

LANGUAGE COURSE

Middle English Grammar 1

10 Chapters

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MIDDLE ENGLISH GRAMMAR 1

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Middle English Grammar 1

Chapter 1 · Letters and Sounds

📜 Letters and Sounds

Before the grammar, you need to know what you are looking at on the page. This chapter shows the letters of Middle English and which of them were on their way out, then gives the main rules for saying a word aloud. It uses Wikipedia's Middle English article (its Phonology and Orthography sections) and the Yogh and Thorn (letter) articles. Where they do not say something, the chapter says so. For the history behind the changes, see The History of the English Language, Chapter 3.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Middle English is written with the Latin alphabet plus a few letters inherited from Old English (**þ ð ƿ**) and one more, **ȝ** (yogh). Most of these were replaced by **th, w** and **gh/y** during the period. A final **-e** was silent by Chaucer's time but still sounded in verse, and it came to mark a long vowel before it. Spelling follows the sounds as they were before the Great Vowel Shift.

The letters that were going

LETTER	NAME	WHAT HAPPENED (PER THE ARTICLES)
Æ æ	ash	No longer needed once its vowel merged into /a/; kept as a ligature for *ae* in Greek and Latin words (the same goes for *œ* for *oe*)
Ð ð	eth	Out of use in the 13th century, replaced by thorn
Þ þ	thorn	Mostly out in the 14th century, replaced by *th*; scribes sometimes used both eth and thorn for the same sound
Ƿ ƿ	wynn	Replaced by *w* in the 13th century (the *Thorn* article says wynn was out of use by 1300)
Ȝ ȝ	yogh	From the insular form of g; stood for several sounds (below); replaced by *gh*, *y*, *g* or *j*; the *Yogh* article gives its use as about 1150 to 1500

- **Yogh's sounds.** The *Middle English* article lists /ɣ/, /j/, /dʒ/, /x/ and /ç/. The *Yogh* article lists /g/ and its velar allophones, /j/, /x/ (and palatal [ç], as in *niȝt*), and sometimes /dʒ/ or /w/. The two lists differ in detail and I show both. The digraph *gh* appeared in the 14th century for /x/ and eventually won out.
- **Why "ye"?** The *Middle English* article says a thorn with superscript letters was a common abbreviation for *the* and *that*. The *Thorn* article says thorn lost its ascender and looked like *y*, that printers using type with no thorn substituted *y*, and that "ye" was never pronounced with /j/. It marks the printers-imported-type explanation as disputed.
- **Z for yogh.** The *Yogh* article says Scots printers often used *z* when yogh was not in their fonts, which is why names such as *MacKenzie* keep a *z* and why Menzies is "most correctly" pronounced *mingis* by that article's account.

New letters, and letters that swapped

The article says *k*, *q* and *z* came into common use, and that *u* and *v*, and *i* and *j*, were interchangeable. So you will see *wijf* (modern *wife*) and *paradijs*, both given as examples in the article. A macron over a letter often meant an omitted *n* or *m*.

> **Spelling was not fixed**
> The History of the English Language, Chapter 5 shows that spelling became fixed only slowly after printing. In Middle English manuscripts the same word can appear in several spellings, and regional forms differ, so do not expect one correct spelling.

Vowels

The *Middle English* article gives these letter-to-sound values. The arrows show where the article says the sound was heading by about 1500, because of the Great Vowel Shift (The History of the English Language, Chapter 6).

LETTERS	VALUE IN MIDDLE ENGLISH	LATER
a	/a/, or /aː/ in lengthened positions	/aː/ becomes [æː] by about 1500
ai, ay	/ai/	

LETTERS	VALUE IN MIDDLE ENGLISH	LATER
au, aw	/au/	
e	/e/, or /eː/ or /ɛː/ in lengthened positions	
ee	/eː/ or /ɛː/	/eː/ becomes [iː] and /ɛː/ becomes [eː] by about 1500
i, j	/i/, or /iː/	/iː/ starts to diphthongise by about 1500
o	/o/, or /ɔː/ in lengthened positions	
oo	/oː/ or /ɔː/	/oː/ becomes [uː] by about 1500
ou, ow	/uː/, or /ɔu/	
oi, oy	/ɔi/ or /ui/	

The article describes these through the table, and gives no separate list of diphthongs. It also says: Old English diphthongs were reduced to monophthongs and new ones appeared through vowel breaking, through /j/ and /w/ becoming offglides, and through French borrowing; Old English /æ/ and /ɑ/ merged into /a/; /æː/ rose to /ɛː/; front rounded vowels unrounded in most dialects; and vowels in open syllables lengthened in the 13th century.

Dialects

For the vowels, the part of the article I read gives only two dialect points: Old English /ɑː/ rounded to /ɔː/ in southern dialects, and the front rounded vowels unrounded "in most dialects". It does not give a vowel chart for each dialect. I will show dialect forms in later chapters wherever the sources give them, and say plainly where they do not.

The final -e and the length of vowels

> **The final -e is silent, except in verse**
>
> The article says the final weak /ə/ (written *e*) was lost: by Chaucer's time it was silent in normal speech but still pronounced in verse to fit the metre. Non-final unstressed *e* was dropped in some

contexts, so *every* became *evry* and *palmeres* became *palmers*.

- **A silent final -e marks a long vowel**, as in *name*. The article says the vowel was originally long because it stood in an open syllable, and the final *e* later became the marker.
- **A doubled consonant shows a short vowel**, either from real double consonants or by analogy. Double consonants (gemination) were lost as sounds, so they became single.
- **Voiced fricatives:** /v/, /ð/ and /z/ became separate sounds, not just variants of the voiceless ones.

Consonants that look odd

SPELLING	VALUE (PER THE ARTICLE)	EXAMPLE
gh after a vowel	Allophones of /h/, [ç] or [x]; Chancery spellings kept *gh* even as the sound was being lost	*knight* [ˈkniçt]
kn-	Both the *k* and the *n* were pronounced	*knight*
gn- at the start	The *g* was still pronounced	
mb	The *b* became silent in later Middle English	
h in some French loans	Silent in some, such as *horrible*	*horrible*

In use

The four opening lines of the *General Prologue*, as Wikipedia's *General Prologue* article prints them (Chapter 3 of The History of the English Language shows them with a paraphrase). The table picks out spellings and shows the article's letter-to-sound values for each. The matching of words to values is my own application and I did not check it against a recording or a reading aid.

WORD	SPELLING	POSSIBLE VALUE, FROM THE TABLE
shoures	**ou**	/uː/ or /ɔu/

WORD	SPELLING	POSSIBLE VALUE, FROM THE TABLE
soote	oo	/oː/ or /ɔː/
roote	oo	/oː/ or /ɔː/
flour	ou	/uː/ or /ɔu/
droghte	gh	[ç] or [x], before the *t*

Reading a word aloud: a short procedure

1. Replace the old letters you meet: *þ* and *ð* with *th*, *ƿ* with *w*, *ȝ* according to its neighbours.
2. Pronounce the vowels with the Middle English values in the table, not the Modern English ones.
3. Pronounce the consonants in clusters such as *kn-* and *gn-*, and treat *gh* as [ç] or [x].
4. Treat a final *-e* as silent in prose, and as a sound in verse if the metre needs it.
5. Remember that the spelling may be one of several for the same word.

Words to know

TERM	MEANING
Digraph	Two letters that stand for one sound, such as *th*
Diphthong	A vowel that glides from one sound to another
Monophthong	A vowel with a single, steady sound
Geminate	A doubled (long) consonant
Allophone	A variant of one sound used in certain positions
Ligature	Two letters written joined, such as *æ*

🖍️ Try It Yourself

Think of the answer first, then click to check.

1. Which Old English letters had been replaced by the end of the Middle English period, and by what?

▼ Show answer

Eth by thorn (13th century); thorn by *th* (14th century); wynn by *w* (13th century); yogh by *gh*, *y*, *g* or *j*.

2. Why was "ye olde" never pronounced with a *y* sound?

▼ Show answer

The *y* stood for a thorn, so the word was *the*; the *Thorn* article says it was never pronounced with /j/.

