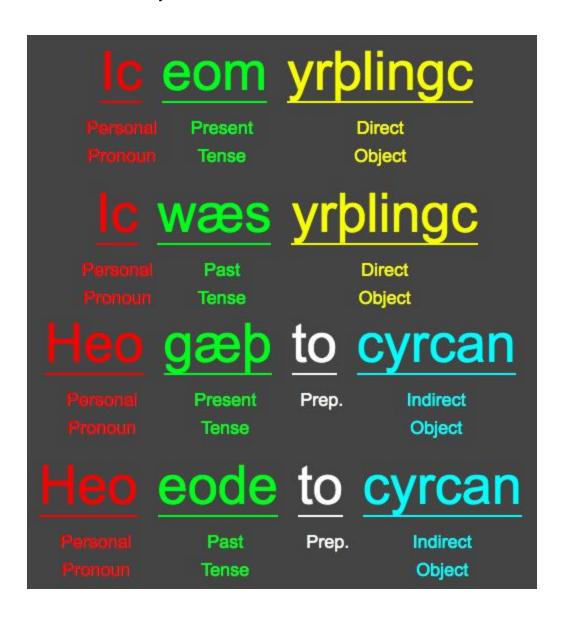# Irregular Verbs Overview

Old English has five irregular verbs: **beon** - to be, **wesan** - to be, **don** - to do, **gan** - to go, **willan** - to wish.

These verbs are irregular as they do not follow the same conjugation patterns as weak or strong verbs, and some are a blend of multiple older verbs, which means their present and past tense look very different. For example, look at the two examples below and compare '*Ic eom yrþlingc - I am a farmer*' with '*Ic wæs yrþlingc - I was a farmer*'. Similarly, look at the present and past tense of '*Heo gæþ to cyrcan - She goes to church*' and '*Heo eode to cyrcan - She went to church*'.

Beon and Wesan

In Old English, 'to be' is what's called a **suppletive** verb. This means it uses forms from different roots, and '*beon'* uses forms from three different verbs. There were two distinct present stems, for which both *'wesan'* and *'beon'* are infinitive forms. They have slightly different uses.

The verb *'wesan'* is generally used to express the present form of 'to be', and is the most commonly used form of the verb. However, *'beon'* tends to be used to express permanent truths, sometimes referred to as 'gnomic' truths, such as '*wyrd biþ ful aræd - fate is fully inexorable*' or '*fugolas beoþ caf - birds are fast*'. For example, examine '*he is wiga - he is a warrior*' and '*wiga biþ strang - warriors are strong*'.

While there is technically no future tense in Old English, the verb *'beon'* is also often used to express the future tense, for example '*ic beo gearo sona - I will be ready soon*'.
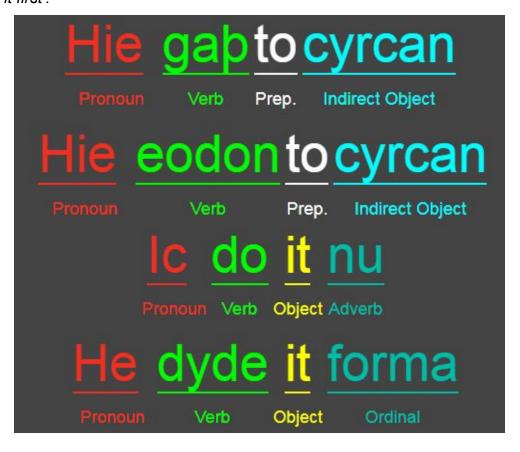
You'll notice in the table below that both *'beon'* and *'wesan'* share the same past tense forms, which differs significantly from the present forms.

	Beon	Wesan	Past
1st Person Singular	beo	eom	wæs
2nd Person Singular	bist	eart	wære
3rd Person Singular	biþ	is	wæs
Plural	beoþ	sind	wæron

Gan and Don

Just like *'beon'* and *'wesan'*, the verbs *'gan'* and *'don'* conjugate irregularly and are suppletive verbs, so their past tense does not share the same root as their present tense. Examine the sentences, '*hie gaþ to cyrcan - they go to church*' versus '*hie eodon to cyrcan - they went to church*' and '*ic do it nu - I do it now*' versus '*he dyde it forma - he did it first*'.

	Gan - to go		Don - to do	
1st Person Singular	ga	eode	do	dyde
2nd Person Singular	gæst	eodest	dest	dydest
3rd Person Singular	gæþ	eode	deþ	dyde
Plural	gaþ	eodon	doþ	dydon

Always look for similarities when encountering new grammar. The endings of *'gan'* and *'don'* are identical to the endings of class I weak verbs. However, if you examine the second and third person singular present verb forms of *'gan'* and *'don'*, you'll notice the vowel in the root changes from **'a'** to **'æ'** and **'o'** to **'e'**. This is an example of **i-mutation** which will be explained in more detail in a later module.

Willan

The final irregular verb is *'willan - to want'*. 'Willan' often comes paired with the infinitive form of another verb, just like in modern English. For example, I want to go, you want to see, he wants to drink. Examine the sentences *'Ic wille gangan to Rome - I want to go to Rome'* and '*He wolde ðæt ða cnihtas cræft leornedon - He wanted the children to learn a craft*'.

Ic wille gangan to Rome
Pronoun Verb Infinitive Prep. Infinitive

He wolde ðæt ða cnihtas cræft leornedon
Pronoun Verb Relative Demon. Object Object Verb

Though *'willan'* looks like it should be translated to 'will', it is usually more correct to translate it as 'want' or 'intend' in the present tense. When in the past tense, it can be translated as either 'wanted' or 'would'. That's not to say it should never be translated as 'will', but consider 'intend' and 'want' first.

Willan - to want		
1st Person Singular	wille	wolde
2nd Person Singular	wilt	woldest
3rd Person Singular	wile	wolde
Plural	wilaþ	woldon

You'll notice that the vowel in the stem changes between the present tense and the past tense. Other than that, the endings of the past are identical to Class I Weak verbs.