

Old English Grammar

Rules, Cases and Sentence Structure

LEARN IN 9 STEPS

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3 Agreement

4 Pronouns

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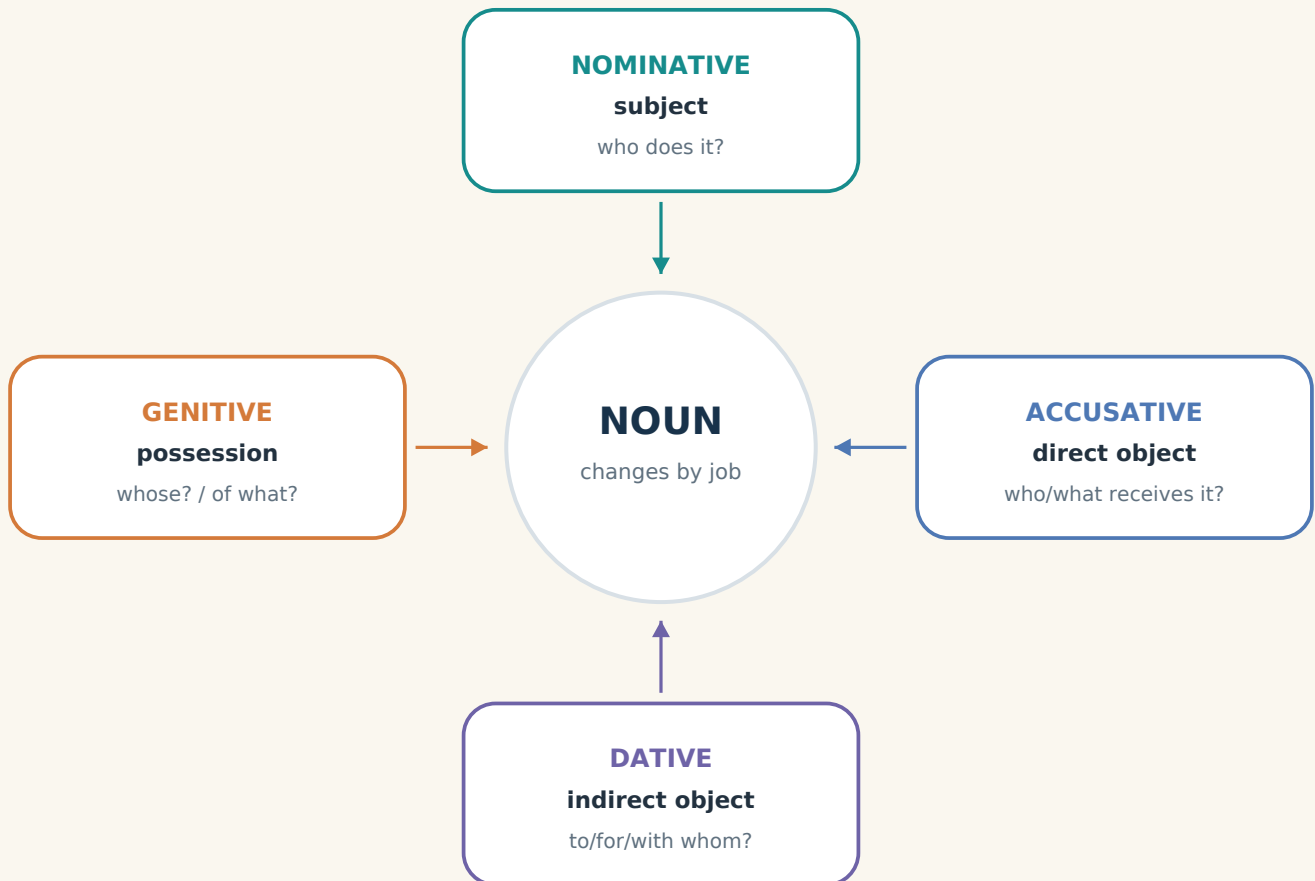
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One-Page Grammar Board

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Understand the Four Cases

A case tells you the job of a noun or pronoun. Learn the job first; memorize endings after you understand the pattern.



SEE THE JOBS

Se cyning geseah **þone biscop**.

The king saw the bishop.

NOMINATIVE: se cyning = subject

ACCUSATIVE: þone biscop = object

Old English nouns change by case and number. Their gender also affects the words that agree with them.

THE NOUN-FORM MACHINE

CASE

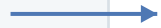
nominative / accusative / genitive / dative

NUMBER

singular / plural

choose ending GENDER

masculine / feminine / neuter



EXAMPLE: STĀN = STONE (MASCULINE STRONG NOUN)

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	stān	stānas
Accusative	stān	stānas
Genitive	stānes	stāna
Dative	stāne	stānum

ENDING CLUES

-es

often genitive singular

-um

commonly dative plural

-as

common masculine strong plural

-an

frequent in weak noun forms

Match Demonstratives & Adjectives

Words around a noun often change with it. Read the noun phrase as a matching team: determiner + adjective + noun.