3. Name three sounds yogh could stand for.

▼ Show answer

For example /j/, /x/ and /dʒ/ (both articles list /j/ and /x/).

4. What does the final *-e* do in *name*?

▼ Show answer

It is silent but marks the vowel before it as long.

5. When might a final *-e* be pronounced in Chaucer?

▼ Show answer

In verse, to fit the metre; in normal speech it was silent by Chaucer's time.

6. What does a doubled consonant tell you about the vowel before it?

▼ Show answer

That it is short.

7. How was the *kn* of *knight* pronounced?

▼ Show answer

Both the *k* and the *n* were pronounced.

8. What was the sound of *gh* in *knight*?

▼ Show answer

[ç] (or [x]); the article gives *knight* as [ˈkniçt].

9. Which two spellings show *u/v* and *i/j* interchange in the article's examples?

▼ Show answer

wijf and *paradijs*, spelled with *j* for *i*.

10. What does the article say about dialects in the vowels?

▼ Show answer

In the part I read: /ɑː/ rounded to /ɔː/ in southern dialects, and front rounded vowels unrounded in most dialects; it gives no chart per dialect.

Note on sources

This chapter uses Wikipedia's *Middle English* article (the first 100,000 of 152,190 characters, including the whole Phonology and Orthography sections, as the page tool summarised them), the *Yogh* article (the whole article) and the *Thorn (letter)* article (the whole article). The stress section is not covered in what I read, so I say nothing about stress. The two articles list slightly different sounds for yogh, and I show both. The matching of the *General Prologue* words to values, the reading procedure and the word definitions are mine and unverified.

Coming up in Chapter 2: Nouns. The plural in *-es*, the few older plurals that survive, the genitive, and what happened to gender and case.

📜 Nouns

Old English nouns had three genders and several cases, each with its own endings. Middle English nouns have two main patterns and little else. This chapter shows what is left and how it works. It uses the Nouns subsection of Wikipedia's Middle English article, and where that article does not say something, the chapter says so. For the Old English system this one wore down, see Old English Grammar 1, Chapters 2 to 4.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

According to the article, Middle English "retains only two distinct noun-ending patterns", **strong** and **weak**. The strong plural is **-(e)s** and survives in Modern English. The weak plural is **-(e)n**, now rare (*oxen*). The genitive is **-es**. The distinct dative case was lost in early Middle English, and grammatical gender gave way to natural gender.

Two patterns

PATTERN	PLURAL	WHERE IT CAME FROM (PER THE ARTICLE)	SURVIVES TODAY AS
Strong	**-(e)s**	Strong nouns come from the other Old English noun stem classes	The ordinary *-s* plural
Weak	**-(e)n**	Weak nouns mainly come from Old English n-stem nouns, and also from ō-, wō- and u-stem nouns that joined the weak declension	*oxen*, and double plurals such as *children* and *brethren*

- **Mixed forms.** Some strong nouns take *-e* in the nominative and accusative singular, as weak nouns do, but otherwise keep strong endings.
- **Other survivals.** The article lists *eyen* (eyes), *shoon* (shoes), *hosen* (hose), *kine* (cows) and *been* (bees) as dialect survivals of older plurals.
- **What the article does not say.** Its Nouns section does not discuss vowel-change plurals such as *feet* and *men* (it mentions vowel change only for strong verbs) and does not mention plurals with no ending. Do not infer that they were absent; the article is silent.

The paradigm table

The article has a table of endings by case, but the page text I received did not keep its layout, so I do not reproduce it here and give no full paradigm. What I can state from the prose is the plural and genitive endings above. The paradigm summary in the course appendix will be built only from what the chapters could verify.

The genitive

TYPE	ENDING	EXAMPLE GIVEN
Strong	**-es** (by the end of the period the only ending in use; spelled variously)	
Some formerly feminine nouns and some weak nouns	**-e** or no ending	**fole hoves** (horses' hooves)
Relationship nouns in *-er*	Often no ending	**fader bone** ("father's bane")

So the Modern English possessive *'s* descends from the strong genitive *-es*. The article's wording is that by the end of the period only the strong *-'s* ending, spelled in various ways, was in use; I take no further steps beyond what it says. Old English Grammar 1 also treats the genitive.

Case and gender

- **Dative.** The distinct dative case was lost in early Middle English. The article's table lists dative *-e* in the singular and *-e(s)* in the plural, but the prose does not discuss them as survivals, so I show them only as the table's listing.
- **Gender.** Grammatical gender survived to a limited extent in early Middle English, then was replaced by natural gender over the period. The article shows it in the agreement of articles and pronouns (*þo ule*, "the owl" as a feminine noun), in *he* used for masculine nouns such as *helm*, and in adjective endings such as *-ne*.

Dialects

The Nouns section does not describe regional differences in noun endings beyond the survivals listed above. The article describes dialect differences in the Verbs section (for example in plural verb endings), which a later chapter covers. So here I can show only that the noun system itself is given as two patterns for the language as a whole, and I do not invent dialect forms. Chaucer's London English can be assumed to follow the main patterns, but the article's noun section does not say so, so I do not claim it as the article's statement.

In use

The article's own examples, with my glosses:

MIDDLE ENGLISH	GLOSS	WHAT IT SHOWS
fole hoves	horses' hooves	A genitive with no *-s*, on a noun that was formerly feminine or weak
fader bone	father's bane	A relationship noun in *-er* with no genitive ending
þo ule	the owl (feminine)	Grammatical gender in the article *þo*

Words to know

TERM	MEANING
Strong noun	A noun with the *-(e)s* plural and *-es* genitive pattern
Weak noun	A noun with the *-(e)n* plural pattern, from Old English n-stems
Genitive	The case that shows possession or relation
Dative	The case of the indirect object, lost in early Middle English
Grammatical gender	Gender assigned to nouns by form, not meaning
Natural gender	Gender that follows the real sex of what is named

📝 Try It Yourself

Think of the answer first, then click to check.

1. How many noun-ending patterns does the article say Middle English retains?

▼ Show answer

Two: strong and weak.

2. What is the strong plural, and what is the weak plural?

▼ Show answer

Strong *-(e)s*; weak *-(e)n*.

3. Which Old English noun class does the weak pattern mainly come from?

▼ Show answer

The n-stems (with some ō-, wō- and u-stems joining it).

4. Name a Modern English plural that keeps the weak pattern.

▼ Show answer

Oxen; also the double plurals *children* and *brethren*.

5. What is the strong genitive ending?

▼ Show answer

-es; by the end of the period it was the only ending in use.

6. Why does **fader bone** have no *-s*?

▼ Show answer

Relationship nouns in *-er* often have no genitive ending, per the article.

7. What happened to the dative case?

▼ Show answer

The distinct dative was lost in early Middle English.

8. What replaced grammatical gender, and where did it show?

▼ Show answer

Natural gender; in early Middle English gender showed in the agreement of articles and pronouns, in *he* for masculine nouns such as *helm*, and in adjective endings such as *-ne*.

9. What does the article's Nouns section not say about vowel-change plurals?

▼ Show answer

It does not discuss them (it mentions vowel change only for strong verbs), so the chapter makes no claim about them.

10. Why are no dialect noun forms given in this chapter?

▼ Show answer

The article's Nouns section describes no regional differences beyond a few survivals; dialect differences appear in its Verbs section.

Note on sources

This chapter uses the Morphology, Nouns subsection of Wikipedia's *Middle English* article, as the page tool summarised it. The page tool said the paradigm table did not extract cleanly and gave only an uncertain reconstruction, so I do not use the table's layout, and the case endings beyond the plural and genitive are not shown. The article gives no example words in its table, only in its prose. I did not read the later (post-100,000-character) part of the article, which held only references. The dialect gap is described above. The glosses of the example phrases and the word definitions are mine and unverified.

Coming up in Chapter 3: The, This and That. The reduced definite article, the demonstratives and what replaced the Old English forms.

