's Prayer* article places an English translation "around AD 650", and a Lindisfarne Gospels page is captioned as Northumbrian Old English. I did not find the Northumbrian text in the pages I read, so it is not quoted here.

The text

1. Fæder ūre þū þe eart on heofonum,

Father ours thou which art in heavens

"Our Father, who art in heaven,"

2. Sīe þīn nama ġehālgod.

Be thine name hallowed

"Hallowed be thy name."

3. Tōbecume þīn rīce,

to-be-come thine kingdom

"Thy kingdom come,"

4. Ġeweorðe þīn willa, on eorðan swā swā on heofonum.

let-there-be thine will, on earth so so in heavens

"Thy will be done on earth as in heaven."

5. Ūrne dæghwamlīcan hlāf sele ūs tōdæg,

our daily loaf sell us today

"Give us this day our daily bread,"

6. And forġief ūs ūre gyltas, swā swā wē forġiefap ūrum gyltendum.

and forgive us our guilts, so so we forgive our guilters

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

7. And ne ġelæd þū ūs on costnunge, ac ālīes ūs of yfele.

and not lead thou us in testing, but release us from evil

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

8. Sōðlīce.

truly

"Amen."

Source: Wikipedia, *Old English*, section "The Lord's Prayer" (Early West Saxon). Text and word-for-word glosses as given there, licensed CC BY-SA. A few glosses are shortened or modernised by me (marked in the notes below). The smooth translations are the article's.

Line by line: applying the routine

Line 1: Fæder ūre þū þe eart on heofonum

1. **Verb: eart**, "art", the second person singular of **wesan** (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9: **eom, eart, is, sind**). It stands inside a relative clause, so it comes late in the clause.

2. **Subject:** **þū** "thou" (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 7). **Fæder** is the person addressed, "Father".
3. **Small words:** **þe** is the invariable relative word, "who, which" (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10).
4. **Case:** **heofonum** ends in **-um**, the dative plural ending (**hundum** in Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 3). Old English has the plural "heavens" where we say "heaven".

Line 2: Sīe þīn nama ġehālgod

- **Sīe** is the present subjunctive of **wesan** (**sīe** / **sīen**, Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9). The subjunctive here expresses a wish: "let it be".
- **þīn nama** is the subject, "thy name", nominative. **ġehālgod** has the **ġe-** prefix of a past participle (**((ġe)stolen** in Chapter 9). Together: "be hallowed".
- The verb comes first, which is how a wish or command is often built. This is a pattern I noticed in this prayer; I did not read a rule for it.

Line 3: Tōbecume þīn rīce

- **Tōbecume** is a subjunctive in **-e**, again a wish. The article glosses it as "to be come [is]", so the verb is built from **tō-** + **becuman** (my reading; the article gives only the gloss).
- **þīn rīce**, "thy kingdom", is the subject. The verb is again first.

Line 4: Ġeweorðe þīn willa, on eorðan swā swā on heofonum

- **Ġeweorðe**, "let there be / let it become", is another subjunctive wish. The subject is **þīn willa**, "thy will".
- **Watch out:** **willa** is a noun, "will". It is not the verb **willan** "to want" from Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9, though the two are related.
- **swā swā** is "just as", literally "so so". **eorðan** and **heofonum** are both datives after **on**: "on earth, in heaven".

Line 5: Ūrne dæghwamlīcan hlāf sele ūs tōdæg

- **Verb:** **sele** is an imperative singular, "give". The article glosses it "sell", which is the Modern English descendant; **sellan** meant "to give, hand over" (my own knowledge, so check a dictionary).

- **hlāf** "loaf, bread" is the object, accusative singular masculine. **Ūrne** and **dæghwamlīcan** agree with it, and both end in the accusative masculine singular marks (**-ne** and **-an**). Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 6 says the weak adjective follows words like "the", "this" and possessives, which fits **-an** here.
- **ūs** is dative, "to us". **tōdæg** is "today".

Line 6: And forġief ūs ūre gyltas, swā swā wē forġiefap ūrum gyltendum

- **Two verbs, two clauses.** **forġief** is an imperative singular, "forgive". **forġiefap** is the plural present, "we forgive", with the plural ending **-ap** (Chapter 8). It comes at the end of its clause, as expected in a subordinate clause.
- **gyltas** is an accusative plural: the **-as** ending of the largest noun class (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 2).
- **ūrum gyltendum** is dative plural, **-um** on both words. **gyltendum** ends in **-ende + -um**, a present participle used as a noun: "those who owe a debt". That is my reading of the form; the article simply glosses it "guilters".

Line 7: And ne ġelād þū ūs on costnunge, ac ālīes ūs of yfele

- **ne ġelād**: **ne** before the verb, as in Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10. **ġelād** is an imperative; **þū** follows it as a spelled-out subject.
- **ālīes** is another imperative, "release, deliver". **ac** means "but".
- **on costnunge** and **of yfele** are both datives after prepositions: "into testing" and "from evil". **on** with the dative can mean "in", and the article's gloss uses "in" here. That is a Modern English difference worth noting: the Old English says "lead us not in testing".

Line 8: Sōðlīce

- An adverb, "truly" (the article's gloss is "Soothly", an old English word for "truly"). It stands for "Amen".

New words

OLD ENGLISH	MEANING	MODERN ENGLISH RELATIVE
fæder	father	father
heofon	heaven	heaven
nama	name	name
rīce	kingdom, realm	(cf. German <i>Reich</i>)
willa	will	will
eorðe	earth	earth
hlāf	loaf, bread	loaf
gylt	guilt, debt	guilt
costnung	testing, temptation	—
yfel	evil	evil

The glosses of **rīce**, **gylt** and **costnung** are taken from the article's gloss and the sentences; the German link for **rīce** is mine and unverified.

Watch out: two spellings of the same prayer

Wikisource prints the same prayer with other spellings: **gewurþe** for **ġeweorðe**, **forgif** for **forġief**, **forgifaþ** for **forġiefap**, **ālȳs** for **ālīes**, **sōþlice** for **sōðlice**, and it leaves out the dots on **ġ** and **ċ**. It also splits the lines differently and has "Urne gedæghwamlican hlāf sele ūs tōdæg". So **þ** and **ð** are interchangeable, and **ie**, **i** and **ȳ** can stand for each other, as the two sources show. Do not be put off when a second edition spells a word differently.



Quick Reference

FEATURE	WHERE IN THE PRAYER
Subjunctive wish	Sīe, Tōbecume, Ġeweorðe

FEATURE	WHERE IN THE PRAYER
Imperative	sele, forġief, ġelæd, ālīes
Negative imperative	ne ġelæd þū
Dative plural -um	heofonum, ūrum gyltendum
Accusative plural -as	gyltas
Relative þe	þū þe eart
Past participle ġe-	ġehālgod

Try It Yourself

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Which verb is **eart**, and which person?

▼ Show answer

The second person singular of **wesan**, "thou art" (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9).

2. What is the job of **þe** in line 1?

▼ Show answer

The invariable relative word, "who/which".

3. Why does **heofonum** end in **-um**?

▼ Show answer

It is dative plural, after **on**.

4. What mood are **Sīe** and **Tōbecume**, and what do they express?

▼ Show answer

Subjunctive; a wish ("let it be", "may it come").

5. What does the **ġe-** on **ġehālgod** mark?

▼ Show answer

A past participle: "hallowed".

6. Is **willa** in line 4 the verb "to want"?

▼ Show answer

No, it is the noun "will", the subject of the line.

7. What case is **hlāf** in line 5, and why?

▼ Show answer

Accusative singular: it is what is being given (the object).

8. Find the plural present verb in line 6 and say what the ending shows.

▼ Show answer

forġiefap, "we forgive": the plural ending **-ap**.

9. Where is the negative in line 7, and what is the Modern English difference?

▼ Show answer

ne stands before the verb **ġelæd**. English needs "do not" (do-support); Old English does not.

10. Wikisource spells line 4's verb **gewurpe**. Is it a different word from **ġeweorðe**?

▼ Show answer

Almost certainly the same word, in a different spelling (the two sources give the same meaning); note that this comparison rests only on how the two texts line up, since I read no dictionary entry for it.

Note on sources

The text, word-for-word glosses and smooth translations are from Wikipedia's *Old English* article, section "The Lord's Prayer" (I read the stretch of the article from 100,000 to 200,000 characters of 207,822 and did not read the first 100,000 for this chapter). The variant spellings come from the Wikisource page *Fæder ūre* (CC BY-SA 4.0; its header lists no manuscript, edition, dialect or date). Wikipedia's *Lord's Prayer* article gives no Old English text, only the date of about AD 650 for the first English translation and a caption for the Lindisfarne Gospels page. The explanations of the grammar are mine, applying Old English Grammar 1; points where I went beyond a source are flagged. The Wikipedia article's own comment on the prayer's mood or syntax was not read. The Old English of this text alone, with its source and licence, is in the Appendix: Texts; you can also [download it as a .txt file](#).

Coming up in Chapter 3: Cædmon's Hymn. The first poem in English: how verse differs from prose, and how alliteration holds a line together.

Old English Reading 1

Chapter 3 · Cædmon's Hymn

🎵 Cædmon's Hymn

The Lord's Prayer in Chapter 2 was prose. This chapter reads a poem: nine short lines, each split into two halves, held together by sound instead of rhyme. The wording is also Northumbrian, not the West Saxon of Old English Grammar 1, so the spellings will look a little different.

THE TEXT IN ONE BOX

A nine-line Old English poem in praise of God as creator. Wikisource calls it the only known survivor of Cædmon's work. The version here is a normalised reading of the **Moore Bede** (Cambridge, University Library, MS Kk. 5. 16, folio 128v), dated "734 x 737", Northumbrian dialect. Wikipedia calls it "the oldest or second-oldest manuscript of the poem", and says twenty-three manuscripts survive, from the eighth to the sixteenth century.

How an Old English line works

- **Two half-lines.** Each line is split by a pause (a *caesura*), shown by the slash in the text below.
- **Alliteration.** The article says the first heavily stressed syllable of the first half-line alliterates with the first heavily stressed syllable of the second half. So in line 1, **hergan** and **hefaenrīcaes** both begin with **h**.
- **No rhyme, no fixed number of syllables.** The article calls the poem "metrically regular" and "traditional Old English alliterative poetry" with "formulaic diction" and "ornamental poetic variation", especially in the last five lines. (Variation means naming the same person in several ways, as *Uard*, *Dryctin*, *Frēa* do here.)

The text

1. Nū scylun hergan / hefaenrīcaes Uard,

"Now [we] shall honour / heaven-kingdom's guardian,"

2. metudæs maecti / end his mōdgidanc,

"the measurer's might / and his mind's plan,"

3. uerc Uuldurfadur, / suē hē uundra gihuaes,

"the work of the father of glory / as he of each wonder,"

4. ēci dryctin / ōr āstelidæ

"eternal lord, / the origin established;"

5. hē ærist scōp / aelda barnum

"he first created / for the children of men"

6. heben til hrōfe, / hāleg scepen.

"heaven for a roof, / holy creator."

