

Cases and Strong Masculine Nouns Overview

Modern English is an **analytical language**. This means that the grammatical function of a word is primarily indicated by word order. Modern English word order generally follows the pattern: **subject, verb, object**.



For example, in '*The dog bites man*', the dog is the **subject** (what is performing the action); bites is the **verb** (the action); and man is the **direct object** (the object being acted upon). If you reverse the order of the words, '*the man bites dog*', the meaning of the sentence changes.

Old English is an **inflected language**, this means the ending of nouns, adjectives and demonstratives change to indicate the grammatical function of the word. The grammatical category which reflects the grammatical function of a word is known as a **case**. There are four main Old English cases: the **nominative**, **accusative**, **genitive** and **dative**.

The Nominative Case indicates the *subject* of the sentence.

The Accusative Case indicates the direct object of a sentence.

The Genitive Case indicates possession.

The Dative Case indicates the indirect object of a sentence.

You can see case systems in many modern languages such as Icelandic, Russian or German, though modern English has largely abandoned its inflectional case system.

Nominative and Accusative Cases

The **nominative** is used for the *subject* of a sentence. A subject is the person, place, thing, or idea that is doing or being something. The **accusative** is used for a *direct object*, that is the person or thing which is the direct recipient of the verb. A verb which is directly acting on an object is known as a *transitive verb*.



In Old English, nouns in the **nominative** and **accusative** cases are often declined in the same way. If it isn't clear from context, the best way of telling the singular nominative and accusative nouns apart is by using checking for the demonstrative 'se' (nominative) or 'pone' (accusative). For example, in the below sentence, even though the word order does not match the word order of the above sentence, and there are no identifiable endings, you can see which is the subject and the direct object using the demonstratives.



Nominative and Accusative Strong Masculine Nouns

	Singular	Plural	Singular Suffix	Plural Suffix
Nominative	Se cyning	þa cyningas	-	-as
Accusative	pone cyning	þa cyningas	-	-as

Genitive Case

The **genitive** is the case of possession and signifies a specific relationship between two words. It can be used both subjectively — *the king's thane saw the stone* — and objectively — *He is king of kings*.



An easy way to tell if something should be in the genitive is to see if you can place 'of' in the sentence. So 'þa cyninges bearnas' could be translated as 'the king's children' or 'the children of the king'. Similarly, 'Sanctes Eadmundes mæssedæg' could be translated as *Saint Edmund's Day* or *The day of Saint Edmund*.

The genitive is also used when referencing a part of a whole, for example 'ælc para manna - each of the men'. You will generally encounter the **partitive genitive** with most expressions of number, quantity or partition. For example: *manig manna - many men*, *twelf mila lang - twelve miles long*.

Genitive Strong Masculine Nouns				
	Singular	Plural	Singular Suffix	Plural Suffix
Genitive	þæs cyninges	para cyninga	-es	-a

Dative Case

The **dative** is the case of the *indirect object*. An indirect object is a word which is not the direct recipient of an action, but is still affected by the verb.



In the above sentence, *beagas* - rings are what is being directly acted upon as they are what are being given, so they are in the **accusative**. However, they are being given to the thane, so he is still affected by the verb indirectly, meaning *þegen* belongs in the **dative** case.

The Dative is a versatile case and can apply in many situations. An easy way to figure out if something is in the dative is to check for the demonstrative **þæm**, as it is used in both the singular and plural forms, or to check for a preposition such as 'to' or 'fram'.



Dative Strong Masculine Nouns				
	Singular	Plural	Singular Suffix	Plural Suffix
Dative	þæm cyninge	þæm cyningum	-e	-um

It is important to understand how cases work, and to be able to identify which case a word is in, so as to understand the meaning of a sentence. While Old English often follows the *subject verb object* format of modern English, there are some common differences in word order which should be watched out for. For example, **possessives** often come after the noun it modifies, especially in direct address:

Old English: *Fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum*

Direct trans: *Father ours you who are in heaven*

Modern Eng: *Our Father who art in heaven*

Always remember that Old English has **case harmony**, so even if a word comes slightly earlier or later in a sentence than you might expect, it can generally be paired to the correct noun by comparing the case endings.

A note on declensions

Monosyllabic words ending in a vowel or 'h' drop their vowel/h when they gain a suffix.

Similarly, words with two syllables will often lose the unstressed vowel of the second syllable when it gains a suffix. This is called **syncopation** and makes the word easier to pronounce.

This is why 'þegen' loses its second 'e' in all conjugations where it gains a suffix, why 'wealh' loses its 'h' and why 'stede' loses its 'e' in some conjugations, and does not add an additional 'e' in the dative singular.

	stede - place		þegen - thane		wealh - foreigner	
Nom	Stede	Stedas	þegen	þegnas	Wealh	Wealas
Acc	Stede	Stedas	þegen	þegnas	Wealh	Wealas
Gen	Stedes	Steda	þegnes	þegna	Weales	Weala
Dat	Stede	Stedum	þegne	þegnum	Weale	Wealum

Glossary of Nouns and Verbs in this Module

Strong Masculine Nouns	Verbs
Æpeling - Prince	Beon- To Be (Irregular)
Abbod - Abbot	
Beag - Ring	Cuman - To Come (Strong Class 4)
Bearn - Child	
Beorg - Mountain	Feran - To Go (Weak Class 1)
Biscop - Bishop	
Cyning - King	Fretan - To Eat (Strong Class 5)
Fugol - Bird	
Gar - Spear	Giefan - To Give (Strong Class 5)
Here - Army	
Stan - Stone	Gretan - To Greet (Weak Class 1)
Stede - Place	
Tun - Town	Slean - To Slay (Strong Class 6)
Ðegen - Thane	
Wealh - Foreigner	
Wiking - Viking	