BASIC NOMINATIVE FORMS

Form	Matches	Example
se	masculine singular	se cyning
sēo	feminine singular	sēo sunne
þæt	neuter singular	þæt scip
þā	plural	þā cyningas

ADJECTIVE PATTERN

gōd cyning = a good king

se gōda cyning = the good king

The adjective ending changes with the grammatical environment.

Pronouns show case clearly. Learn the main forms as a family, then use them as clues when reading sentences.

PRONOUN FAMILY

Person	Subject	Object / Dative	Meaning
1st singular	ic	mē	I / me
2nd singular	þū	þē	you
3rd masculine	hē	hine / him	he / him
3rd feminine	hēo	hīe / hire	she / her
1st plural	wē	ūs	we / us
2nd plural	gē	ēow	you
3rd plural	hīe	hīe / him	they / them

A FEATURE MODERN ENGLISH LOST: DUAL PRONOUNS



wit

we two



git

you two

Start by deciding whether a verb is strong or weak. Then check person, number, tense, and mood.

TWO MAIN PAST-TENSE PATHS

STRONG VERB

Past often changes the stem vowel.

drincan → dranc

to drink drank

WEAK VERB

Past often adds a d/t dental suffix.

lufian → lufode

to love loved

PRESENT-TENSE PERSON CLUES: LUFIAN

1	ic	lufie	I love
2	þū	lufast	you love
3	hē	lufap	he loves
4	wē	lufiap	we love

MOODS TO RECOGNIZE

Indicative

statement / question

Imperative

command

Subjunctive

possibility / wish / dependent idea

Old English word order is flexible, but not random. Case endings help you identify roles even when the verb changes position.

COMMON MAIN CLAUSE

S → V → O

Se cyning | geseah | þone mann

The king saw the man.

AFTER AN OPENING ADVERB

ADV → V → S → O

þā | geseah | se cyning | þone mann

Then the king saw the man.

DEPENDENT CLAUSE

S → O → V

hē | þone mann | geseah

...that he saw the man.

READING RULE

Do not decide the subject from position alone.

Check case + agreement first, then rebuild natural Modern English word order.

Many prepositions choose the case that follows them. Learn the preposition and its usual case together.

CASE GOVERNMENT

DATIVE

mid fram tō æfter

with / from / to / after

ACCUSATIVE

þurh geond ymb

through / throughout / around

BOTH

on in

location vs movement can
change case

ON: LOCATION VS MOVEMENT

DATIVE

on þæm hūse

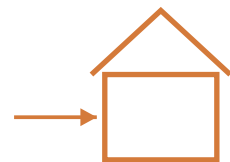
location



ACCUSATIVE

on þæt hūs

movement / direction



Learn a preposition together with the case it normally governs.

Old English normally places *ne* directly before the finite verb. It does not need Modern English *do/does/did* support.

NEGATIVE SENTENCE FORMULA

SUBJECT + **ne** + **FINITE VERB**

COMPARE

Old English	Natural Modern English
Hē com.	He came.
Hē ne com.	He did not come.
Hē nis cyning.	He is not a king.

NEGATIVE CONTRACTION

ne + is → nis

Hē nis cyning. = He is not a king.

Multiple negative words can reinforce one negative meaning in Old English.

Use the same reading order every time: verb, case clues, phrases, then natural translation.

WHITEBOARD SENTENCE

Þā **geseah** **se cyning** **þone biscop** **on þære cirican.**

1

Find the finite verb

geseah = saw

2

Find the nominative

se cyning = subject

3

Find the accusative

þone biscop = direct object

4

Read the prepositional phrase

on þære cirican = in the church

5

Notice the opening adverb

þā = then

6

Rebuild natural English

Then the king saw the bishop in the church.

VERB → CASES → AGREEMENT → PHRASES → NATURAL TRANSLATION

Use this page as the final classroom board: the main grammar system in one view.

CASES

Nominative	subject
Accusative	direct object
Genitive	possession
Dative	indirect object / many prepositions

NOUNS & AGREEMENT

Gender	masculine / feminine / neuter
Number	singular / plural
Adjective	matches case + gender + number
Determiner	se / sēo / þæt / þā change form

VERBS

Strong	vowel-change past
Weak	d/t dental past
Person	verb ending can change
Mood	indicative / imperative / subjunctive

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Main clause	S-V-O is common
After adverb	V often before subject
Dependent clause	use can appear later
Reading	trust endings before position

THE READING ORDER TO REMEMBER

Ending clues first. Word order second.

Identify the grammar job, then translate the meaning naturally.