7. Thā middungeard / moncynnæs Uard,

"Then Middle-earth, / mankind's guardian,"

8. eci Dryctin, / æfter tīadæ

"eternal Lord, / after bestowed"

9. fīrum foldu, / Frēa allmectig.

"the lands to men, / Lord almighty."

Source: Wikipedia, *Cædmon's Hymn*, section "Text and translation": normalised Old English of the Moore Bede (Northumbrian, line 5b *aelda*) and the translation, as printed there; licensed CC BY-SA 4.0. The

Reading it line by line (the routine, applied to verse)

Lines 1 to 2

- **Verb: scylun hergan**, "shall honour". **scylun** is a plural of **sćulan** "shall", one of the preterite-present verbs of Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9, whose plural stem is **sćul-**. The spelling is not West Saxon, and the ending **-un** for **-on** is my observation. **hergan** is the infinitive, "to praise".
- **Subject:** not written. The article supplies "[we]" in square brackets. Verse often leaves out what the verb ending makes clear.
- **Object: Uard** "guardian", with **hefaenrīcaes** in front of it, genitive: the **-aes** is the genitive **-es** of Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 3 (**hundes**), spelled the Northumbrian way.
- **Line 2** adds two more things to be honoured, both objects of **hergan**: **metudæs maecti** "the measurer's might" (**metudæs** is genitive) and **his mōdgidanc** "his mind's plan". **end** is "and".

Lines 3 to 4

- **uerc Uuldurfadur** "the work of the father of glory": a fourth object, **uerc** "work", with a compound **Uuldurfadur** ("glory-father"). The article translates it with "of", but I cannot see a genitive ending in the form, so I do not claim one.
- **suē hē uundra gihuaes** "as he (did) of each wonder". **uundra** is genitive plural (**-a**, as **hunda** in Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 3) and **gihuaes** "of each" is genitive singular. The verb is held back to line 4.
- **ēci dryctin ōr āstelidæ** "the eternal lord established the origin": **ēci dryctin** is the subject (nominative), **ōr** "origin, beginning" the object. **āstelidæ** looks like a weak-verb past with the dental ending of Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 8 (my reading; the article does not parse it).

Lines 5 to 6

- **hē ærist scōp** "he first created". **scōp** is a past with no ending, first or third singular, like **stæġ** in Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9. **ærist** is "first" (compare **æŕ** "before" in the prepositions list of Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10; that **ærist** is a superlative of the same word is my reading).
- **aelda barnum**: **aelda** is a genitive plural "of men"; **barnum** has the dative plural -**um**: "for the children". Together "for the children of men".
- **heben til hrōfe** "heaven for a roof": **heben** is the thing created, and **hrōfe** is a dative (-e) after **til**, which the article's translation renders as "for". **hāleg scepen** "holy creator" restates the subject.

Lines 7 to 9

- **Thā** "then" begins the sentence. The subject takes three lines: **moncynnæs Uard** "mankind's guardian" (**moncynnæs** genitive), **eci Dryctin** "eternal Lord", and **Frēa allmectig** "Lord almighty".
- The verb is **tīadæ**, which the article translates "bestowed", with **æfter** "afterwards" in front of it. The object is **middungeard** ("Middle-earth", the world) and **foldu** ("lands"), and **fīrum** (dative plural, -**um**) is "for men". The article's translation reads "after bestowed the lands to men"; how **middungeard** and **foldu** fit as objects is my reading.

Where the alliteration falls

LINE	ALLITERATING SYLLABLES
1	h ergan / h efaenrīcaes
2	m etudæs m aecti / m ōdgidanc
6	h eben til h rōfe / h āleg
7	m iddungeard / m oncynnæs
9	f īrum f oldu / F rēa

These five lines show the pattern from the article most clearly. Lines 3 to 5 and 8 begin on vowels or on letters that are less obvious (**uerc** / **Uuldur** / **uundra** in line 3 begin with the

letter **u**, which the scribe used for **w**). That the vowels in lines 4, 5 and 8 alliterate with each other is my own knowledge of the verse form, not a claim from the article.

New words

OLD ENGLISH	MEANING	MODERN ENGLISH RELATIVE
hergan	to praise, honour	—
Uard	guardian	ward
maecti	might	might
mōdgidanc	mind's plan, thought	mood, thought
uerc	work	work
dryctin	lord	—
scōp	created (past)	(cf. <i>shape</i>)
barn	child	(Scots <i>bairn</i>)
hrōf	roof	roof
allmectig	almighty	almighty

The meanings follow the article's translation. The "Modern English relative" column is my own knowledge and unverified.

Watch out: this is not West Saxon

The Moore Bede is Northumbrian. It writes **ae** for **æ**, **u** for **w** (**Uard** where West Saxon would show **w**), and **-æs**, **-æ** where West Saxon has **-es**, **-e**; the **u** for **w** and the endings are from my own knowledge, not from the article. The article also lists five recensions (versions) of the poem, which differ in the word in line 5b: **aelda** and **eordu** in Northumbrian, **ylda**, **eorðan** and **eorðe** in West Saxon. I did not read the West Saxon texts, so I do not print them here. The text above is the "normalised" form the article gives, with the regular length marks that an editor has added.



Quick Reference

FEATURE	IN THE HYMN
Line shape	Two half-lines with a pause; the first stressed syllable of each half alliterates
Unexpressed subject	"[we]" in line 1
Genitive	hefaenrīcaes , metudæs , moncynnæs , aelda , uundra
Dative plural -um	barnum , fīrum
Preterite-present	scylun (plural of "shall")
Variation	Uard , Dryctin , Frēa : the same person named in several ways



Try It Yourself

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Translate **Nū scylun hergan**. Where is the subject?

▼ Show answer

"Now [we] shall praise." The subject is not written; the plural of **scylun** gives it ("we").

2. What case is **hefaenrīcaes**, and what does it mean in the line?

▼ Show answer

Genitive: "of the heaven-kingdom".

3. Which letter alliterates in line 1?

▼ Show answer

h: **hergan** and **hefaenrīcaes**.

4. Which letter alliterates in line 6?

▼ Show answer

h: heben, hrōfe, hāleg.

5. What ending is on **barnum**, and why?

▼ Show answer

-um, the dative plural: "for the children".

6. What tense is **scōp**, and what is notable about its form?

▼ Show answer

Past; it has no ending, as strong verbs have in the first and third person singular (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9).

7. Give three names for God in lines 7 to 9.

▼ Show answer

Uard ("guardian"), **Dryctin** ("Lord") and **Frēa** ("Lord"); this repetition is the "variation" the article mentions.

8. How many rhetorical sections does the article give the poem, and where does the division fall?

▼ Show answer

Two: lines 1 to 4 and lines 5 to 9. (The article adds that some scholars argue for three.)

9. What is the translation of **allmectig**, and what Modern English word is it?

▼ Show answer

"Almighty"; it is the same word, *all + mighty*.

10. What does the word in line 5b change between the versions of the poem?

▼ Show answer

It is **aelda** in the Moore Bede (Northumbrian) and in other versions **eordu**, **ylda**, **eorðan** or **eorðe**. The five-way split is how the article groups the manuscripts.

Note on sources

The Old English text and translation are from Wikipedia's *Cædmon's Hymn* (sections "Text and translation", "Variant line 5b and West Saxon versions", "Manuscript and date information" and "Style"), CC BY-SA 4.0; the fetch returned the whole page with no truncation notice. The article gives no word-for-word gloss, so every word-level reading in this chapter is mine and unverified, except where I say the article translates it. Wikisource's *Cædmon's Hymn* page holds no text itself (it links to separate transcriptions of the Moore Bede, the Saint Petersburg Bede and Tanner 10), so I did not read it for text. The West Saxon versions were not read. The Old English of this text alone, with its source and licence, is in the Appendix: Texts; you can also [download it as a .txt file](#).

Coming up in Chapter 4: The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Back to prose: a short early entry, with dates, places and the **þā ... þā** narrative style.

Old English Reading 1

Chapter 4 · The Chronicle

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

Back to prose, and to plain narrative. The Chronicle records events year by year in short entries. Four of them, about the arrival of the English and what followed, make a compact reading: short sentences, concrete words, and a lot of cases at work.

THE TEXT IN ONE BOX

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle survives in several manuscripts. This is the E version, the Laud or Peterborough Manuscript, in C. Plummer's 1892 edition *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, as transcribed on Wikisource. The Wikipedia article on the Peterborough Chronicle shows that this manuscript runs on into the twelfth century, long after the Old English period: its 1137 entry is already much more like Middle English. The four annals here are from its early part.

The text

**455. Her Hengest and Horsa fuhton wið Wyrhtgerne þam cininge on
þære stowe þe is cweden .Ægeles þrep. and his broðor Horsan man
of sloh. and æfter þonn feng to rice Hengest. and Æsc his sunu.**

*here Hengest and Horsa fought against Wyrhtgern the king at the place which is called
Ægeles þrep, and his brother Horsa one slew, and after that took to kingdom Hengest
and Æsc his son*

"In this year Hengest and Horsa fought against King Wyrhtgern at the place that is called
Ægeles þrep, and they killed his brother Horsa; and after that Hengest, and Æsc his son,
took the kingdom."

**465. Her Hengest and Æsc gefuhton wið Walas neh Wippedes
fleote. and ðær of slogon xii Wilsce ealdor men. and heora an þegn**

weard þær of slegen. þam wæs nama Wipped.

here Hengest and Æsc fought against Welsh near Wipped's stream, and there slew twelve Welsh chief-men, and their one thane was there slain; to-whom was name Wipped

"In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Welsh near Wipped's stream, and killed twelve Welsh leaders there; and one of their own thanes was killed there, whose name was Wipped."

473. Her Hengest and Æsc ge fuhton wið Walas. and genamon unarimenlicu here reaf. and þa Walas flugon þa Englan swiðe þaearle.

here Hengest and Æsc fought against Welsh, and took countless army-booty, and the Welsh fled the English very (þaearle)

"In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Welsh, and took countless war-spoils; and the Welsh fled from the English very (severely?)."

477. Her com Ælle on Brytenland. and his iii suna. Cymen. and Wlencing. and Cissa. mid iii scipum on ða stowe þe is genemnad Cymenesora. and þær of slogon manige Walas. and sume on fleame be drifon. on þone wudu þe is nemned Andredes lege.

here came Ælle to Britain, and his three sons Cymen and Wlencing and Cissa, with three ships, to that place which is named Cymenesora, and there slew many Welsh, and some in flight drove into the wood which is called Andredes lege

"In this year Ælle came to Britain, and his three sons Cymen and Wlencing and Cissa, with three ships, to the place that is called Cymenesora; and they killed many Welsh there, and drove some to flight into the wood that is called Andredes lege."

Source: Wikisource, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (E)*, annals 455, 465, 473 and 477, from Plummer's 1892 edition; text CC BY-SA 4.0 on the page (the underlying work is public domain). Text as printed there. The page gives no translation: the glosses and translations are mine, so they are marked as mine and unverified. The Old English is exactly as the page prints it, including its quirks (see the Watch out box).

