

English 428/528
MWF 12:00-12:50
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Classroom: 276 Education

OLD ENGLISH I: SYLLABUS

This is a course in learning to read and understand Old English, the language of the Anglo-Saxons (the English between 449 and 1066). In this first term of Old English we will concentrate on bringing reading skills up to speed, so you will be able to read Old English literature (taught in later terms of the course) with some fluency. Thus the focus of this term will be grammar, although we will also read some texts (wisdom-literature, riddles, etc.) and acquire some background in Anglo-Saxon history and culture.

In essence, however, this first term of Old English calls for language skills rather than literary skills. This means that, even more than in a conventional English course, your proficiency and your grade will reflect the time you put in. Because of this, consistent attendance is essential; if you think you may have to miss a substantial number of classes, you should take this class another year when your time is freer.

A note on this class: This class is the first in a three-class sequence, and is *not* designed to stand alone. The second and third terms cover a variety of interesting Old English texts — the second term includes wonderful short poems and prose texts and the third term usually *Beowulf*. Instead of drills and quizzes, you'll put what you've learned this term to use in immersing yourself in the Anglo-Saxon world. (In short, the later terms are *even more fun* than this term!) Do not take this term alone! I urge you not to take this class unless you are planning to take further terms of Old English!

If you have a documented disability, you're invited to let me know, and we'll discuss accommodations for this class in conjunction with Disability Services.

Learning Outcomes of this course. This course will help you to:

1. understand Old English and the history, structure, and vocabulary of the English language
2. read literary and cultural texts with discernment and comprehension and with an understanding of their conventions
3. draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts

Required text:

Richard Marsden, *The Cambridge Old English Reader*

All other texts will be available on Blackboard.

Grading:

Every Monday from Week 3 through Week 8 (except for Week 6, which is the midterm), there will be a quiz on grammar.

For undergraduates, the midterm will count for 30% of the grade, the average of the quizzes for 35%, and the final for 35%. There will also be the opportunity for extra credit.

Graduate students will also do a small research project, which will involve a bibliography and a short paper. For graduate students, the midterm, quiz average, final and research project will each be worth 25% of the grade.

There will also be exercise sheets handed out in class. These will not be given a letter grade, but failure to do them will bring you down if your grade is borderline. And, of course, if you do them, the grammar will be much easier and more pleasant!

Qui amat uina, non execratur crateras; qui nucleos, non putamina; qui segetes, non boues; qui lac, non uaccas; qui Deum, non proximum; et qui amat scientiam, non abhorreat a grammatica, sine qua nemo eruditus aut sapiens esse poterit.

He who loves wine does not hate goblets; he who loves nuts does not mind nutshells; he who loves corn does not object to oxen; he who loves milk does not detest cows; he who loves God does not hate his neighbor; and he who loves knowledge should not loathe grammar, without which no one can be either learned or wise.

— *Collectanea* (8th century)

Schedule:

Week 1

Sept. 29-October 3: Introduction. Pronunciation, letter-forms, the case system. Artifact: West Stow and Anglo-Saxon everyday life. Read: Marsden, *Old English Reader* pp. xxix-xxxii.

Week 2

Oct. 7-11: Masculine, neuter and feminine strong nouns. Some pronouns. For reference, read Marsden, *The Cambridge Old English Reader*, “Reference Grammar” §B1, §B2, and §B3 (pp. 362-69). You do not need to memorize all the variants given; just look them over so you know they exist. Artifact: Anglo-Saxon names.

Week 3

Oct. 14-18: Weak nouns. Weak verbs. Look over Marsden §B5 (pp. 371-72) and §G4 (pp. 388-91; again, don’t bother to memorize all the variants unless you really love variants). Monday quizzes start this week. Hereafter there will be a quiz on the previous week’s grammar every Monday. Artifact: The Fuller Brooch.

Week 4

Oct. 20-24: Monday quiz. Strong verbs (Marsden §G3, pp. 386-88). Masculine and neuter definite articles (Marsden §A1, pp. 355-56). Forms of “to be” (Marsden §G1(a), pp. 383-83). Artifact: Runes and the Ruthwell Cross.

Week 5

Oct. 27-31: Monday quiz. Feminine definite article (Marsden §A1, pp. 355-56). Demonstratives (Marsden §A1(b), p. 356).

Week 6

Nov. 3-7: Grammar practice and reading. Artifact: Tæfl and Anglo-Saxon games.

Monday, Nov. 3: **Midterm exam**

Week 7

Nov. 10-14: Monday quiz. Weak and strong adjectives (Marsden §C, pp. 373-76).
Artifact: The Prittlewell Prince.

Week 8

Nov. 17-21: Monday quiz. Reading. Artifact: Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.

Week 9

Nov. 24-28 (no class Nov. 28: Thanksgiving vacation): Reading.

Week 10

Dec. 1-5: Reading. Artifact: The Franks Casket and riddles in Anglo-Saxon England.

All undergraduate extra credit projects are due at the final exam.
Graduate seminar papers are due at the final exam.

All students must attend the **Final Exam** at the official scheduled time:
Wednesday, December 10, 10:15-12:15. Sorry, no exceptions!

“The Old English language will reward amply the few weeks of attention which would alone be requisite for its attainment; a language already fraught with all the eminent science of our parent country, the future vehicle of whatever we may ourselves achieve, and destined to occupy so much space on the globe, claims distinguished attention in American education.” – Thomas Jefferson