

Old English Verbs

Common Verbs, Meanings & Conjugations

STRONG

rīsan -> rās

vowel change

WEAK

lufian -> lufode

d/t past ending

IRREGULAR

gān -> ēode

learn as a form set

MODAL-TYPE

sculan -> sceal

special historical group

LEARN IN ORDER

1. Read the verb system
2. Learn core verbs
3. Separate strong and weak
4. Conjugate model verbs
5. Read short sentences
6. Recognize prefixes and participles

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A compact teacher-style reference - not a full article copy

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Read the Verb System

A verb form can show who acts, how many act, when the action happens, and how the statement is framed.

PERSON

1st / 2nd / 3rd

Who performs the action?

NUMBER

singular / plural

One subject or more?

TENSE

present / preterite

Present or past?

MOOD

indicative / subjunctive / imperative

Statement, possibility, or command?

WATCH THE ENDING CHANGE

ic

lufie

I love

þū

lufast

you love

hē

lufaþ

he loves

wē

lufiaþ

we love

TEACHER BOARD

luf-

verb stem

+

-aþ

person / number ending

=

lufaþ

usable verb form

Class II weak model: luf- + -aþ = lufaþ (he / she / it loves).

Core Verbs to Know

Learn the meaning first, then connect each verb to its conjugation family.

Being & possession

Old English	Meaning	Type
bēon / wesan	be	irregular
habban	have	weak
weorþan	become	strong
libban	live	weak

Movement

Old English	Meaning	Type
gān	go	irregular
cuman	come	strong
faran	travel / go	strong
rīdan	ride	strong

Speech & senses

Old English	Meaning	Type
sprecan	speak	strong
secgan	say / tell	weak
sēon	see	strong
hīeran	hear	weak

Everyday actions

Old English	Meaning	Type
dōn	do	irregular
etan	eat	strong
drincan	drink	strong
findan	find	strong

MEMORY ANCHOR

Start with these 16 high-frequency verbs. The same families recur in many texts.

Strong Verbs

A strong verb forms its preterite mainly through an internal stem-vowel change called ablaut.

ABLAUT = INTERNAL VOWEL CHANGE

rīsan

infinitive

->

rās

past singular

->

rison

past plural

->

risen

past participle

COMMON STRONG VERB PATTERNS

Infinitive	Meaning	Past singular	Past participle
beran	bear / carry	bær	boren
niman	take	nam	numen
cuman	come	cwōm	cumen
sprecan	speak	spræc	sprecen
standan	stand	stōd	standen
feallan	fall	fēoll	feallen

TRADITIONAL SYSTEM

7 strong classes

The classes group verbs by historical vowel patterns. For reading, learn a strong verb together with its principal parts.

Weak Verbs

A weak verb usually forms its preterite with a dental suffix containing d or t.

DENTAL PAST FORMATION

luf-

verb stem

+ -ode

weak past ending

lufode

loved

A CLEAR MODEL: LUFIAN

Form	Old English	Meaning
Infinitive	lufian	to love
1st sg. present	ic lufie	I love
2nd sg. present	þū lufast	you love
3rd sg. present	hē lufaþ	he loves
plural present	wē lufiaþ	we love
past singular	lufode	loved
past plural	lufodon	loved (plural)

MORE WEAK EXAMPLES

hīeran -> hīerde

leornian -> leornode

macian -> macode

Strong vs Weak

Identify the past-tense strategy first, then confirm the verb family.

STRONG

rīsan -> rās

PAST MARKER

stem vowel changes

KEY IDEA

ablaut

TRADITIONAL CLASSES

7

MODERN ECHO

sing -> sang

LEARN AS

principal parts

WEAK

lufian -> lufode

PAST MARKER

d/t dental suffix

KEY IDEA

added ending

TRADITIONAL CLASSES

3

MODERN ECHO

love -> loved

LEARN AS

stem + past ending

PAST FORM CHECK

Vowel change -> usually strong | d/t past ending -> usually weak

Then confirm the class or an irregular pattern.

Present Endings

Use *lufian* as a clear Class II weak model for subject endings.

ic subject	-ie ending	lufie verb form	I love meaning
pū subject	-ast ending	lufast verb form	you love meaning
hē / hēo / hit subject	-ap ending	lufap verb form	he / she / it loves meaning
wē / gē / hīe subject	-iap ending	lufiap verb form	we / you / they love meaning

PLURAL SHORTCUT

The three plural persons normally share one present form: **lufiap**.

Read it in pieces: *luf-* + *-iap* -> "we / you / they love".