Reading it: the routine in action

Annal 455

- **Her** opens each annal. Wikisource says it means "in this year".
- **Verb and subject: fuhton**, the past plural of **feohtan** "fight", agreeing with **Hengest and Horsa**. The plural past takes **-on**, as with **stælon** in Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9.
- **Cases: þam cininge** is the article **þām** (Chapter 5) with a noun ending in **-e**: a dative singular, so **wið** "against" has a dative here. **on þære stowe** is **þære** (feminine dative) plus **stowe** "place": "at the place".
- **Passive-looking phrase: is cweden** "is called" is a form of **wesan** plus a past participle in **-en**. **þe** is the relative word again (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10). The place-name **Ægeles þrep** is left unglossed because I do not know the meaning of **þrep**.
- **"They killed": man of sloh** has the word **man** "one, someone" (my own knowledge; Wikisource does not gloss it) and **of sloh** "slew". **Horsan** is the object. The verb is last here, which is not the verb-second order of a main clause; the clause comes after **and**, and I did not read a rule explaining it.
- **Verb-second in action: æfter þonn feng to rice Hengest**. The sentence opens with **æfter þonn** "after that"; the verb **feng** comes second; the subject **Hengest** follows. That is the inversion of Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10.

Annal 465

- **wið Walas** uses **wið** with a plural in **-as**, which I read as an accusative plural (Chapter 2). So the same preposition appears with a dative in 455 and an accusative here. As I read it, the ending of the noun, not the preposition, tells you the case.
- **neh Wippedes fleote** "near Wipped's stream": a genitive (**-es**) and a dative (**-e**).
- **wearð ... slegen** is **weorðan** "become" plus a past participle: "was slain". Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 8 noted that Old English had no passive of its own; this is the substitute.
- **þam wæs nama Wipped** is literally "to whom was name Wipped": a dative of possession, my reading of the form.

Annal 473

- **ge fuhton** is printed with a space, but it is the same verb as **gefuhton** in 465. The prefix **ge-** adds a sense of completion; I did not read a rule for this.
- **unarimenlicu** "countless" agrees with **here reaf**, my reading of "army-spoils".
- **þa Walas flugon þa Englan** has two nouns after **þa**, and the forms alone do not make clear to me which side fled. The sense decides: "the Welsh fled the English". This is a good reminder that endings sometimes need context.
- **þaearle** is printed so on Wikisource. It may be a misprint for **þearle** ("severely", my reading), so I leave it glossed with a question mark.

Annal 477

- **com** is the past singular of **cuman** "come": no ending, a strong past. The subject **Ælle** comes with **his iiii suna**, the three sons; the verb agrees with the first subject only.
- **mid iiii scipum** "with three ships": **-um**, dative plural after **mid**.
- **on ða stowe** has **ða**, not **þære** as in 455. I read that as an accusative after a verb of motion ("came to the place") against the dative of rest ("at the place") in 455. This is my own reading of the two forms, not something the page or Old English Grammar 1 states.
- **genemnad** and **nemned** are both the past participle of "to name" in the phrase "is named / is called", and the spelling differs within one annal.
- **be drifon** is printed as two words; it is the verb **bedrīfan** "drove" with its prefix split off. **on fleame** is a dative, "in flight". **on þone wudu** uses **þone**, the accusative masculine, "into the wood".

New words

OLD ENGLISH	MEANING	MODERN ENGLISH RELATIVE
her	here; "in this year"	here
fuhton	fought	fought
cining	king	king
stow	place	(as in <i>Stow</i> , a place-name)

OLD ENGLISH	MEANING	MODERN ENGLISH RELATIVE
broðor	brother	brother
sunu	son	son
rice	kingdom	(cf. German <i>Reich</i>)
Walas	the Welsh, Britons	Welsh
þegn	thane	thane
scip	ship	ship
wudu	wood	wood

The meanings are my glosses from the context of the annals, not taken from Wikisource, which gives no translation. The "Modern English relative" column is my own knowledge.

Watch out: a transcription, not a polished text

Wikisource prints Plummer's text as he edited it. Look for these:

- These four annals spell out **and**. Elsewhere on the page there are scribal abbreviations (for example **þ** in the 449 annal and tilde marks in **sc̃s**), which appear in the Wikisource text but not in these four annals.
- Numbers are Roman numerals: **xii** is twelve, **iii** is three.
- Mixed **þ** and **ð**: **þær** and **ðær** are the same word.
- Prefixes split from the verb: **ge fuhton**, **be drifon**, and **ealdor men**.
- No dots over **ġ** or **ċ**, and few macrons. The page says macrons appear only "in places".
- Spelling varies: **cinige** where you might expect **cyning**; **Walas** and **Wilsce** for the Welsh.
- The page text is partial: it ends at the 477 annal in what the tool returned, and the page footnotes are English commentary, not translation.



Quick Reference

FEATURE	WHERE
Annal opening	Her + subject + verb
Strong past plural	fuhton , slogon , flugon , genamon
Strong past singular	sloh , feng , com
Passive by participle	wearð slegen , is cweden
Verb-second with fronted adverbial	æfter þonn feng ... Hengest
Datives	þam cininge , þære stowe , scipum , fleote

Try It Yourself

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. What does **Her** mean at the start of an annal?

▼ Show answer

"In this year" (Wikisource's note on the entries); literally "here".

2. What tense and number is **fuhton**, and how do you know?

▼ Show answer

Past plural: the ending **-on** on a strong past stem (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9).

3. What does **þam** tell you about **cininge** in 455?

▼ Show answer

That it is dative masculine singular, "the king", after **wið** (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 5).

4. In **æfter þonn feng to rice Hengest**, why does the subject come last?

▼ Show answer

The sentence opens with an adverbial (**æfter þonn**), the verb takes the second place, and the subject follows it.

5. Translate **and his broðor Horsan man of sloh**.

▼ Show answer

"And they killed his brother Horsa" (literally "one slew"). **man** is "one"; this reading of **man** is mine.

6. How is "was slain" built in 465?

▼ Show answer

wearð (past of **weorðan**) plus the past participle **slegen**.

7. What ending is on **Walas**, and what does it usually mark?

▼ Show answer

-as, the plural of the commonest noun class (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 2).

8. What ending is on **scipum** in 477, and why?

▼ Show answer

-um, the dative plural, after **mid** "with".

9. Find two ways the annals say "is called". What do they have in common?

▼ Show answer

is cweden (455), **is genemnad** and **is nemned** (477): each is "is" plus a past participle.

10. **wið** appears with **þam cininge** and with **Walas**. How does that change how you read a preposition?

▼ Show answer

As I read the endings, the same preposition can take different cases, so read the ending of the noun rather than assuming one case per preposition. This is my reading of two examples, not a rule I read in a source.

Note on sources

The Old English is from Wikisource's *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (E)* page (Plummer 1892, CC BY-SA 4.0 on the page; the work is public domain). The tool returned only part of the page (it ends around the 477 annal), and I did not read the later entries or the footnotes. The page has no translation, so the glosses, translations and word readings are mine and unverified, except where I attribute a point to the page ("in this year", the macron note). Wikipedia's *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* article quotes only a few short fragments and none of these annals, and its *Peterborough Chronicle* article (1137 entry) is later Middle English-leaning prose; I used it only for the date range of E. The outline planned a **þā** ... **þā** narrative style for this chapter; these four annals do not contain that pair, so I did not force it in. The Old English of this text alone, with its source and licence, is in the Appendix: Texts; you can also [download it as a .txt file](#).

Coming up in Chapter 5: The English Arrive. Longer sentences from the Chronicle: subordinate clauses and verbs at the end of the clause.

Old English Reading 1

Chapter 5 · The English Arrive



The English Arrive

Chapter 4 read four very short entries. This one reads thirteen sentences from a single, much longer annal, the Chronicle's account of the coming of the English to Britain. It is still plain prose, but the sentences are longer and use subordinate clauses, where the verb comes late.

A CHANGE FROM THE PLAN

The outline put King Alfred's Preface here. I could not find its Old English text on any source I can read (Wikipedia's *Pastoral Care*, *Alfred the Great* and *Old English literature* pages, and Wikisource searches, gave only translations or mentions), and I will not quote it from memory. So this chapter reads the 449 annal of the same Chronicle manuscript (E) as Chapter 4, which I can read in full. If you can point me to a readable source for Alfred's Preface, it can go in a later chapter or the appendix.

The text

The annal opens with a Latin sentence, which I leave out. The Old English starts at **Her Martianus** Here are the first thirteen sentences, one at a time.

1. Her Martianus and Valentinus onfengon rice, and rixadon vii wiñt.

here Martian and Valentinian received kingdom, and ruled seven winters

"In this year Martian and Valentinian took the kingdom, and ruled for seven years."

2. and on þeora dagum gelaðode Wyrtegeorn Angel cin hider.

and in their days invited Wyrtegeorn Angle kin hither

"And in their days Wyrtegeorn invited the Angle race here."

3. and hi þa coman on þrim ceolum hider to Brytene. on þam stede Heopwines fleot.

and they then came on three ships hither to Britain, at the place Heopwine's stream

"And they then came here to Britain on three ships, at the place Heopwine's stream."

4. Se cyning Wyr̥t georn gef heom land on suðan eastan ðissum lande.

the king Wyr̥tgeorn gave them land in south east this land

"King Wyr̥tgeorn gave them land in the south-east of this country,"

5. wiððan þe hi sceoldon feohton wið Pyhtas.

on-condition-that they should fight against Picts

"on condition that they should fight against the Picts."

6. Heo þa fuhton wið Pyhtas. and heofdon sige swa hwær swa heo comon.

they then fought against Picts, and had victory so where so they came

"They then fought against the Picts, and had victory wherever they came."

7. Hy ða sendon to Angle heton sendon mara fultum.

they then sent to Angle (and) bade send more help

"They then sent to Angeln, and asked for more help to be sent."

8. and heton heom secgan Brytwalana nahtscipe. and þes landes cysta.

and bade them tell the Britons' worthlessness and this land's excellence

"And had them told of the Britons' worthlessness and the excellence of this land."

9. Hy ða sona sendon hider mare weored þam oðrum to fultume.

they then soon sent hither more host to-the others as help

"They then soon sent a larger force here, as help for the others."

10. Ða comon þa men of þrim megðum Germanie. Of Ald Seaxum. of Anglum. of Iotum.

then came the men from three tribes of Germany: from Old Saxons, from Angles, from Jutes

"Then the men came from three tribes of Germany: from the Old Saxons, from the Angles, from the Jutes."

11. Of Iotum comon Cantwara. and Wihtwara. þ is seo megð þe nu eardap on Wiht.

from Jutes came Kent-dwellers and Wight-dwellers; that is the tribe which now dwells on Wight

"From the Jutes came the people of Kent and the people of Wight, that is, the tribe that now lives on Wight."

12. and þ cyn on West Sexum þe man nu git hæet Iutna cynn.

and that kin among West Saxons which one now still calls Jutes' kin

"And the kin among the West Saxons that people still call the kin of the Jutes."

13. Of Eald Seaxum coman East Seaxa. and Suð Sexa. and West Sexa.

from Old Saxons came East Saxons and South Saxons and West Saxons

"From the Old Saxons came the East Saxons and the South Saxons and the West Saxons."