📜 The, This and That

In Old English the word for "the" had many forms for gender, number and case (Old English Grammar 1, Chapter 5). In Middle English almost all of them are gone. This chapter is a short one on purpose. The Wikipedia Middle English article has no section on articles or demonstratives, so I used other pages, and they cover less than a grammar book would. I say below what I could and could not verify.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

The Middle English definite article is **þe** (written *the* by later printers), and the *Middle English* article says most of the roughly one dozen Old English forms disappeared in Early Middle English (dated 1150 to 1350). **A/an** comes from Old English *ān*, "one". The demonstrative **this** (Middle English *þis*) has many spelling variants, some labelled by region.

The definite article

POINT	WHAT THE SOURCES SAY	SOURCE
The form	In Middle English *the* was written **þe**, with thorn standing for "th"	*English articles*
Use	The article is the only English definite article and "can be used with both singular and plural nouns, with nouns of any gender"	*English articles*
Loss of forms	"Most of the roughly one dozen forms" of the Old English definite article disappeared in Early Middle English (1150 to 1350 on the page)	*Middle English*
Other spellings	The, thi, thy, þ̊, þᵉ, þi, þy	Wiktionary, *þe*
Origin	From Old English *þē*, described as "a late variant of *sē*, the þ- from the oblique stem replacing the earlier s-"; the s- form occurred in	Wiktionary, *þe*

POINT	WHAT THE SOURCES SAY	SOURCE
	the nominative singular masculine and feminine only	
Abbreviation	Scribes wrote *þe* with a small superscript *e*, which later became a *y* with a superscript *e* in early modern print	*English articles*

- **What is left of the old forms.** The *Middle English* article shows an old feminine article in the owl example, **þo ule** (Chapter 2), as a survival of grammatical gender in early Middle English.
- **A date for the invariant article.** I could not find one. The *Middle English* article gives no date for *the* becoming invariant, and the *English articles* page gives none either.
- **Dialects.** None of these pages gives separate Northern and Southern forms of the article. I show none.
- **Where the article shapes adjectives.** The *Middle English* article says single-syllable adjectives take a final *-e* after the definite article and after demonstratives such as *þis* and *þat*, and that this continued in writing after the final *e* stopped being pronounced. Chapter 4 follows this up.

A and an

POINT	WHAT THE *ENGLISH ARTICLES* PAGE SAYS
Origin	*An* is the older form, related to *one*, from Old English *ān*, which goes back to roots meaning "single"
The loss of *n*	The *n* was gradually assimilated before consonants in almost all dialects by the 15th century, but survived before vowels, which is why *an* is used before vowel sounds today
An example	The Paston Letters of 1448 show the *n* shifting between article and noun: **a nege** for *an edge*
Later change	The form *an* before /ju/ words such as *unicorn* was largely replaced by *a* from the 19th century on

This

The Wiktionary entry for Middle English **þis** ("this") lists these spellings, and its headword line gives some Old-English-style inflected forms: a feminine *þeos*, an accusative *þisne*, a dative *þissum* and a genitive *þisses*. I give the lists as printed and take it that the headword line records older forms, not Middle English usage. Wiktionary is edited by volunteers, and what I read was a snapshot.

GROUP	FORMS (AS THE ENTRY PRINTS THEM)
Main alternative forms	**þys, þise, þisse, þyse, þysse, þes, þese, þeis, þeise, þeys, þeyse, þeose, þus, dis**
Southwest	**þues, þusse**
Northern and East Anglia	**yis**
Early Middle English	**þisse, þysse, þies, þyes, þesse, þæs, þos**
After dentals	The *tis* forms

- **Sound.** The entry's pronunciation note gives /ðis/, with emphatic /θis/, and /tis/ after /t/.
- **Plural.** The entry does not label any form as plural, so I cannot tell you from this source which of these spellings were plural. Modern English *these* descends from forms like these, but I did not find a source that states it, so I do not claim it.
- **Dialects.** The only regional labels are the two above: Southwest *þues*, *þusse*, and Northern and East Anglia *yis*. I could not find labels for the Midlands or Kent.

That

Wiktionary's Middle English entry for **þat** says only "alternative form of *that*" under three headings: conjunction, pronoun and determiner. It gives one citation, from a1420, a translation of Lanfranc's surgical text: **þat is to-broken or dislocate**. It lists no plural form, no dialect forms and no etymology for the Middle English section. So I can say *þat* and *that* are one word and that it served as conjunction, pronoun and determiner, and nothing more. I could not verify the plural (*tho* or *those*), and Wiktionary's entry for *þo* gave only "alternative form of þou (thou)", which is a different word.

What this chapter could not give

- A full paradigm of the Middle English article and demonstratives. No source I could read gave one.
- Dialect forms of *that* and the plurals of *this* and *that*.
- A date for the article becoming invariant.

I would rather say this than fill the gap from memory. When the course appendix is built, the article and demonstrative table will contain only the forms in this chapter.

Words to know

TERM	MEANING
Definite article	The word for "the"
Indefinite article	The word for "a" or "an"
Demonstrative	A word that points out something, such as *this* or *that*
Determiner	A word that introduces a noun, including articles and demonstratives
Invariant	Having only one form
Assimilation	A sound becoming like a neighbouring sound, or being absorbed by it

🖍️ Try It Yourself

Think of the answer first, then click to check.

1. How was *the* written in Middle English?

▼ Show answer

þe, with thorn for "th".

2. What happened to the Old English forms of the definite article?

▼ Show answer

Most of the roughly one dozen forms disappeared in Early Middle English (1150 to 1350 on the page).

3. From which Old English word does *þe* come, according to Wiktionary?

▼ Show answer

þē, a late variant of *sē*, with þ- from the oblique stem replacing s-.

4. Why is "ye" not pronounced with a *y*?

▼ Show answer

The *y* stood for thorn in print, so the word was *the*.

5. Where does *a/an* come from, and when did the *n* go before consonants?

▼ Show answer

From Old English *ān*, "one"; the *n* was gradually lost before consonants in almost all dialects by the 15th century.

6. What does the Paston Letters example show?

▼ Show answer

The *n* shifting between article and noun: *a nege* for *an edge* (1448).

7. Which regional forms of *this* does Wiktionary give?

▼ Show answer

Southwest *þues, þusse*; Northern and East Anglia *yis*.

8. What roles does *þat* play in the Wiktionary entry?

▼ Show answer

Conjunction, pronoun and determiner, each defined as "alternative form of *that*".

Note on sources

The Wikipedia *Middle English* article (first 100,000 of 152,190 characters) has no determiners subsection, so it gives only the facts above. I also read Wikipedia's *English articles* page (the whole page, which does not cover the Old English forms, gender, the date *the* became invariant or Northern and Southern forms) and Wiktionary's Middle English entries for *þe*, *þis*, *þat* and *þo* (the Middle English parts only), all as the page tool summarised them. The Middle English parts of the Wiktionary pages for *this* and *that* were cut off, so I used the entries for *þis* and *þat*. I did not find a source for the plural demonstratives, a full paradigm or a date, and the chapter says so. I did not read any grammar book. Wiktionary is volunteer-edited and I read snapshots. The glosses and word definitions are mine and unverified.

Coming up in Chapter 4: Adjectives. The final *-e* in plural and definite forms, comparison, and what the sources say about agreement.

📜 Adjectives

Old English adjectives changed their endings for case, gender and number. Middle English adjectives mostly do not, but a small final -e keeps turning up. This chapter follows the Adjectives subsection of Wikipedia's Middle English article, and says plainly where that subsection stops. For the Old English system this wore down, see Old English Grammar 1.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

A single-syllable adjective takes a final **-e** when it modifies a **plural** noun, after **the**, after a **demonstrative or possessive**, and in **direct address**. Otherwise it is unmarked. Comparison is usually **-er** and **-est**.

The final -e

CONTEXT	ADJECTIVE FORM
Modifying a plural noun	adjective + **-e**
After the definite article	adjective + **-e**
After a demonstrative or possessive	adjective + **-e**
In direct address	adjective + **-e**
Anywhere else	unmarked

- **Where it comes from.** The article traces the *-e* to the Old English weak declension, the pattern Old English used after *the*, *this* and similar words.
- **Written, not always said.** The *-e* went on being written after it stopped being pronounced.
- **Longer adjectives.** Adjectives of more than one syllable also took *-e* in these positions in earlier texts, but less consistently later on.