Conjugate rīsan

A strong Class I model meaning "to rise".

rīsan

infinitive

rās

past singular

rison

past plural

risen

past participle

PRESENT INDICATIVE

Subject	Form	Meaning
īc	rīse	I rise
þū	rīsest	you rise
hē	rīseþ	he rises
plural	rīsaþ	we / you / they rise

PRETERITE INDICATIVE

Subject	Form	Meaning
īc	rās	I rose
þū	rise	you rose
hē	rās	he rose
plural	rison	we / you / they rose

VOWEL MAP

ī

present / infinitive

->

ā

past singular

->

i

past plural / participle

Irregular Core Verbs

Memorize these high-frequency verbs as compact form sets.

BE**bēon / wesan**

ic	eom / bēo
pū	eart / bist
hē	is / biþ
plural	sind(on) / bēoþ
past	wæs / wæron

GO**gān**

1st sg.	gā
2nd sg.	gæst
3rd sg.	gæþ
plural	gāþ
past	ēode / ēodon

DO**dōn**

1st sg.	dō
2nd sg.	dēst
3rd sg.	dēþ
plural	dōþ
past	dyde / dydon

WANT / WILL**willan**

1st sg.	wille
2nd sg.	wilt
3rd sg.	wile
plural	willað
past	wolde

Modal-Type Verbs

Preterite-present verbs helped shape several later English modal verbs.

HOW THE GROUP WORKS

Their present forms historically resemble strong preterites; their own preterites use weak-type dental endings. For learning, recognize the common form and meaning first.

HIGH-FREQUENCY FORMS

Verb	Core meaning	Common form	Later English link
cunnan	know how / be able	cann	can / could
magan	be able	mæg	may / might
sculan	owe / ought / must	sceal	shall / should
mōtan	be allowed / may	mōt	must
witan	know	wāt	wit / to wit

FORM -> FUNCTION -> LATER CONNECTION

sceal

obligation / expected action

shall / should

mæg

ability / possibility

may / might

cann

knowledge / ability

can / could

Use Verbs in Sentences

Read the subject, identify the verb form, then translate the clause.

1ST SINGULAR PRESENT

Ic lufie þē.

I love you.

FOCUS: lufie

PLURAL PRESENT

Hīe cumap.

They come.

FOCUS: cumap

STRONG PAST SINGULAR

Hē spræc.

He spoke.

FOCUS: spræc

STRONG PAST SINGULAR

Hē stōd.

He stood.

FOCUS: stōd

IRREGULAR PAST PLURAL

Hīe ēodon.

They went.

FOCUS: ēodon

SINGULAR IMPERATIVE

Rīs!

Rise!

FOCUS: rīs

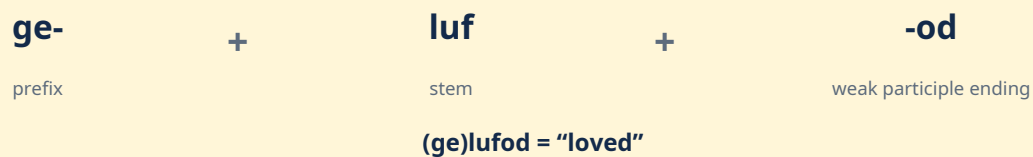
Prefixes & Participles

Recognize extra pieces that change meaning or mark a verb form.

PREFIX EXAMPLE



PAST PARTICIPLE PATTERN



PARTICIPLES TO RECOGNIZE

Type	Common marker	Example	Meaning
Present participle	-ende	rīsende	rising
Strong past participle	often ge- + vowel pattern	(ge)risen	risen
Weak past participle	often ge- + dental ending	(ge)lufod	loved

Verb Reading Map

Use this sequence whenever you meet an unfamiliar Old English verb.

1

Find the infinitive

Often ends in -an or -ian

LOOK FOR -AN / -IAN

sprecan, lufian

2

Identify the family

Strong, weak, irregular, or preterite-present

CLASSIFY

rīsan = strong

3

Read the ending

Person and number may be visible in the form

READ THE ENDING

lufaþ = 3rd sg.

4

Check the tense

Present or preterite (past)

CHECK TENSE

spræc = past

5

Translate in context

Combine subject, verb form, and sentence meaning

BUILD THE MEANING

Hē spræc = He spoke

FAST REFERENCE

Strong: vowel change | **Weak: d/t past** | **Plural present: often one shared form**

Irregular forms: learn as compact sets. Then translate the whole sentence in context.