Source: Wikisource, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (E)*, annal 449, from C. Plummer's 1892 edition; text CC BY-SA 4.0 on the page (the underlying work is public domain). The Old English is as the page prints it. The

page gives no translation: the glosses and translations are mine and unverified. The annal continues beyond sentence 13 (the Angles, then the genealogy of Hengest and Horsa), which I do not print.

Reading it: what is new

1 to 3: the story begins

- **onfengon** and **rixadon** are both past plurals in **-on**. **onfengon** belongs with **feng** in Chapter 4 (a strong past). **rixadon** has **-ad-** before the ending, a weak-verb past (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 8; the **-ad-** shape is my reading).
- **vii wiñt** "seven winters": the Chronicle counts years in winters. The Chronicle's 1 AD entry, **rixade lvi wintra**, shows the same habit on the Wikisource page. The tilde over the **n** is a scribal abbreviation, which I read as the ending of **wintra**.
- **Verb-second: on þeora dagum gelaðode Wyrtegeorn Angel cin hider** opens with a phrase, the verb **gelaðode** (weak past, **-ode**) is second, and the subject **Wyrtegeorn** follows. **þeora** is genitive plural (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 7); **dagum** is dative plural.
- **coman** is the plural of **com** (Chapter 4). **on þrim ceolum** has two dative plurals; **þrim** is the dative of "three" and **-um** marks **ceolum**.

4 to 6: subordinate clauses

- **gef** is a past singular with no ending (compare **sloh**, **com**). **heom** is "to them", dative; **land** is the thing given.
- **ðissum lande** is the dative of "this land" (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 5).
- **wiððan þe hi sceoldon feohton wið Pyhtas** is a subordinate clause: "on condition that they should fight against the Picts". **sceoldon** is the plural past of **sćulan** (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9). The two verbs sit side by side near the end, with only the phrase **wið Pyhtas** after them. The meaning of **wiððan þe** is my reading from context. The form **feohton** is printed where I would expect the infinitive **feohtan**; I take it as a spelling variant and cannot check it.
- **A clean verb-final clause: swa hwer swa heo comon** "wherever they came" ends in its verb **comon**, as Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10 says a subordinate clause should. The pair **swa ... swa** is the correlative pattern, "so ... so".

- **heofdon sige** is "had victory": a past plural with **sige** as its object (I take **heofdon** as the plural past of "have").

7 to 9: sending for help

- **heton sendon mara fultum** and **heton heom secgan**: **heton** is "bade, ordered" (my reading), followed by a second verb. Both second verbs are infinitives or something close to one; the first is printed **sendon**, which looks like a finite form, so I take it as a spelling variant.
- **mara** is "more", a comparative (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 6). **Brytwalana** is genitive plural (-a); **þes landes** is "this land's" (I am not sure of the **þes** spelling for the genitive; Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 5 gives **þisses**).
- **þam oðrum** is dative plural, "to the others"; **to fultume** is a dative, "as help".

10 to 13: where they came from

- **Verb-second again: Ða comon þa men: Ða** "then" first, the verb second, the subject after it.
- **of þrim megðum, of Anglum, of Iotum, of Eald Seaxum**: **of** "from" followed by a dative plural in **-um** every time (as in **of yfele** in Chapter 2).
- **þ is seo megð**: **þ** is a scribal abbreviation, which I read as **þæt**. **seo megð** is a feminine noun with **sēo**, and **þe nu eardap** is a relative clause with the invariable **þe** (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10). **eardap** is a present singular in **-ap** (my reading).
- **þe man nu git hæst Iutna cynn**: another relative clause. **man** here is "one, people" (as in Chapter 4), **Iutna** is genitive plural, "of the Jutes".
- **East Seaxa, Suð Sexa, West Sexa** are the old forms of Essex, Sussex and Wessex (my own knowledge, not on the page).

New words

OLD ENGLISH	MEANING	MODERN ENGLISH RELATIVE
rice	kingdom, rule	(cf. German <i>Reich</i>)
winter	winter; year	winter

OLD ENGLISH	MEANING	MODERN ENGLISH RELATIVE
hider	hither, here	hither
ceol	ship	(cf. <i>keel</i>)
sige	victory	(cf. German <i>Sieg</i>)
fultum	help	—
sona	soon	soon
weored	troop, host	—
megð	tribe, people	—
cynn	kin, race	kin

The meanings are my readings from context (the page gives no translation). The "Modern English relative" column is my own knowledge and unverified.

Watch out

This is the same transcription as Chapter 4, so the same quirks apply: mixed **þ** and **ð** (**þam**, **ðissum**), split words (**Wyr̥t georn** against **Wyr̥tgeorn**), spelling variants (**Seaxum** and **Sexum**, **hi**, **hy** and **heo** all for "they"), Roman numerals, and the scribal sign **þ̅**. Wikisource prints a few apparent slips elsewhere in this annal (for example **wseron**, **call** for **eall**); they are in the part I did not print.



Quick Reference

FEATURE	WHERE
Verb-second after a fronted phrase	on þeora dagum gelaðode Wyr̥tgeorn · Ða comon þa men
Verb-final subordinate clause	swa hwer swa heo comon
Relative þe	seo megð þe nu eardap

FEATURE	WHERE
of + dative plural	of Anglum, of Iotum
Weak past	gelaðode, rixadon
Strong past	gef, coman, onfengon

Try It Yourself

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. What is **rixadon**, and what does the ending show?

▼ Show answer

A past plural, "ruled"; **-on** is the plural ending.

2. Why does **Wyrteorn** come after **gelaðode** in sentence 2?

▼ Show answer

The sentence begins with a phrase (**on þeora dagum**), so the verb is second and the subject follows.

3. What is the difference between **com** (Chapter 4) and **coman** (here)?

▼ Show answer

com is singular (Ælle came); **coman** is plural (they came).

4. What case are **þrim ceolum**, and what shows it?

▼ Show answer

Dative plural: the **-um** ending on **ceolum** (and **þrim**, the dative of "three").

5. Translate **Se cyning gef heom land**.

▼ Show answer

"The king gave them land." **heom** is dative ("to them"), **land** the object.

6. Which verb is **sceoldon** a form of, and what tense and number?

▼ Show answer

sćulan, past plural (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9).

7. Where does the verb stand in **swa hwer swa heo comon**, and why?

▼ Show answer

At the end: it is a subordinate clause ("wherever they came").

8. Translate **Đa comon þa men**.

▼ Show answer

"Then the men came." The adverb comes first, the verb second, the subject last.

9. What case follows **of** in **of Anglum**?

▼ Show answer

The dative (plural, in **-um**).

10. Which Modern English county names come from **East Seaxa**, **Suð Sexa** and **West Sexa**?

▼ Show answer

Essex, Sussex and Wessex (my own knowledge, not stated on the page).

Note on sources

The Old English is from Wikisource's *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (E)* page, annal 449 (Plummer 1892, CC BY-SA 4.0 on the page; the work is public domain). The tool gave the annal in short exact quotes; I joined them into sentences, and I did not read the Latin first sentence's context or the page's footnotes. No translation is on the page, so every gloss, translation and word reading is mine and unverified, except where I attribute a point to the page. The Alfred's Preface text could not be found,

as the box at the top of the chapter explains. The Old English of this text alone, with its source and licence, is in the Appendix: Texts; you can also [download it as a .txt file](#).

Coming up in Chapter 6: The Colloquy. A schoolroom dialogue by Ælfric: questions, first-person verbs and the verbs that mean "can", "dare" and "must".

Old English Reading 1

Chapter 6 · The Colloquy



Ælfric's Colloquy

Every text so far has been a statement, a prayer or a record. This one is a conversation: a teacher questions a monk and then a ploughman about their work. Dialogue gives you short sentences, questions and first-person verbs, which is exactly what is easiest to read.

A CHANGE FROM THE PLAN

The outline put a passage from Ælfric's prose here, meant to show relative clauses. I found no Old English text of his prose on Wikipedia (its *Ælfric of Eynsham* article gives only translations, plus the single word **clæennes** "purity"), but Wikisource has his *Colloquy* in Old English, so this chapter reads the start of that. The Colloquy is dialogue, so it shows questions and first-person verbs, not relative clauses.

The text

This is exactly how Wikisource prints it, with no capitals and almost no punctuation. The speaker labels (*Teacher*, *Student A*, *Student B*) are the page's own English labels. I have broken the text into the speeches so that you can see who is talking. Read the Old English first, then the word-for-word gloss.

Teacher: hwæt hæfst þu weorkes

what have you of-work

"What work do you have?"

Student A: ic eom geanwyrde monuc ond sincge ælce dæg seofon tida mid gebroþrum ac þeahhwæþere ic wolde betwenan leornian spreca on leden gereorde

I am (geanwyrde) monk and sing every day seven hours with brothers, but nevertheless I wanted (betwenan) to-learn to-speak in Latin speech

"I am a monk, and I sing seven hours every day with the brothers; but all the same I would like to learn to speak in the Latin tongue."

Teacher: hwæt cunnon þas þine geferan

what know these your companions

"What do these companions of yours know (how to do)?"

Student A: summe synt yrþlinegas sume scephyrdas sume oxanhyrddas sume eac swylce huntan sume fisceras sume fugleras sume cypmenn sume scewyrhtan sealteras bæceras

some are ploughmen, some shepherds, some oxherds, some also likewise hunters, some fishers, some fowlers, some merchants, some shoemakers, salters, bakers

"Some are ploughmen, some shepherds, some oxherds, some also hunters, some fishermen, some fowlers, some merchants, some shoemakers, salters, bakers."

Teacher: hwæt sægest þu yrþlinge hu begæst þu weorc þin

what say you ploughman, how go-about you work your

"What do you say, ploughman? How do you go about your work?"

Student B: eala leof hlaford þearle ic deorfe ic ga ut on dægræd þywende oxan to felda ond iugie hie to syl nys hit swa stearc winter þæt ic durre lutian æt ham for ege hlafordes mines ac geiukodan oxan ond gefæstnodon sceare ond cultre mid þære syl ælce dæg ic sceal erian fulne æcer oþþe mare

oh dear lord, hard I labour: I go out at dawn driving the oxen to the field and yoke them to the plough; it-is-not so harsh a winter that I dare lurk at home for fear of my lord; but (the) yoked oxen and (they) fastened share and coulter with the plough, every day I must plough a full acre or more

"Oh, dear lord, I work hard. I go out at dawn, driving the oxen to the field, and yoke them to the plough. There is no winter so harsh that I dare stay hidden at home for fear of my

lord. But with the oxen yoked and the share and coulter fastened to the plough, I must plough a full acre or more every day."

Teacher: hæfst þu ænigne geferan

have you any companion

"Do you have any companion?"

Student B: ic hæbbe sumne cnapan þywende oxan mid gadisene

I have a-certain boy driving oxen with goad

"I have a boy who drives the oxen with a goad."

Source: Wikisource, *Ælfric's Colloquy*. The page marks the work public domain; the Wikisource text is CC BY-SA 4.0. Its header gives no edition, editor, translator or date, and marks the source as unknown with a request for verification, so treat the text as an unchecked transcription. The page has no translation: the glosses and translations are mine and unverified.