- **No double -e.** An adjective that already ends in *-e* does not gain another.
- **Earlier texts inflect more.** The article says Layamon's *Brut* marks several case and gender forms, and that *The Owl and the Nightingale* adds *-e* to non-nominative adjectives, but only in the weak declension.

> **Link to Chapter 3**
>
> Chapter 3 met the article **þe** and the demonstratives **þis** and **þat**. These are the words that trigger the *-e* here, so the two chapters belong together.

Comparison

PATTERN	WHAT THE ARTICLE SAYS	EXAMPLE GIVEN
Regular	Comparative and superlative usually in **-er** and **-est**	
Short long vowel	Some adjectives shorten a long vowel when comparing	**greet** (great), **gretter** (greater)
Adjectives in -ly or -lich	Comparatives with either **-lier / -liest** or **-loker / -lokest**	
Umlaut	A few show Germanic umlaut	**long**, **lenger**
Other irregulars	Described as mostly matching Modern English	

The article names no other irregular adjectives, so this chapter does not list forms such as those for *good* or *bad*.

What this chapter could not give

- **Agreement.** The subsection does not discuss agreement with gender or number beyond the plural and definite-article contexts above.
- **Dialects.** It describes no regional differences in adjective endings. It mentions two texts, but does not tie their patterns to a dialect, so I give no Northern, Midland, Southern or

Kentish adjective forms.

- **Chaucer's London English.** The subsection does not say how consistently Chaucer's text uses the *-e*, so I make no claim.
- **Full example sentences.** I fetched the Wiktionary entry for **gret**, which says only "alternative form of *grete*", with no inflected forms or dated citations. The entry for *lang* was cut off before its Middle English part. So the examples come from the article only.

Words to know

TERM	MEANING
Weak declension	The Old English adjective pattern used after the or a demonstrative, source of the Middle English *-e*
Direct address	Speaking to someone by name or title
Comparative	The form meaning "more", as in *-er*
Superlative	The form meaning "most", as in *-est*
Umlaut	A vowel change caused by a following sound, as in *long* and *lenger*

🖍️ Try It Yourself

Think of the answer first, then click to check.

1. Name four contexts in which a single-syllable adjective takes *-e*.

▼ Show answer

Before a plural noun, after the definite article, after a demonstrative or possessive, and in direct address.

2. Where does the *-e* come from?

▼ Show answer

The Old English weak declension.

3. The *-e* stopped being pronounced. Did it stop being written?

▼ Show answer

No. It continued to be written.

4. What happens to an adjective that already ends in *-e*?

▼ Show answer

It does not gain another *-e*.

5. What are the usual comparative and superlative endings?

▼ Show answer

-er and *-est*.

6. What happens to the vowel in **greet** when it becomes **gretter**?

▼ Show answer

A long vowel is shortened (and the article's spelling doubles the *t*).

7. Which pair in this chapter shows umlaut?

▼ Show answer

long and **lenger**.

8. Why does this chapter give no dialect forms for adjectives?

▼ Show answer

The article's Adjectives subsection describes no regional differences, and the chapter does not fill the gap from memory.

Note on sources

This chapter uses the Morphology, Adjectives subsection of Wikipedia's *Middle English* article, as the page tool summarised it; I read the first 100,000 of 152,228 characters, which contain the subsection. Wiktionary's *gret* entry gave only a pointer to *grete*, and its *lang* page was cut off before

the Middle English part. I read no grammar book. The glosses, the table layout and the word definitions are mine and unverified.

Coming up in Chapter 5: Pronouns. The personal pronouns, *thou* and *ye*, and the arrival of *she* and *they*.

📜 Pronouns

Pronouns are the one part of the grammar that kept its cases. Nouns lost most of theirs (Chapter 2), but Middle English still has he and him, we and us. This chapter gives the personal pronoun table from Wikipedia's Middle English article, the two big newcomers she and they, and the points where the article is silent. For the Old English pronouns, see Old English Grammar 1.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Pronouns keep **separate subject and object forms**, unlike nouns. Two forms were replaced: **she** (a form of the demonstrative took over the feminine subject) and **they / them / their** (borrowed from Old Norse). The Old English dual forms were lost.

The personal pronouns

Read this table with care

The page text I received merged some columns, and the article lists many spelling variants, so the table is my reading of an approximate extraction. I checked it a second time and the rows agreed, but I still treat the cell-by-cell placement as less certain than the prose. Forms are given as the article lists them, separated by slashes. The article's dash for the feminine possessive pronoun is shown as "none listed".

PERSON	SUBJECT	OBJECT	POSSESSIVE (BEFORE A NOUN)	MODERN ENGLISH
1st singular	**ic / ich / I**	**me / mi**	**min / minen (pl.)**	I, me, my
2nd singular	**þou / þu / tu / þeou**	**þe**	**þi / ti**	thou, thee, thy
3rd masculine	**he**	**him / hine**	**his / hisse / hes**	he, him, his

PERSON	SUBJECT	OBJECT	POSSESSIVE (BEFORE A NOUN)	MODERN ENGLISH
3rd feminine	**scheo / scho / ȝho**	**heo / his / hie / hies / hire**	**hio / heo / hire / heore**	she, her, her
3rd neuter	**hit**	**hit / him**	**his**	it, it, its
1st plural	**we**	**us / ous**	**ure[n] / our[e] / ures / urne**	we, us, our
2nd plural	**ȝe / ye**	**eow / [ȝ]ou / ȝow / gu / you**	**eower / [ȝ]ower / gur / [e]our**	ye, you, your
3rd plural (Old English line)	**heo / he**	**his / heo[m]**	**heore / her**	they, them, their
3rd plural (Old Norse line)	**þa / þei / þeo / þo**	**þem / þo**	**þeir**	they, them, their

The article also lists possessive pronouns used alone and reflexive forms. A few of them: **min / mire / minre** (mine), **þin / þyn** (thine), **oures** (ours), **youres** (yours), **him-seluen** (himself), **mi seluen** (myself). The third-person plural rows were the least clear in the extraction, so I report them as they appeared.

The newcomers

WORD	WHAT THE ARTICLE SAYS	WHAT IT DOES NOT SAY
she	The feminine subject was replaced by a form of the demonstrative that developed into **sche**. The older form **heyr** stayed in some areas for a long time.	A date, or where the change began
they	The third-person plural is a borrowing from Old Norse. The Old English form clashed with the third-person singular and was eventually dropped.	A date, or the order in which *they*, *them* and *their* spread

Old English Grammar 1's own pronoun table is for the older language. The Wikipedia article *Old English grammar* says the plural third-person pronouns "were all replaced with Old Norse forms during the Middle English period" and applies this to stressed positions. It does not mention *she*.

Changes in the third person

- **Him for hine.** The distinction between dative and accusative in the third person was gradually lost. **hine** was replaced by **him** south of the River Thames by the early 14th century.
- **Neuter dative.** The neuter dative **him** was largely replaced by *it* in most dialects by the 15th century.
- **Dual lost.** The Old English dual forms ("we two", "you two") disappeared.
- **The h- forms.** The table lists **hit** for "it" and **heo[m]**, **heore / her** for "them" and "their" in the Old English line. The article does not discuss them in prose.

Thou and ye

The table gives **þou** as 2nd singular and **ȝe / ye** as 2nd plural. The article does not explain when a speaker chose one over the other (politeness, rank, familiarity), so I make no claim about it here. Chaucer's practice is likewise not covered in the pages I read.

Dialects

The article says many other variants exist because of spelling and pronunciation across time and dialect, but in this subsection it ties no form to a Northern, Midland, Southern or Kentish area. The only regional notes are **heyr** surviving in some areas and **hine** giving way to **him** south of the Thames. I give no further dialect pronoun forms.