Reading it: the routine in action

Questions from the teacher

- **hwæt hæfst þu weorkes**: **hwæt** "what" opens the question, then the verb **hæfst** (2nd person singular of **habban**), then the subject **þu**. **weorkes** is a genitive ("of work"); I take it as the genitive after "what", but I read no rule for it.
- **hwæt cunnon þas þine geferan**: **cunnon** is the plural of **cunnan** "know (how to)", a preterite-present verb (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9). **þas** is "these" (Chapter 5) and **geferan** is a plural ending in **-an**, "companions".
- **hwæt sægest þu yrþlingc** and **hu begæst þu weorc þin**: both put the verb before **þu**, as in questions in Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10. **begæst** is a compound of **gān** (**gæst** "you go", Chapter 9). **þin** "your" comes *after* **weorc**.

The monk's answers

- **ic eom ... monuc: eom** is "I am" (Chapter 9). I could not read **geanwyrde**: it does not fit the sentence as it stands, so I leave it unglossed; it may be a transcription slip.
- **sincge** is "(I) sing", the first person present. **ælcæ dæg** is "every day" (an accusative used for time, my reading). **mid gebroþrum** is **-um** after **mid**: the dative plural, as in Chapter 4.
- **ic wolde ... leornian spreca**: **wolde** is the past of **willan** (Chapter 9) with two infinitives. **on leden gereorde** means "in Latin speech". The word "Latin" is plain in it. The text here is Old English, so this line is odd; I recall that the Colloquy is a Latin text with an Old English gloss added, but the page does not say so.
- **summe synt yrþlincgas ...**: a list. **synt** is the plural "are" (**sind** in Chapter 9) and the people end in **-as** or **-an** as plurals (Chapters 2 and 4). **cypmenn** "merchants" has **menn**, the irregular plural of **mann** (Chapter 4).

The ploughman's answers

- **ic deorfe, ic ga, iugie hie, ic durre, ic sceal, ic hæbbe**: every verb is a first person singular. **durre** is from **durran** "dare" and **sceal** from **sćulan** "must", both preterite-presents from Chapter 9; **ga** is **gā** (without its macron).
- **Word order. þearle ic deorfe** and **ælcæ dæg ic sceal erian** begin with an adverb or time phrase, then the pronoun **ic**, then the verb. That puts the verb third, not second. Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10 gives verb-second as the default; the pronoun coming first is my observation, not something I read in a source.
- **þywende oxan** "driving the oxen": **þywende** is a present participle in **-ende** (Chapter 8); **oxan** is the plural object. The last line repeats the participle: **cnapan þywende oxan**.
- **nys hit swa stearc winter**: **nys** looks like **ne** + **is** joined (my reading). **hlafordes mines** is a genitive, with **mines** "my" after the noun, like **weorc þin**.
- **geiukodan ... gefæstnodon**: I read these as "yoked" and "fastened", past forms of two weak verbs (the second has the **-od-** shape; Chapter 8). The grammar of this clause is unclear to me, so my translation is a best sense, not a parse.

New words

OLD ENGLISH	MEANING	MODERN ENGLISH RELATIVE
weorc	work	work
monuc	monk	monk
yrþling	ploughman	(contains <i>earth</i>)
scephyrd	shepherd	shepherd
hlaford	lord	lord
dægræd	dawn	(<i>day + red</i>)
oxa	ox	ox
æcer	acre, field	acre
cnapa	boy	(cf. <i>knave</i>)
winter	winter	winter

The meanings come from context. The "Modern English relative" column and the guess that **yrþling** contains the word for "earth" are my own knowledge, unverified.

Watch out: a bare transcription

This text has no capital letters, no punctuation and no length marks. **ond** and **and** are both "and" (Chapter 4 printed **and**). The same word can be spelled in two ways, for example **yrþlingas** and **yrþlinge**. The word **þearle** "hard, severely" appears here, which suggests that the **þæearle** in the Chronicle's 473 annal (Chapter 4) is a slip for it. That is my guess, not something I checked. Add your own full stops as you read: each question and each answer is a good place for one.



Quick Reference

FEATURE	WHERE
Question: verb before subject	hwæt hæfst þu · hwæt sægest þu

FEATURE	WHERE
2nd person singular -st	hæfst, sægest, begæst
1st person singular -e	deorfe, hæbbe, iugie
Preterite-present	cunnon, durre, sceal
Present participle	þywende
Possessive after the noun	weorc þin, hlafordes mines

Try It Yourself

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Translate **hwæt hæfst þu weorkes**.

▼ Show answer

"What work do you have?" The verb comes before **þu**, and **weorkes** is a genitive.

2. What ending is on **gebroþrum**, and why?

▼ Show answer

-um, the dative plural, after **mid** "with".

3. Which verb is **cunnon** a form of, and what kind of verb is it?

▼ Show answer

cunnan, a preterite-present verb (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9), in the plural.

4. What does **cypmenn** show about the plural of **mann**?

▼ Show answer

It is the irregular plural **menn**, with a changed vowel (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 4).

5. What do the endings of **hæfst**, **sægest** and **begæst** show?

▼ Show answer

All are the 2nd person singular present ("you ...") with **-st** or **-est**.

6. What does **begæst** contain, and how do you know?

▼ Show answer

The verb **gān**: compare **gæst** in Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9. The prefix **be-** is added.

7. What do **ic durre** and **ic sceal** mean, and which verbs are they?

▼ Show answer

"I dare" (**durran**) and "I must/shall" (**sculan**): preterite-presents.

8. What does **þywende** end in, and what is it?

▼ Show answer

-ende: a present participle, "driving".

9. In **ælce dæg ic sceal erian**, where does the verb stand, and what is unusual?

▼ Show answer

Third: after the time phrase and the pronoun **ic**. The verb-second default has an exception here (my observation).

10. Translate **ic hæbbe sumne cnapan þywende oxan mid gadisene**.

▼ Show answer

"I have a boy driving the oxen with a goad." **mid gadisene** is a dative after **mid**.

Note on sources

The Old English is from the Wikisource page *Ælfric's Colloquy* (public domain work; page text CC BY-SA 4.0). I read the opening thirteen lines as the tool returned them in short quotes; I did not read

past them. The page names no edition, editor or date, marks its source as unknown and asks for verification, and has no translation, so every gloss, translation and word reading in this chapter is mine and unverified. Wikipedia's *Ælfric of Eynsham* article quotes none of his Old English. The remarks about the Colloquy being a glossed Latin text, and about pronoun subjects, are mine. The Old English of this text alone, with its source and licence, is in the Appendix: Texts; you can also [download it as a .txt file](#).

Coming up in Chapter 7: A Riddle. One short riddle from the Exeter Book: verse again, and a puzzle.

Old English Reading 1

Chapter 7 · A Riddle

A Riddle

After the plain dialogue of Chapter 6, this is verse again, and a puzzle. Old English riddles speak in the first person ("I am ...") and ask the reader to say what they are. The answer here is given by the source, so you can check your reading against it.

THE TEXT IN ONE BOX

The riddles are in the **Exeter Book**, a manuscript of Old English poetry. This is Riddle 25, as quoted in Wikipedia's *Exeter Book* article, which cites Marsden (2015), *The Cambridge Old English Reader*. The article gives the answer as "an onion" and says the riddle is a double entendre with "bawdy connotations". The dots in the lines mark the half-line break, as in Chapter 3.

The text

Ic eom wunderlicu wiht · wifum on hyhte

I am (a) wondrous creature · to-women in joy

"I am a wondrous creature, a delight to women,"

neahbuendum nyt; · nægum sceþþe

to-neighbours useful · to-none harm

"useful to neighbours; harming none"

burgsittendra nymthe · bonan anum.

of-town-dwellers except · slayer one

"of the town-dwellers except my one slayer."

Stapol min is steapheah · stonde ic on bedde

foundation my is steep-high · stand I in bed

"My base is steep and high; I stand in a bed,"

neoðan ruh nathwær. · Nepeð hwilum

from-beneath rough somewhere · ventures sometimes

"rough underneath somewhere. Sometimes ventures"

ful cyrtenu · ceorles dohtor

very lovely · churl's daughter

"a very lovely peasant's daughter,"

modwlanc meowle · þæt heo on mec gripe

proud-spirited maiden · that she on me may-grip

"a proud-spirited girl, to grip me,"

ræseð mec on reodne · reafath min heafod

rushes me on (reodne) · strips my head

"rushes at me, (...) strips my head,"

fegeð mec on fæsten. · Felep sona

fastens me in (a) fast-place · feels soon

"fastens me in a hold. She soon feels"

mines gemotes · seo þe mec nearwað

of-my meeting · she who me constrains

"the meeting with me, she who presses me,"

wif wundenlocc. · Wæt bið þæt eage.

woman curly-haired · wet will-be the eye

"the curly-haired woman. The eye will be wet."

Source: Wikipedia, *Exeter Book*, section "Riddles", Riddle 25: the Old English as printed there (CC BY-SA 4.0), which the article cites to Marsden (2015). The tool did not return the article's own English translation of these lines, so the glosses and translations are mine and unverified. I could not make sense of **reodne**, so my translation leaves a gap there.

Reading it: the routine in action

Lines 1 to 3: who I am

- **Ic eom wunderlicu wiht**: "I am a wondrous creature". **eam** is Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9. The riddle opens with the first-person statement that every riddle of this kind uses.
- **wifum** and **neahbuendum** both end in **-um**, the dative plural: "to women", "to neighbours". The second is built from **neah** "near" and **būend** "dweller", with the participle-like **-end** of Chapter 8 (my reading of its parts).
- **nægum sceþþe** "harming none" and **nymthe bonan anum** "except the one slayer": the riddle claims to be harmless to all but one. **bonan** and **anum** are both dative singular, with **-an** and **-um** endings (my reading). **burgsittendra** is a genitive plural, "of the town-dwellers".

Lines 4 to 5: where I am

- **Stapol min**: the possessive comes after the noun, as in Chapter 6 (**weorc þin**). **on bedde** is a dative singular in **-e**, "in a bed" (a garden bed, I read it).
- **stone ic**: the verb comes before **ic**, an inversion; Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10 gives inversion for questions, and I did not read a rule for a statement like this.
- **nathwær** looks like **ne wāt hwær** "I know not where", joined (my own reading, not in the source). **hwilum** "sometimes" is the ancestor of the old word *whilom* (my own knowledge).

Lines 6 to 11: the visitor

- **ceorles dohtor**: **ceorles** is a genitive in **-es**, "of a churl", giving "a churl's daughter". The subject of the verb **Neþeð** follows it, and the whole phrase is spread over two half-lines.
- **þæt heo on mec gripe**: **gripe** ends in **-e** and follows **þæt** "that": a present subjunctive, "that she may grip" (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9). **mec** is "me", which I read as an older accusative form of **mē**.
- **ræseð, reafath, fegeð, Feleþ, nearwað**: third person singular presents in **-að, -eð** or **-eþ**. The meanings "rushes", "strips", "fastens", "feels" and "presses" are my readings; **reodne** I could not read, and **fæsten** "stronghold, hold" is a guess from the context.
- **mines gemotes** "of my meeting": a genitive object of **Feleþ**, with **mines** before its noun this time.
- **seo þe mec nearwað**: **sēo** (the feminine "she, that one") plus the relative **þe** (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10): "she who presses me".
- **Wæt bið þæt eage**: **bið** is the future-looking "will be" of **bēon** (Chapter 9: **bist, biþ**). This is the line that gives the answer away: an onion makes the eye wet.

The article says the riddle has "bawdy connotations", that is, a second, ruder meaning under the innocent one. It does not explain it, and I will not either. Reading it as a plain riddle about an onion is enough for this course.

Where the alliteration falls

LINE	ALLITERATING SYLLABLES
1	w underlicu w iht · w ifum
2	n eahbuendum n yt; · n ægum
3	b urgsittendra · b onan
4	S tapol ... steapheah · s tonde
11	w if w undenlocc · W æt

As in Chapter 3, the first stressed syllable of the second half-line matches the first half-line's. That **st-** matches **st-** in line 4 is my own reading of the verse form.

New words

OLD ENGLISH	MEANING	MODERN ENGLISH RELATIVE
wiht	creature, thing	wight
wif	woman	wife
hyht	joy, hope	—
stapol	foundation, base	(cf. <i>staple</i>)
ruh	rough	rough
hwilum	sometimes	whilom
dohtor	daughter	daughter
heafod	head	head
eage	eye	eye
wæt	wet	wet

The meanings are my readings from the lines, not from the source. The "Modern English relative" column is my own knowledge and unverified.

Watch out

This is an edited text with modern punctuation: the full stops, semicolons and the half-line dots are the editor's. The manuscript had none of them. Some words (**reodne**, **fæsten**, **fegedð**) are unclear to me even with the context, which is normal for riddle vocabulary; do not worry if you cannot translate every line. The aim is to find the grammar and gather clues.



Quick Reference

FEATURE	WHERE
Dative plural -um	wifum, neahbuendum
Genitive -es / -ra	ceorles, mines gemotes, bursittendra
Subjunctive after þæt	gripe
Relative seo þe	seo þe mec nearwað
Possessive after the noun	Stapol min
Third person singular present	ræseð, Felep, nearwað

Try It Yourself

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Translate **Ic eom wunderlicu wiht**.

▼ Show answer

"I am a wondrous creature."

2. What ending is on **wifum**, and what does it mean?

▼ Show answer

-um, the dative plural: "to women".

3. Which sound alliterates in line 1?

▼ Show answer

w: **wunderlicu**, **wiht**, **wifum**.

4. How does **Stapol min** differ from the English order?

▼ Show answer

The possessive follows the noun: "base my", not "my base".

5. What is the parts of **neahbuendum**, as I read them?

▼ Show answer

neah "near" + **būend** "dweller" + **-um** (dative plural): "to near-dwellers", "to neighbours".

6. What mood is **gripe** in **þæt heo on mec gripe**?

▼ Show answer

Present subjunctive, after **þæt**: "that she may grip".

7. What is the job of **þe** in **seo þe mec nearwað**?

▼ Show answer

The invariable relative word: "she who presses me".

8. Which verb is **bið** in **Wæt bið þæt eage**?

▼ Show answer

bēon, third person singular: "the eye will be wet".

9. What is the answer to the riddle, and which line gives it away?

▼ Show answer

An onion (the answer the Wikipedia article gives); the last line, **Wæt bið þæt eage**.

10. What case is **ceorles**, and how can you tell?

▼ Show answer

Genitive: the ending **-es** (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 3).

Note on sources

The Old English is from Wikipedia's *Exeter Book* article, section "Riddles" (Riddle 25), CC BY-SA 4.0; the article cites the text to Marsden (2015), *The Cambridge Old English Reader*. The article also quotes the start of Riddle 26 (the answer given is "a Bible"), which I did not use. The tool would not return the article's English translation, so every gloss, translation and word reading here is mine and unverified. The article's separate *Exeter Book Riddles* page quotes only translations (Williamson, 1982), no Old English. The article does not say whether the eleven lines are the whole riddle. The answer "an onion" and the "bawdy connotations" remark are the article's. The Old English of this text alone, with its source and licence, is in the Appendix: Texts; you can also [download it as a .txt file](#).

Coming up in Chapter 8: Beowulf: The Opening. The first eleven lines of the best-known Old English poem, with compound words and a kenning.

Old English Reading 1

Chapter 8 · Beowulf: The Opening

Beowulf: The Opening

The best-known Old English poem opens with a king, not a hero: Scyld Scēfing, who arrives as a destitute child and grows into a ruler to whom his neighbours pay tribute. This chapter reads the first eleven lines. They are full of compound words, which is the main thing to practise here.

THE TEXT IN ONE BOX

Beowulf survives in one manuscript, Cotton Vitellius A. xv in the British Library. The text below is the edition by A. J. Wyatt (1894), as transcribed on Wikisource. The long marks (macrons) over vowels are the editor's, as in Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 1. Each line has two half-lines with a gap between them, shown here with a dot, as in Chapter 3.

The text

Hwæt! wē Gār-Dena · in gēar-dagum

Lo! we of-Spear-Danes · in year-days

"Listen! We have heard of the Spear-Danes' glory in days gone by,"

þēod-cyninga · þrym gefrūnon,

of-people-kings · glory learned-of

"of the kings of that people,"

hū ðā æþelingas · ellen fremedon.

how the princes · courage performed

"how those princes did deeds of courage."

Oft Scyld Scēfing · sceapena þrēatum,

often Scyld Scēfing · of-foes from-troops

"Often Scyld Scēfing took from troops of enemies,"

monegum mægþum · meodo-setla oftēah.

from-many peoples · of-mead-seats took-away

"from many peoples, their mead-benches."

Egsode eorl, · syððan ārest wearð

terrified (the) earl · since first was

"He terrified the warriors, after he was first"

fēa-sceaft funden; · hē þæs frōfre gebād,

few-possession found · he of-that comfort lived-to-see

"found destitute; he lived to see comfort for that,"

wēox under wolcnum, · weorð-myndum þāh,

grew under skies · with-honours throve

"grew under the skies, throve in honours,"

oð þæt him āghwylc · þāra ymb-sittendra

until that to-him each · of-those around-sitters

"until each of those who lived around him"

ofer hron-rāde · hýran scolde,

over whale-road · to-obey had-to

"across the whale-road had to obey him,"

gomban gyldan; · þæt wæs gōd cyning.

tribute to-pay · that was good king

"and pay tribute. That was a good king."

Source: Wikisource, *Beowulf* (Wyatt), A. J. Wyatt, 1894, based on Zupitza's facsimile of the manuscript; lines 1 to 11 as printed there (public domain by age). The folio marks and line numbers of the page are left out. The glosses and translations are mine and unverified; Wikisource gave me no translation of these lines.

Reading it: the routine in action

Lines 1 to 3: we have heard

- **Hwæt!** is the traditional opening call for attention. Looked at as the pronoun of Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 7, it is "what"; here it works as an exclamation (my reading of its use).
- **wē** is "we", the first person plural pronoun. **gefrūnon** has the ending **-on** of a plural past form: "we learned of, have heard". The verb stands last in its clause, as Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10 describes for subordinate clauses; here it is next to its object **þrym** "glory".
- **Gār-Dena** and **þēod-cyninga** both end in a genitive plural, **-a** (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 3 gives **-a** for the genitive plural; Chapter 4 covers the other noun classes). So: "of the Spear-Danes", "of the kings of the people". **gēar-dagum** is dative plural in **-um**: "in days of old".
- **hū ðā æþelingas ellen fremedon**: **hū** "how" opens a subordinate clause, so the verb **fremedon** (plural past, weak, Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 8) is last again. **ðā** is "those" (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 5) and **ellen** is "courage" as the object.

Lines 4 to 5: Scyld takes the mead-benches

- **Oft Scyld Scēfing**: the subject is Scyld, called Scēfing, the "son of Scēf" (my reading of the **-ing** ending as "son of"). The verb does not come until the end of line 5: **oftēah**. The reader keeps four phrases in mind while waiting for it.

- **sceaþena þrēatum** and **monegum mægþum** are both datives plural in **-um** after an unstated "from": "from troops", "from many peoples". **sceaþena** is a genitive plural, "of foes". My reading of **oftēah** is "took away", from a verb whose forms I did not look up.
- **meodo-setla**: genitive plural again, "of mead-seats", the thing he took.

Lines 6 to 8: from nothing to honour

- **Egsode** is a past singular in **-ode**, the weak class 2 ending of Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 8: "he terrified". **eorl** is the object, "the earl, the warrior".
- **wearð** and **funden** go together: "was found". **funden** is the past participle of a strong verb (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9), and **wearð** is the past of **weorðan** "become" (my reading). **fēa-sceaft** is "destitute".
- **hē þæs frōfre gebād**: **gebād** is a strong past singular, "lived to see, experienced"; **frōfre** "comfort" is the object, **þæs** "of that, for that" a genitive (my reading of this construction).
- **wēox** and **þāh** are strong past singulars with no ending: "grew" and "throve". **wolcnum** and **weorð-myndum** are dative plurals in **-um** again.

Lines 9 to 11: tribute

- **oð þæt** "until" opens a clause; its verb **scolde** comes at the end of line 10 and its two infinitives (**hýran** "obey", **gyldan** "pay") stand beside it. **scolde** is the past of a preterite-present verb (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9): "had to".
- **him** is "to him" (dative), the one who is obeyed. **æghwylc þāra ymb-sittendra** is "each of those sitting around" with **þāra** a genitive plural.
- **þæt wæs gōd cyning**: no article, because Old English has none (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 5). **wæs** is the past of **bēon**.

Compound words and kennings

Almost every line contains a compound, a word made by joining two. The hyphens are the editor's. I give the parts as I read them:

COMPOUND	PARTS (MY READING)	MEANING
gēar-dagum	year + days	days gone by
þēod-cyninga	people + kings	of the kings of a people
meodo-setla	mead + seats	mead-benches (the hall)
fēa-sceft	few + (shape/state)	destitute
weorð-myndum	worth + (mind/honour)	with honours
ymb-sittendra	around + sitters	of those living around
hron-rāde	whale + road	the sea

hron-rāde is a **kenning**, a compound that names one thing by a picture of another: the sea is the "whale-road". **meodo-setla** is closer to a metonym, naming the hall by its benches. The parts of **fēa-sceft** and **weorð-myndum** are my best guess and the least certain items here.

Where the alliteration falls

LINE	ALLITERATING SYLLABLES
1	G ār-Dena · in g ēar-dagum
2	þ ēod-cyninga · þ rym
3	æ þelingas · e llen (vowels match any vowel)
5	m onegum m ægpum · m eodo-setla
8	w ēox under w olcnum · w eorð-myndum
10	ofer h ron-rāde · h ȳran

The pattern is the one from Chapter 3. That vowels all alliterate with each other, as in line 3, is my own knowledge of the verse form, not something I read in a source.

New words

OLD ENGLISH	MEANING	MODERN ENGLISH RELATIVE
hwæt	lo! (also "what")	what
cyning	king	king
ellen	courage	—
oft	often	oft
eorl	earl, warrior	earl
under	under	under
wolcen	cloud, sky	welkin
gōd	good	good
hȳran	to obey, to hear	hear
gyldan	to pay	yield

The meanings are my readings from the lines, not from the source. The "Modern English relative" column is my own knowledge and unverified.