Words to know

TERM	MEANING
Subject form	The pronoun used for the doer: *he*, *we*
Object form	The pronoun used for the receiver: *him*, *us*
Possessive	The pronoun that shows ownership: *his*, *our*
Reflexive	A pronoun that points back to the subject: *himself*
Dual	An Old English pronoun form for exactly two people, lost in Middle English

🖍️ Try It Yourself

Think of the answer first, then click to check.

1. What do pronouns keep that nouns mostly lost?

▼ Show answer

Separate subject and object (nominative and accusative) forms.

2. Give three Middle English spellings of "she" from the table.

▼ Show answer

scheo, **scho**, **ȝho** (the article's list).

3. Where did the new third-person plural come from?

▼ Show answer

Old Norse.

4. Why, according to the article, was the Old English plural dropped?

▼ Show answer

It clashed with the third-person singular.

5. Which Middle English forms for "they" and "their" come from Old Norse in the table?

▼ Show answer

þei and its variants for "they", and **þeir** for "their".

6. What replaced **hine**, and where first?

▼ Show answer

him, south of the River Thames by the early 14th century.

7. What replaced the neuter dative **him**?

▼ Show answer

It, in most dialects by the 15th century.

8. Which Middle English pronouns are 2nd singular and 2nd plural subjects?

▼ Show answer

þou (singular) and **ȝe / ye** (plural).

9. Does the article say when to use *thou* rather than *ye*?

▼ Show answer

No. The chapter makes no claim about it.

10. Why does this chapter give no dialect pronoun forms?

▼ Show answer

The article names only **heyr** surviving in some areas and the change south of the Thames, and ties no other form to a region.

Note on sources

The table and prose come from the Morphology, Pronouns subsection of Wikipedia's *Middle English* article, as the page tool summarised it; I read it twice and the readings agreed. The tool said the table's columns were merged, so its layout is approximate. I read the first 100,000 of 152,228 characters. For the Old English remark I read the first 100,000 of 131,629 characters of *Old English grammar*; its table was also partly garbled, so I used no Old English forms from it. I read no

grammar book. The Modern English column, the headings and the word definitions are mine and unverified.

Coming up in Chapter 6: Verbs: Weak and Strong. The dental past tense, vowel-change verbs and the dialect endings of the present tense.

📜 Verbs: Weak and Strong

Verbs kept more of their endings than nouns did, and this is where the dialects differ most clearly. This chapter follows the Verbs subsection of Wikipedia's Middle English article: the present-tense endings, the infinitive and participles, and the two ways of making a past tense. The irregular verbs (be, have, do, will) are for Chapter 7. For the Old English verbs this system came from, see Old English Grammar 1.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

A regular verb adds **-e** (I), **-(e)st** (thou) and **-eþ** or **-es** (he) in the present. The plural ending depends on the dialect: **-eþ** in the South, **-en** in the Midlands from about 1200, **-es** in the North. **Weak** verbs make the past with a **dental** ending (-ed(e), -d(e), -t(e)); **strong** verbs change the stem vowel.

The present tense

PERSON	ENDING	EXAMPLE GIVEN
1st singular	**-e**	**ich here** (I hear)
2nd singular	**-(e)st**	**þou spekest** (thou speakest)
3rd singular	**-eþ**, variant **-es**	**he comeþ** (he cometh, he comes)
Plural	depends on dialect: see below	

The plural, dialect by dialect

DIALECT	PLURAL PRESENT ENDING	WHAT THE ARTICLE SAYS
Southern	**-eþ**	Keeps the Old English ending

DIALECT	PLURAL PRESENT ENDING	WHAT THE ARTICLE SAYS
Midland	**-en**	Appears from about 1200
Northern	**-es**	Used in the 3rd singular and in the plural
East Midland, West Midland, Kentish	The subsection names only Southern, Midland and Northern, so I give nothing separate for these three.	

Why it matters

The Northern *-es* is the ancestor of the Modern English *-s* in *he speaks*. The article does not say this in so many words, so this is my link and unverified. The article's own table also shows the Midland plural *-en* with *-es* and *-eþ* in brackets as variants.

Infinitive and participles

FORM	ENDING
Infinitive	**-en**
Present participle	**-ende** or **-ynge**
Past participle, weak verbs	the past-tense stem, with the prefixes **i-**, **y-** and sometimes **bi-**
Past participle, strong verbs	**i-** plus **-en**

The subsection does not assign *-ende* or *-ynge* to a dialect, so I do not. It does not cover the imperative or the subjunctive in this subsection.

Weak verbs

- **The past tense** adds **-ed(e)**, **-d(e)** or **-t(e)**.
- **The past participle** uses the same past-tense forms, without personal endings, with the prefixes above.

- The article's weak-verb table shows **-ede** and **-eden** and, for the 2nd singular, **-edest**. The page tool said the table's cells were misaligned, so I do not give a full person-by-person paradigm.

Strong verbs

- Strong verbs make the past tense by changing the stem vowel, called **apophony**. The article's example is **binden**, past **bound**.
- The subsection describes no separate vowel-change classes, so I list none. Old English Grammar 1 covers the classes of the earlier language.
- The article's table gives strong past endings of **-e** (and **-est**) in the singular and **-en** in the plural, though the person slots were not clearly aligned.

What this chapter could not give

- **A full paradigm:** both verb tables came through partly garbled, so only the clear cells are used.
- **Forms for the East Midland, West Midland and Kentish dialects** separately, and the Chaucerian London practice.
- **A list of strong verbs** beyond *binden*, and their vowel patterns.
- **Dates** other than the Midland *-en* plural from about 1200.

Words to know

TERM	MEANING
Weak verb	A verb whose past tense adds a dental ending (-ed, -d, -t)
Strong verb	A verb whose past tense changes the stem vowel
Apophony	A change of vowel inside a word to show a grammatical change
Infinitive	The "to ..." form of a verb
Participle	A verb form used like an adjective or with a helper verb

Try It Yourself

Think of the answer first, then click to check.

1. What are the 1st and 2nd singular present endings?

▼ Show answer

-e and **-(e)st**.

2. What is the 3rd singular ending, and its variant?

▼ Show answer

-eþ, variant **-es**.

3. Give the plural present ending in the Southern, Midland and Northern dialects.

▼ Show answer

Southern **-eþ**; Midland **-en** (from about 1200); Northern **-es**.

4. Which dialect keeps the Old English plural ending?

▼ Show answer

The Southern dialects.

5. What is the infinitive ending?

▼ Show answer

-en.

6. Name the three ways a weak verb can form its past tense.

▼ Show answer

Adding **-ed(e)**, **-d(e)** or **-t(e)**.

7. How does a strong verb make its past tense? Give the article's example.

▼ Show answer

By changing the stem vowel; **binden** becomes **bound**.

8. How does the strong past participle differ from the weak one?

▼ Show answer

Strong: **i-** plus **-en**. Weak: the past-tense stem with prefixes such as **i-** or **y-**.

9. Translate **þou spekest**.

▼ Show answer

"Thou speakest" (you speak, singular).

10. Why does this chapter give no separate East Midland, West Midland or Kentish verb endings?

▼ Show answer

The article's Verbs subsection names only Southern, Midland and Northern, and the chapter does not fill the gap from memory.

Note on sources

This chapter uses the Morphology, Verbs subsection of Wikipedia's *Middle English* article, as the page tool summarised it; I read the first 100,000 of 152,228 characters, which contain the subsection. The tool said the regular-verb tables were misaligned, so I use only clear cells. A page I tried on Middle English verbs returned a 404. I read no grammar book. The link of Northern *-es* to Modern English *-s*, the glosses and the word definitions are mine and unverified.

Coming up in Chapter 7: Be, Have, Do, Will. The irregular and auxiliary verbs, and the modals.

📜 Be, Have, Do, Will

The commonest verbs are the least regular. This chapter gives the forms of be, have, do, go and will, and then the modals (can, may, shall and others), all from the irregular-verb table in Wikipedia's Middle English article. The table came through partly garbled, so I use the rows the tool read clearly and mark the doubtful cells. The regular patterns are in Chapter 6.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

These verbs do not follow the regular endings. **Be** has *am, art, is, aren* in the present and *was, weren* in the past. **Have**, **do** and **will** are irregular in the 2nd and 3rd singular and in the past. The modals (*can, may, shall, must* and others) take **no ending in the 1st and 3rd singular**, as the table shows.