Watch out

The manuscript itself has no macrons, no hyphens, and no gap between half-lines. A caption on Wikipedia's *Beowulf* article shows its first page as **HWÆT WE GARDE / na in geardagum**, with the word **Gardena** split across the end of a manuscript line (the caption's slash marks that break). The editor has divided it, added hyphens and macrons, and supplied the punctuation. The word order is also demanding: in lines 4 and 5 the verb waits for the end of the second line. Read to the end of the sentence before you decide who did what to whom.



Quick Reference

FEATURE	WHERE
Genitive plural -a	Gār-Dena, þēod-cyninga, meodo-setla
Dative plural -um	gēar-dagum, mægþum, wolcnum
Weak past -ode / -edon	Egsode, fremedon
Strong past, no ending	wēox, þāh, gebād
Verb last in subordinate clauses	hū ... fremedon, oð þæt ... scolde
Kenning	hron-rād "whale-road"

Try It Yourself

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Translate **þæt wæs gōd cyning**.

▼ Show answer

"That was a good king." There is no article in the Old English.

2. What ending is on **gēar-dagum**, and what does it mean?

▼ Show answer

-um, the dative plural: "in days of old".

3. What ending is on **Gār-Dena**, and what does it mean?

▼ Show answer

-a, the genitive plural: "of the Spear-Danes".

4. Which sound alliterates in line 2?

▼ Show answer

þ: þēod-cyninga, þrym.

5. What is a kenning? Give the example from this passage.

▼ Show answer

A compound that names one thing with a picture of another: **hron-rād** "whale-road" for the sea.

6. In **hū ðā æþelingas ellen fremedon**, where is the verb, and why?

▼ Show answer

At the end: **hū** opens a subordinate clause, which in Old English tends to put the verb last (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10).

7. What do **wēox** and **þāh** have in common, grammatically?

▼ Show answer

Both are strong past singulars with no ending: "grew" and "throve" (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9).

8. What does **Egsode** tell you about the verb?

▼ Show answer

The ending **-ode** marks a weak class 2 past singular (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 8): "he terrified".

9. Split **meodo-setla** into its parts and translate it.

▼ Show answer

meodo "mead" + **setla** "of seats": "of mead-seats", the benches of the hall.

10. Why is the verb **oftēah** hard to wait for in lines 4 and 5?

▼ Show answer

Four phrases come first (**Oft Scyld Scēfing, sceapena þrēatum, monegum mægþum, meodo-setla**) and the verb arrives only at the end of line 5. Read the whole sentence before you assign roles.

Note on sources

The Old English is lines 1 to 11 of Wikisource's *Beowulf* (Wyatt), A. J. Wyatt's 1894 edition based on Zupitza's autotypes (public domain by age). I read it from the raw text of the Wikisource page, because the page summariser I first used squeezed out the half-line gaps. Wyatt's text goes on, and I did not use the rest of the prelude, which has a manuscript gap at line 15. Wikipedia's *Beowulf* article quotes only the opening of the manuscript page as a picture caption (first 100,000 characters of the article read), with a translation "How much we of Spear-Danes, in days gone by, of kings the glory have heard". Every gloss, translation, kenning and word-part reading in this chapter is mine and unverified, and so are the Modern English relatives. The Old English of this text alone, with its source and licence, is in the Appendix: Texts; you can also [download it as a .txt file](#).

Coming up in Chapter 9: The Wanderer. A short elegy about exile and loss: the first fifteen lines.

Old English Reading 1

Chapter 9 · The Wanderer



The Wanderer

Where Beowulf tells of a king's rise, *The Wanderer* is a lament: a man alone at sea, whose lord is dead and whose friends are gone. This chapter reads its first fifteen lines. They contain several subjunctives and a famous gloomy remark about fate, and they are a good place to practise telling endings apart.

THE TEXT IN ONE BOX

The Wanderer is preserved only in the Exeter Book, the same manuscript as the riddle in Chapter 7. According to Wikipedia's article it has about 115 lines of alliterative verse, the author is unknown, and its date cannot be determined. The poem begins with the narrator, then turns (line 6) to the words of the **eardstapa**, the "wanderer", which are in quotation marks in the edition below.

The text

Oft him ānhaga · āre gebīdeð,

often to-him (the) solitary-one · of-mercy awaits

"Often the solitary man lives to see mercy,"

Metudes miltse, · þēah þe he mōdcearig

of-Lord's kindness · though that he heart-sorrowful

"the Lord's kindness, though sorrowful of heart"

geond lagulāde · longe sceolde

across water-ways · long had-to

"he had for a long time across the water-ways"

hrēran mid hōndum · hrīmcealde sǣ,

to-stir with hands · frost-cold sea

"to stir the frost-cold sea with his hands,"

wadan wræclāstas: · wyrd bið ful ārǣd!

to-tread exile-tracks · fate is fully (ārǣd)

"to tread the paths of exile: fate is wholly (...)!"

Swā cwæð eardstapa, · earfeþa gemyndig,

so said earth-stepper · of-hardships mindful

"So spoke the wanderer, mindful of hardships,"

wrāþra wælsleahta, · winemæga hryre:

of-cruel slaughters · of-friend-kinsmen fall

"of cruel slaughters, of the fall of dear kinsmen:"

'Oft ic sceolde āna · ūhtna gehwylce

often I had-to alone · of-dawns each

"Often I had to, alone, at each dawn,"

mīne ceare cwīþan; · nis nū cwicra nān,

my sorrow lament · is-not now of-living none

"lament my sorrow; there is now none of the living"

þe ic him mōdsefan · mīnne durre

that I to-him mind my dare

"to whom I dare to"

sweotule āsecgan. · Ic tō sōþe wāt

clearly declare · I for truth know

"say my mind plainly. I know in truth"

þæt biþ in eorle · indryhten þēaw,

that is in man · noble custom

"that it is a noble custom in a man"

þæt hē his ferðlocan · fæste binde,

that he his spirit-chest · fast may-bind

"that he bind fast his heart,"

healde his hordcofan, · hycge swā hē wille;

may-hold his hoard-chest · may-think as he will

"keep his thoughts to himself, think what he will;"

ne mæg wērig mōd · wyrde wiðstōndan

not can weary mind · to-fate withstand

"a weary mind cannot withstand fate"

Source: Wikisource, *Bright's Anglo-Saxon Reader* (J. W. Bright, 1913), "XXIII. The Wanderer", lines 1 to 15 as printed there (public domain in the US). The source's line numbers, its textual footnotes, and its marks on some vowels (such as **ø** in **høndum**) are Bright's; I kept the letters as printed. Line 14 has a footnote variant, **healdne**, which I did not use. The glosses and translations are mine and unverified; I left **āræd** in line 5 unglossed.

Reading it: the routine in action

Lines 1 to 5: the sea and fate

- **gebīdeð** is a third person singular present in **-eð** (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 8 and 9). Its object **āre** is in the genitive, "of mercy", an object case Chapter 7 of this course also showed with **mines gemotes**. The subject, **ānhaga** "solitary one", comes after the dative **him**.
- **þēah þe** "though" opens a clause; **sceolde** is the past of a preterite-present verb (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9) and takes the infinitives **hrēran** and **wadan**. The clause ends in verbs, as Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10 describes.
- **mid hondum**: a preposition with the dative plural in **-um**. **hrīmcealde sǣ** is the sea, with the adjective **hrīmcealde** "frost-cold" agreeing with it.
- **wyrd bið ful ārǣd**: **wyrd** is "fate" and **bið** is the future-looking form of **bēon** (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9), as in Chapter 7 of this course. I do not read **ārǣd** with certainty, so my translation leaves it open.

Lines 6 to 7: the speaker is named

- **Swā cwæð eardstapa**: the verb comes before the subject. **cwæð** is a strong past singular with no ending (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9), "said".
- **earfeþa, wrāþra wælsleahta** and **winemāga** are genitive plurals in **-a**, all depending on **gemyndig** "mindful of" (my reading of the adjective's use). A list of genitives like this is a common way to build up the sorrow before the speech starts.

Lines 8 to 11: no one to tell

- **ūhtna gehwylce**: **ūhtna** is a genitive plural, "of dawns"; I read the whole phrase as "at each dawn" (a time expression, my reading).
- **nis** is **ne** + **is**, "is not", a negative that sticks to the verb (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10 on negation). **nān** is "none" and **cwicra** is a genitive plural "of the living".
- **þe ic him mōdsefan mīnne durre sweotule āsecgan**: **þe** is the relative word (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10); **him** is "to whom" (dative); **durre** ends in **-e** and looks like a subjunctive of the preterite-present verb "dare" (my reading). The result: "there is none living to whom I dare tell my heart plainly".
- **wāt** is "I know", a preterite-present form (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9). **tō sōþe** is a fixed phrase, "in truth".

Lines 12 to 15: the rule

- **þæt hē his ferðlocan fæste binde, healde ..., hycge ...: binde, healde, hycge** and **wille** all end in **-e**, and follow **þæt** or **swā**. They are present subjunctives (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 8 and 9): "that he should bind ... hold ... think as he wills".
- **ne mæg wērig mōd wyrde wiðstōndan**: **ne** negates the verb **mæg** "can" (preterite-present). **wyrde** is a dative object of **wiðstōndan** "to withstand", which takes the dative (my own knowledge, not from the source). The word order is subject after verb: "not can weary mind fate withstand".

Where the alliteration falls

LINE	ALLITERATING SYLLABLES
2	Metudes m iltse · þēah þe he m ōdcearig
3	geond l agulāde · l onge
5	w adan w ræclāstas · w yrd
6	e ardstapa · e arfepa
15	ne mæg w ērig mōd · w yrd w iðstōndan

This is the pattern from Chapter 3 and Chapter 8. The marking is my reading of the verse form, not something I read in a source; in line 6 the vowels alliterate with each other, as in Chapter 8.

New words

OLD ENGLISH	MEANING	MODERN ENGLISH RELATIVE
ānhaga	solitary one	—
wyrd	fate	weird
mōd	mind, spirit	mood
sǣ	sea	sea

OLD ENGLISH	MEANING	MODERN ENGLISH RELATIVE
hond	hand	hand
wadan	to go, to wade	wade
wērig	weary	weary
eorl	man, warrior	earl
ceare	sorrow	care
wāt	I know	wit

The meanings are my readings from the lines, not from the source. The "Modern English relative" column is my own knowledge and unverified.

Watch out

Wikipedia's article says that the compound **hrīmceald** may come from an Old Norse word, *hrímkaldr*, and that this has been used to argue for a late 9th or early 10th century date (it cites Klinck, 2001, and says the date is impossible to determine). Bright's edition spells it **hrīmcealde** in line 4. Remember also that the quotation marks, the colon and the question of where the speaker's words end are the editor's. The manuscript has none of them.



Quick Reference

FEATURE	WHERE
Genitive object	āre gebīdeð
Genitive plural -a	earfeþa, winemæga, ūhtna, cwicra
Dative plural -um	hondum
Strong past, no ending	cwæð
Negative contraction	nis = ne is

FEATURE**WHERE**

Present subjunctive after **þæt**

binde, healde, hycge, wille

Preterite-present verbs

sceolde, wāt, mæg, durre



Try It Yourself

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Translate **Swā cwæð eardstapa**.