A warning about this table

The page text had no reliable column alignment. A cell can sit under the wrong heading, and several rows were marked unclear by the tool. The article gives no dialect labels for any of these forms. Nothing here is a full paradigm.

Be, have, do, go, will

VERB	INFINITIVE	PRESENT (1SG, 2SG, 3SG, PLURAL)	PAST (SINGULAR, PLURAL)
be	been	am, art, is, aren	was (2sg wast), weren
have	haven	have, hast, haþ, haven	hadde (2sg haddest), hadden
do	don	do, dost, doþ / doth, doþ / don	didde (2sg didst), didden

VERB	INFINITIVE	PRESENT (1SG, 2SG, 3SG, PLURAL)	PAST (SINGULAR, PLURAL)
go	**gon**	**go, gost, goþ, goþ / gon**	**wend / yede / yode**; plural **wenden / yeden / yoden**
will (want)	**willen**	**will, wilt, will, wollen**	**wolde** (2sg **woldest**), **wolden**

- **Participles.** Present participles end **-ende / -ynge** (for example **beende / beynge**, **havende / havynge**). Past participles listed are **ibeen**, **ihad**, **idon** and **igon(gen)**. No past participle is listed for *will*.
- **Be.** An unlabeled extra list follows the row (**be, bist, biþ, beth / been, were**). The table does not say what it is. It may be subjunctive or imperative forms, but that is a guess.
- **Go.** The past is a set of alternatives, **wend**, **yede**, **yode**. The article gives no regions for them, so I do not pick one.
- **Will.** The glossed meaning is "want", which is how the table presents it.

The modals and similar verbs

VERB (GLOSS IN TABLE)	PRESENT (1SG, 2SG, 3SG, PLURAL)	PAST (SINGULAR, PLURAL)
can (cunnen)	**can, canst, can, cunnen**	**coude / couthe**; **couden / couthen**
dare (durren)	**dar, darst, dar, durren**	**durst / dirst**; **dursten**
may (mowen)	**may, myghst, may, mowen**	**mighte**; **mighten**
must (moten)	**mot, must, mot, moten**	**muste**; **musten**
shall (schulen, glossed "should")	**schal, schalt, schal, schulen**	**scholde**; **scholde**
know (witen)	**woot, woost, woot, witen**	**wiste**; **wisten**
owe, ought (owen)	**owe, owest, owe, owen**	**owed / ought**

VERB (GLOSS IN TABLE)	PRESENT (1SG, 2SG, 3SG, PLURAL)	PAST (SINGULAR, PLURAL)
need (þurven, þaren)	**þarf, þarst, þarf, þurven / þaren**	**þurft**; **þurften**

Look at the 1st and 3rd singular: *can / can*, *may / may*, *schal / schal*, *mot / mot*. They are the same, with no *-eþ*. That is why Modern English still says *he can*, not *he cans*. This is my observation from the table, not a statement in the article. The table's cells for *can*, *dare*, *owe* and *need* were flagged as unclear, so treat those rows with extra care.

What this chapter could not give

- **The use of these verbs.** The article's prose says nothing about *do* as a helper, *will* as a future marker, or the modals as a group. So I cannot say when *do* began to help in questions (Chapter 8) or how *will* and *shall* marked the future.
- **Dialect forms** of any of these verbs.
- **Why modals look as they do.** The article gives the forms but does not explain the pattern. The table is called "irregular and preterite-present", but its text does not describe what preterite-present means.

Words to know

TERM	MEANING
Irregular verb	A verb that does not follow the regular endings
Auxiliary	A helper verb used with another verb
Modal verb	A helper verb for ability, permission, obligation or the future
Preterite-present	A label the article uses for the modal-type verbs; this course does not define it, as the source does not

🖍️ Try It Yourself

Think of the answer first, then click to check.

1. Give the present singular and plural of *be*.

▼ Show answer

am, art, is; plural **aren**.

2. Give the past of *be*.

▼ Show answer

was (2sg **wast**), plural **weren**.

3. What is the 3rd singular present of *have*?

▼ Show answer

haþ.

4. What is the past of *do*, singular and plural?

▼ Show answer

didde, **didden**.

5. Which three past forms does the table give for *go*?

▼ Show answer

wend, **yede**, **yode**.

6. What are the present forms of *will* in the table?

▼ Show answer

will, wilt, will, plural **wollen**.

7. What do the 1st and 3rd singular of the modals have in common?

▼ Show answer

They are the same form with no ending: **can / can**, **may / may**, **schal / schal**.

8. Give the past singular of *shall*, *may* and *must*.

▼ Show answer

scholde, **mighte**, **muste**.

9. What does the article's prose not tell us about *do* and *will*?

▼ Show answer

How they were used as helpers: it says nothing about *do* in questions or *will* marking the future.

10. Why does the chapter list no dialect forms?

▼ Show answer

The table gives no regional labels for any of these verbs.

Note on sources

This chapter uses the irregular and preterite-present verb table in the Morphology, Verbs subsection of Wikipedia's *Middle English* article, as the page tool summarised it; I read the first 100,000 of 152,228 characters. The tool said the table had no reliable column alignment and marked the rows for *can*, *dare*, *owe*, *need* and the extra list under *be* as unclear. I read no grammar book. The observation about the modals' shared singular forms, the glosses and the word definitions are mine and unverified.

Coming up in Chapter 8: Questions and Negation. Questions by inversion, *ne* and *not*, and negative concord.

📜 Questions and Negation

This chapter has a lopsided source base. Wikipedia's Middle English article has no syntax section, so it says nothing about how questions were formed. Negation is better covered: the article Jespersen's cycle traces ne, ne ... not and not with dated figures. I give what I could read, and say clearly what I could not.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Negation passed through three stages: **ne** alone, then **ne ... not** around the verb, then **not** alone (reached in the 15th century). Word order moved from "relatively free" towards a stricter order as endings wore away. **Questions**: no source I could read describes them, so the chapter gives no rule for them.

The three stages of negation

STAGE	PATTERN	EXAMPLE GIVEN
Old English	**ne** before the verb	**ic ne secge** (I do not say)
Middle English, stage two	**ne ... not** around the verb	**I ne seye not** (I NEG say not)
Stage three	**not** alone, reached in the 15th century	**I say not**

- **Where *not* comes from.** The article says *noht* led to the second stage. In the past-tense example, Old English *ic ne geseah* ("I didn't see") became Middle English **I ne ysauȝ nauȝt** (NEG saw nothing). **nauȝt** comes from Old English *nawiht*, "no thing". Early Modern English then has "I saw not".
- **Emphasis in Old English.** It was optionally added with *na*, *nalles* and *noht*.

The dated figures

The article cites Phillip Wallage's study of the Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English, which counted sentential negation (complex examples excluded). The most common pattern in each period:

PERIOD	MOST COMMON PATTERN	SHARE
1150–1250	**ne** alone	60.5%
1250–1350	**ne** + **not**	67.7%
1350–1420	**not** alone	87.5%
1420–1500	**not** alone	98.2%

The article does not break these figures down by dialect or text type, so I cannot say whether Northern, Midland or Southern writers differed, or what Chaucer did. Those figures are percentages across the whole corpus.

Word order

- The *Middle English* article says Old Norse contact helped move English from a language with "relatively free word order" to a more analytic one with stricter order, attributing this to the erosion of inflectional endings in the Danelaw.
- It also describes a general shift "from inflections to fixed word order" in early Middle English, and says other Germanic languages did the same, more slowly.

Do

The article *Do-support* says that in Middle English auxiliary *do* "apparently had a meaning contribution", marking aspect, probably perfective but in some cases imperfective. In Early Modern English that meaning was lost, and the use of *do* forms came to resemble today's. It gives no dates for when this began and no glossed Middle English questions or negatives with *do*. Chapter 7 gave the forms of *do*; this is all the sources let me say about its use.

What this chapter could not give

- **Questions.** Neither article describes Middle English question formation, so I give no rule on inversion, and no example question.
- **Negative concord** (several negatives in one sentence). Not described in what I read. The example **I ne ysauȝ nauȝt** shows *ne* and *nauȝt* together, but the article presents it as the second stage of one pattern, not as a rule about multiple negatives.
- **Dialect differences** in negation, and Chaucer's practice.
- **Full sentences** beyond the short examples above.

Words to know

TERM	MEANING
Negation	Saying that something is not so
Jespersen's cycle	The pattern in which a negative word weakens, is strengthened by another, and is then replaced by it
Corpus	A large collection of texts used for counting
Auxiliary	A helper verb, such as *do*
Aspect	Whether an action is seen as completed or ongoing

🖍️ Try It Yourself

Think of the answer first, then click to check.

1. Name the three stages of negation in order.

▼ Show answer

ne alone; **ne … not**; **not** alone.

2. Translate **ic ne secge**.

▼ Show answer

"I do not say" (Old English).

3. Where does **nau3t** come from?

▼ Show answer

Old English *nawiht*, "no thing".

4. In which period was *ne* + *not* the most common pattern, and with what share?

▼ Show answer

1250–1350, at 67.7%.

5. By 1420–1500, what share of negation was *not* alone?

▼ Show answer

98.2%.

6. Whose study do the figures come from, and what was counted?

▼ Show answer

Phillip Wallage's, using the Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English; it counted sentential negation, excluding complex examples.

7. Why did word order become stricter, according to the *Middle English* article?

▼ Show answer

Inflectional endings eroded, helped by Old Norse contact in the Danelaw.

8. What does the *Do-support* article say *do* contributed in Middle English?

▼ Show answer

A meaning of aspect, probably perfective but sometimes imperfective.

9. Why does this chapter give no rule for Middle English questions?

▼ Show answer

Neither source describes them, and the chapter does not fill the gap from memory.

Note on sources

The negation material comes from Wikipedia's *Jespersen's cycle* (the English section as the page tool summarised it); the page cites Wallage, Tottie 1991 and van Gelderen 2014, none of which I read. The word-order remarks come from the first 100,000 of 152,228 characters of *Middle English*, which has no syntax section. The remark on *do* comes from *Do-support*, whose "Common uses" section covers modern rules only. I read no grammar book. The glosses of the table headings, the word definitions and my reading of the examples are mine and unverified.

Coming up in Chapter 9: Borrowed Words. French and Norse words and endings, and how the grammar absorbed them.

📜 Borrowed Words

Two languages pressed on Middle English: Norse in the north and east, and French (Norman, then Anglo-Norman) from 1066. This chapter lists what the sources say they added, which words are grammar words and which are everyday vocabulary, and where the sources say the effect on the grammar is only proposed. For the history behind this, see The History of the English Language, Chapters 2 and 3.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Norse gave grammar words (*they, their, both, same, are*) and everyday words. **French** gave words of law, government, religion, the arts and food, plus affixes such as *-ment, -able, -ity*. Both languages are linked to the loss of endings, but the sources present much of that link as a proposal.

Norse

WHAT THE SOURCES SAY	DETAIL
When	Main contact between the 9th and 11th centuries, in the settlement of eastern and northern England. Norse words entered speech in the 10th and 11th centuries and appear in writing from the early 13th century, which the *Middle English* article puts down to the West Saxon bias of surviving Old English writing.
Where	Strongest in the Danelaw (Yorkshire, the central and eastern Midlands, East Anglia). Northern texts show the most borrowings.
Grammar words	*They* from **þeir**, *their* from **þeirra**, *both* from **baðir**, *same* from **same / samr**. *Though* is partly from **þó**, and *are* blends Old English and Old Norse forms.
Where it shows	The *Middle English* article says Viking influence is most visible in pronouns, modals, comparatives, pronominal adverbs (*hence, together*), conjunctions and prepositions.

Chapter 5 gave the Norse third-person plural line of the pronoun table (**þei**, **þem**, **þeir**).

WORD	OLD NORSE SOURCE (AS LISTED)	GLOSS GIVEN
egg	**egg**	egg
take	**taka**	
cake	**kaka**	cake
leg	**leggr**	
ill	**illr**	bad
husband	**husbondi**	master of the house
window	**vindauga**	wind-eye
sky	**ský**	cloud
skin	**skinn**	animal hide
skirt	**skyrta**	shirt
skull	**skulle**	head (the page's own gloss)

The Wikipedia list marks some words as northern, such as *bloom* and *harsh*, and says the northern form of *gable* probably comes straight from Norse. That is the list's own note; it does not give Middle English spellings, so I give none.

French

WHAT THE SOURCES SAY	DETAIL
When	After the Norman Conquest of 1066. Borrowing was gradual; the peak was 1250–1400, when about 40% of the French words in English first appear (*Influence of French on English*). Anglo-Norman stayed the dominant language of literature and law until the 14th century.

WHAT THE SOURCES SAY	DETAIL
Law and government	*court, judge, jury, appeal, parliament, justice, heir*
Food	*beef* (from **buef**, c. 1300), *mutton* (**moton**, sheep), *veal* (**vel**, calf)
Home and daily life	*chair* (**chaiere**), *curtain* (**cortine**, a bed curtain), *pantry* (**paneterie**, bread storage)
Pairs with an English word	*pig / pork, calf / veal, wood / forest, freedom / liberty*; and *kingly* (English), *royal* (French), *regal* (Latin via French)
Double borrowings	*catch* (Norman) and *chase* (Parisian); *warranty* and *guarantee*
Affixes	The page lists *pre-, -ous, -ity, -tion, -ture, -ment, -ive, -able* as adopted from French, next to native ones like *-ness* and *-ful*.

Effects on the grammar: proposed, not proven

- **Loss of endings.** The *Middle English* article says Norse and English speakers' endings became confused, leading to their gradual loss. This claim is marked "citation needed" in the article, as is the idea that Norse speakers' difficulty with English endings helped cause the loss. It also says French influence alone cannot explain the move to fixed word order, which also happened in other Germanic languages.
- **The -s plural.** *Influence of French on English* says its spread has been attributed to French, but that *-as* was already a plural for some strong masculine nouns before 1066, and French may only have strengthened *-s* over *-en*. The *Middle English* article does not credit Norse for the *-s* plural or the Northern verb *-es*.
- **Noun then adjective.** Phrases like *attorney general* are described as French in origin, though fairly rare.
- **Doubted links.** Other proposals (the impersonal *one*, "the guitar of David") are doubted because other Germanic languages have similar forms.
- **Gerund.** A late Middle English gerund use has been linked to French, as a proposed connection.

- **Thou and you.** The decline of *thou* in favour of *ye* and then *you* has been linked to French *vous*. This is a proposal on that page; Chapter 5 found no statement about it in the *Middle English* article.
- **Syntax from Norse.** The *Middle English* article says there is no certain evidence of syntactic influence from Norse in the sources (marked "citation needed").

What this chapter could not give

- **Middle English spellings** of most of the borrowed words, and the date each one first appears (only *beef*, c. 1300, was given).
- **A statement of how a borrowed word was fitted into the endings** (which plural or verb pattern a French noun or verb took). The sources I read do not say.
- **A dedicated Norse-influence article:** the page named *Old Norse influence on the English language* returned a 404, so I used the list of Norse-origin words and the *Middle English* article instead.

Words to know

TERM	MEANING
Loanword	A word taken into one language from another
Anglo-Norman	The French of the Norman rulers in England
Danelaw	The part of England under Norse influence, mostly north and east
Doublet	Two words from the same source that entered by different routes
Affix	A prefix or suffix added to a word

🖍️ Try It Yourself

Think of the answer first, then click to check.

1. Name three English grammar words that come from Norse.

▼ Show answer

Any three of *they*, *their*, *both*, *same*; *though* is partly Norse, and *are* blends English and Norse forms.

2. Why did Norse words appear in writing later than in speech?

▼ Show answer

The *Middle English* article puts it down to the West Saxon bias of surviving Old English writing.