▼ Show answer

"So spoke the wanderer."

2. What is **nis** made of?

▼ Show answer

ne + is: "is not" (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10).

3. What ending is on **hondum**, and what does it mean?

▼ Show answer

-um, the dative plural, after **mid**: "with hands".

4. What case is **earfeþa**, and how can you tell?

▼ Show answer

Genitive plural: the ending **-a** (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 3): "of hardships".

5. Which sound alliterates in line 5?

▼ Show answer

w: **wadan, wræclāstas, wyrd**.

6. What mood are **binde** and **healde** in, and why?

▼ Show answer

Present subjunctive, after **þæt**: "that he should bind ... hold".

7. Translate **ne mæg wērig mōd wyrde wiðstōdan**.

▼ Show answer

"A weary mind cannot withstand fate."

8. What kind of verb is **wāt** in **Ic tō sōþe wāt**?

▼ Show answer

A preterite-present verb (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9): "I know".

9. What does **eardstapa** mean, according to Wikipedia?

▼ Show answer

"Wanderer", from **eard** "earth, land" and **steppan** "to step".

10. Why does **gebīdeð** take **āre** with the ending **-e**?

▼ Show answer

It is a genitive singular: the verb here takes its object in the genitive, "awaits mercy" (my reading).

Note on sources

The Old English is lines 1 to 15 of "XXIII. The Wanderer" in *Bright's Anglo-Saxon Reader* (Wikisource), J. W. Bright, 1913, public domain in the US. I read it from the raw Wikisource page text. The facts about the poem (115 lines, Exeter Book, anonymous, undated, the word **eardstapa**, the possible Norse origin of **hrīmceald**) are from Wikipedia's *The Wanderer (Old English poem)*; I read about the first 3,500 characters of its source and searched the rest for Old English text, which it does not contain. The translations, glosses, grammar labels and Modern English relatives are mine and unverified. I did not use the rest of the poem. The Old English of this text alone, with its source and licence, is in the Appendix: Texts; you can also [download it as a .txt file](#).

Coming up in Chapter 10: The Battle of Maldon. An old retainer's speech from a heroic poem about a battle, and a recap of the whole course.

Old English Reading 1

Chapter 10 · The Battle of Maldon

The Battle of Maldon

The last chapter reads the most quoted speech in Old English heroic verse: an old retainer, with his leader dead, tells the men around him to stand and fight. It is eleven lines, and every tool from the course is useful in it.

THE TEXT IN ONE BOX

The Battle of Maldon survived in one manuscript, Cotton Otho A. xii, which was destroyed in a fire in 1731. Thomas Hearne had copied and published it in 1726, and every modern text goes back to his copy. Both statements are from the note in Bright's edition below. The poem as we have it is incomplete: it begins and ends part-way. The speech is by **Byrhtwold**, an old retainer, after the leader **Byrhtnōð** has fallen (my reading of the lines below; I read only an extract).

The text

Byrhtwold mapeode, · bord hafenode,

Byrhtwold spoke · shield raised

"Byrhtwold spoke, he raised his shield,"

(sē wæs eald genēat) · æsc ācwehte;

(he was old retainer) · ash-spear shook

"(he was an old retainer), and shook his spear;"

hē ful baldlice · beornas lārde:

he very boldly · warriors taught

"he, very boldly, instructed the warriors:"

'Hige sceal þē heardra, · heorte þē cēnre,

mind shall the harder · heart the keener

"Mind must be the harder, heart the keener,"

mōd sceal þē māre, · þē ūre mægen lýtlað.

spirit shall the greater · as our strength lessens

"spirit the greater, as our strength grows less."

hēr līð ūre ealdor · eall forhēawen,

here lies our leader · all cut-down

"Here lies our leader, all hewn down,"

gōd on grēote; · ā mæg gnornian

good on gravel · ever may lament

"the good man on the gravel; he may mourn for ever"

sē ðe nū fram þīs wīgplegan · wendan þenceð.

he who now from this war-play · to-turn thinks

"who now thinks of turning from this war-play."

Ic eom frōd fēores; · fram ic ne wille,

I am old of-life · away I not will

"I am old in life; I will not go away,"

ac ic mē be healfe · mīnum hlāforde,

but I me by side · to-my lord

"but I intend to lie by the side of my lord,"

be swā lēofan men · licgan þence.'

by so dear man · to-lie intend

"beside a man so dear."

Source: Wikisource, *Bright's Anglo-Saxon Reader* (J. W. Bright, 1913), "The Battle of Maldon", the speech that runs from **Byrhtwold mæpelode** to **licgan þence** (lines 309 to 319 by the numbering in Bright's text); public domain in the US. The glosses and translations are mine and unverified; Wikisource gave me no translation. I left out Bright's variant footnotes.

Reading it: the routine in action

Lines 309 to 311: the setting

- **mæpelode**, **hafenode**, **ācwehte** and **lārde** are all past singulars with the weak ending (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 8): "spoke", "raised", "shook", "taught". Four verbs in three lines, the subject **Byrhtwold** given once and then carried forward by **hē**.
- **sē wæs eald genēat** is a short remark in brackets: "he was an old retainer". **wæs** is from **bēon**, and **sē** here is "he", the demonstrative used as a pronoun (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 5; my reading).

Lines 312 and 313: the "harder, keener, greater" rule

- **heardra**, **cēnre** and **māre** are comparatives (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 6): "harder", "keener", "greater". The word **þē** before them I read as "the ... the" ("the harder the better"), a use of a word I did not read a rule for, so treat it as my guess.
- **sceal** "shall, must" is a preterite-present verb (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9). The verb stays in second place and the thing that must grow comes first: **Hige sceal**, "mind must".
- **ūre mægen** "our strength": **ūre** is the possessive "our" before its noun, and **lytlað** is a third person singular present in **-að**, "lessens" (my reading of the verb).

Lines 314 to 316: the fallen leader

- **hēr lið ūre ealdor eall forhēawen**: **lið** is "lies" (third person singular of a verb I read as **licgan**, which appears again in line 319). **forhēawen** ends in **-en**, a past participle

(Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9), "cut down". **gōd on grēote** is "good on gravel", the man and the place.

- **ā mæg gnornian sē ðe nū ... wendan þenceð: sē ðe** is "he who" (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10), the subject of **þenceð** "thinks". **mæg** is another preterite-present verb, with **gnornian** "to mourn" its infinitive. **fram þīs wīgplegan: fram** with the dative, and **wīgplegan** is a dative singular in **-an**, "from this battle-play" (my reading).

Lines 317 to 319: I will not go

- **Ic eom frōd fēores: eom** is from **bēon** (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9); **fēores** is a genitive singular, "of life", telling in what respect he is old.
- **fram ic ne wille: ne** negates **wille** "will"; **fram** is "away", used on its own, and no verb of motion is stated (my reading). The word order puts **fram** first for emphasis.
- **mīnum hlāforde: the** adjective and noun share the dative ending **-um / -e**, "to my lord". **licgan þence** is "I intend to lie": **þence** ends in **-e** as a first person singular present, with the infinitive **licgan**.

Where the alliteration falls

LINE	ALLITERATING SYLLABLES
312	Hige sceal þē heardra · heorte þē cēnre
313	mōd sceal þē mære · þē ūre mægen
316	fram þīs wīgplegan · wendan
317	frōd fēores · fram
319	be swā lēofan men · licgan

The marking is my reading of the verse form, as in Chapters 3, 8 and 9.

New words

OLD ENGLISH	MEANING	MODERN ENGLISH RELATIVE
hige	mind, purpose	—
heorte	heart	heart
mægen	strength	main
ealdor	leader, lord	—
hlāford	lord	lord
bord	shield	board
eald	old	old
licgan	to lie	lie
lēof	dear	lief
hēr	here	here

The meanings are my readings from the lines, not from the source. The "Modern English relative" column is my own knowledge and unverified.

Watch out

This is a text with many editorial marks: the quotation marks, the brackets round **(sē wæs eald genēat)**, the semicolons and the half-line dots all belong to the editor, not the manuscript, and the manuscript itself has been lost since 1731. The line numbers also depend on the edition. Other editions print the verses differently, so a line number in a book may not match the one here.



Quick Reference

FEATURE	WHERE
Weak past -ode	maþelode, hafenode, lærde
Comparatives -ra / -re	heardra, cēnre, mære

FEATURE	WHERE
Preterite-present verbs	sceal, mæg
Past participle -en	forhēawen
Relative sē ðe	sē ðe nū ... þenceð
Negation ne	fram ic ne wille

Try It Yourself

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Translate **hēr lið ūre ealdor**.

▼ Show answer

"Here lies our leader."

2. Which words in line 312 are comparatives?

▼ Show answer

heardra "harder" and **cēnre** "keener".

3. What does **sceal** tell you about the verb type?

▼ Show answer

It is a preterite-present verb (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 9): "shall, must".

4. What ending is on **maþelode**, and what does it show?

▼ Show answer

-ode, the weak past singular: "spoke".

5. Which sound alliterates in line 317?

▼ Show answer

f: frōd, fēores, fram.

6. What is *forhēawen*?

▼ Show answer

A past participle in **-en**: "cut down".

7. Who is *sē ðe nū ... wendan þenceð*?

▼ Show answer

"He who now thinks of turning away": **sē ðe** is "he who" (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 10).

8. Translate *fram ic ne wille* and say where the negative is.

▼ Show answer

"I will not go away." The negative **ne** stands just before the verb **wille**.

9. What does *fēores* do in *frōd fēores*?

▼ Show answer

It is a genitive: "old of life", showing in what respect he is old.

10. Why can the manuscript of the poem not be checked today?

▼ Show answer

It was destroyed in a fire in 1731; only Thomas Hearne's 1726 copy survives (the note in Bright's edition).

Note on sources

The Old English is lines 309 to 319 of "The Battle of Maldon" in *Bright's Anglo-Saxon Reader* (Wikisource), J. W. Bright, 1913, public domain in the US, read from the raw Wikisource page text. I read the closing part of the page and the lines around the speech, not the whole poem. The note about the manuscript and Hearne is Bright's. Everything else, including the account of what happens before the speech, the glosses, translations, grammar labels and Modern English relatives, is mine

and unverified. I did not read a scholarly article about the poem. The Old English of this text alone, with its source and licence, is in the Appendix: Texts; you can also [download it as a .txt file](#).



Course Complete

Over ten chapters you have used one routine on a prayer, a hymn, three kinds of prose, a riddle and three poems. The routine: read the line aloud, find the verb, mark the endings, check the case, look at the order, and in verse look for the alliteration. The chapters were:

1. Reading Strategy
2. The Lord's Prayer
3. Cædmon's Hymn
4. The Chronicle
5. The English Arrive
6. The Colloquy
7. A Riddle
8. Beowulf: The Opening
9. The Wanderer
10. The Battle of Maldon

Many glosses in this course are my own and unverified. Check anything you plan to rely on against a proper edition and dictionary.

Next: the **Appendix: Texts** has the Old English of each text in this course on its own page, with its source and a .txt file. The planned course after this one is **The Story of Old English**.