3. Where was Norse influence strongest?

▼ Show answer

In the Danelaw: Yorkshire, the central and eastern Midlands and East Anglia; Northern texts show the most borrowings.

4. Which sk- words from Norse are in the chapter's table?

▼ Show answer

sky, *skin*, *skirt*, *skull*.

5. When was the peak of French borrowing?

▼ Show answer

1250–1400, when about 40% of the French words in English first appear.

6. Give two English/French pairs from the chapter.

▼ Show answer

Any two of *pig / pork*, *calf / veal*, *wood / forest*, *freedom / liberty*.

7. Name four French-derived affixes the page lists.

▼ Show answer

Any four of *pre-*, *-ous*, *-ity*, *-tion*, *-ture*, *-ment*, *-ive*, *-able*.

8. What does *Influence of French on English* say about the *-s* plural?

▼ Show answer

Its spread has been attributed to French, but *-as* was already a plural before 1066; French may have strengthened *-s* over *-en*, presented as a possibility.

9. Why is the claim that Norse caused the loss of endings treated cautiously?

▼ Show answer

The article marks it "citation needed", and says French alone cannot explain the move to fixed word order.

10. Which dialect of verbs uses *-es*, and does the article say Norse caused it?

▼ Show answer

Northern (Chapter 6). The article does not attribute it to Norse.

Note on sources

The Norse and French material comes from three Wikipedia pages as the page tool summarised them: *Middle English* (the first 100,000 of 152,228 characters), *Influence of French on English* (complete) and *List of English words of Old Norse origin* (the first 100,000 of 121,053 characters; the list itself was complete). A page on Old Norse influence returned a 404. Some of the Norse claims are marked "citation needed" in the article, and the French grammar links are described there as proposals. I read no grammar book. The headings and word definitions are mine and unverified.

Coming up in Chapter 10: Putting It Together. A method for analysing a sentence, short passages from Chaucer, and a recap of the course.

📜 Putting It Together

Nine chapters gave you pieces: letters, nouns, the article, adjectives, pronouns, verbs, the irregular verbs, negation and borrowed words. This chapter gives a routine for using them on a real line, tries it on six short lines of Chaucer, and then recaps. Where a chapter's source was silent, the routine says to stop rather than guess.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Take a line one word at a time and ask the same questions in the same order: **what is it?** (noun, pronoun, verb, adjective) **what ending does it carry? which chapter explains that ending?** And when no chapter does, **say so**.

The routine

1. **Spot the verb first.** Look for an ending: **-eþ / -th**, **-en**, **-ed**, or an irregular form (Chapters 6 and 7).
2. **Find the pronouns.** Match them against the table in Chapter 5. Remember that *his* can mean "its".
3. **Find the little words.** *the, this, that, a* (Chapter 3), and look at the adjective that follows for a final *-e* (Chapter 4).
4. **Check nouns for *-es* or *-en*** (Chapter 2).
5. **Look at negatives and borrowed words** (Chapters 8 and 9).
6. **Read the spelling aloud** with the cautions from Chapter 1.

Trying it on Chaucer

The lines are from Skeat's 1900 edition of *The Canterbury Tales*, the Prologue, on Wikisource, as the page tool gave them. The History of the English Language, Chapter 3, quotes the same opening and spells one word differently (*soote* there, *sote* in Skeat), which is ordinary variation between editions. My notes are mine and unverified.

LINE	WHAT THE ROUTINE FINDS
Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote	**shoures** has the strong plural ending (Chapter 2). **his** is the neuter possessive "its" (Chapter 5's table lists *his* for the neuter).
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote,	**hath** is the 3rd singular of *have*, matching **haþ** in Chapter 7. **perced** ends in **-ed**, the weak dental ending (Chapter 6). **the** is the reduced article (Chapter 3).
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,	**bathed** ends in **-ed**, again the weak ending (Chapter 6). **veyne** is a noun in the singular, ending in *-e* (compare Chapter 1's silent *e*).
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;	**is** is the 3rd singular of *be* (Chapter 7). **engendred** ends in **-ed**. Several of the nouns here (*vertu*, *licour*) may be French; Chapter 9 gave the French categories, not these words, so I do not say.
A Knight ther was, and that a worthy man,	**was** is the past of *be* (Chapter 7). **a** is the indefinite article (Chapter 3). **worthy** has no final *-e*, which fits Chapter 4: it is not plural, not after *the*, *this* or *that*, and not addressing someone.
That fro the tyme that he first bigan	**he** is the Chapter 5 masculine subject. **bigan** looks like a past tense made by a vowel change, as a strong verb does, but none of the chapters' sources lists it, so that is my reading only.

What the routine cannot do

It cannot tell you the dialect of a text, only whether a form matches a table. The chapters gave dialect forms only for the present plural of verbs (Chapter 6) and a few pronoun and demonstrative notes. It also cannot say how Chaucer himself used the final *-e*: Chapter 4's source did not.

Recap of the course

CHAPTER	THE CORE FACT
1 Letters and Sounds	Thorn, yogh and the silent final *e*
2 Nouns	Strong plural *-(e)s*, weak *-(e)n*, genitive *-es*; dative lost

CHAPTER	THE CORE FACT
3 The, This and That	**þe**, **þis**, **þat**; *a / an*
4 Adjectives	Final *-e* after the, demonstratives, possessives, in the plural and in address; *-er / -est*
5 Pronouns	Subject and object forms kept; *she* new; *they* from Norse
6 Verbs	Present endings; plural Southern *-eþ*, Midland *-en*, Northern *-es*; weak and strong past
7 Be, Have, Do, Will	Irregular forms; modals with no ending in the 1st and 3rd singular
8 Questions and Negation	*ne*, then *ne* ... *not*, then *not*; no source for questions
9 Borrowed Words	Norse grammar words; French vocabulary and affixes; proposed effects on grammar

What the course could not give

- A full noun, article or verb paradigm: three of the source tables came through garbled.
- Dialect forms beyond the verb plural, and anything specific to Chaucer's London English.
- Middle English question formation, and the use of *do* and *will* as helpers.
- A grammar book. Every chapter used online encyclopedia and dictionary pages, as stated on each.

Where to go next

Old English Grammar 1 shows the fuller system that this one is worn down from. The planned `middleenglish_reading1` course is meant to read longer Middle English texts with this grammar in hand; it has not been written yet.

The appendix

A one-page paradigm summary follows this chapter: a table each for nouns, article and demonstratives, adjectives, pronouns and verbs, built only from the forms the chapters verified.

🖍️ Try It Yourself

Think of the answer first, then click to check.

1. In **hath perced**, which is the weak-verb form and which the form of *have*?

▼ Show answer

perced is the weak past with **-ed**; **hath** is the 3rd singular of *have*.

2. What does **his** mean in **with his shoures sote**?

▼ Show answer

"Its", since the table lists *his* as the neuter possessive.

3. Why does **worthy** in **a worthy man** have no final *-e*?

▼ Show answer

It is singular, follows *a* rather than *the* or a demonstrative, and is not in direct address.

4. Which line contains a plural noun with the strong ending?

▼ Show answer

The first: **shoures**.

5. What is **is** in **engendred is the flour**?

▼ Show answer

The 3rd singular present of *be*.

6. Why does the chapter not call **bigan** a strong verb for certain?

▼ Show answer

None of the sources lists it, so that reading is the author's only.

7. Name the dialect plural endings of the present tense.

▼ Show answer

Southern **-eþ**, Midland **-en**, Northern **-es**.

8. Which part of Middle English grammar did the sources not describe at all?

▼ Show answer

Question formation (and the use of *do* and *will* as helpers).

Note on sources

The Chaucer lines are from Skeat's 1900 edition on Wikisource, as the page tool reported them; I could quote only short portions, lines 1–4 and 43–44. My notes on each line apply the earlier chapters' tables, and any "may be" or "looks like" is mine and unverified. The recap is drawn from the earlier chapters, whose sources are named on their own pages.

Coming up: the paradigm appendix, then `middleenglish_reading1` when it is written.