Strong Nouns Overview

All nouns are subdivided into three grammatical categories called **'genders'**. These categories are purely grammatical and are not determined by the meaning of the words, so they just have to be learned. The gender of a word changes which inflectional suffix it takes and which demonstrative pronoun it uses. **Strong nouns** have many inflectional variants and generally end in a consonant.

The inflectional suffix taken by a noun depends on its **case**. The case of a noun is determined by its function in a sentence. **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.

Lastly, nouns decline differently depending on whether they are **singular** or **plural**.

Strong Masculine Nouns		Strong Neuter Nouns		Strong Feminine Nouns	
se cyning	þa cyningas	þæt scip	þa scipu	seo cwen	þa cwena
þone cyning	þa cyningas	þæt scip	þa scipu	þa cwene	þa cwena
þæs cyninges	þara cyninga	þæs scipes	þara scipa	þære cwene	þara cwena
þæm cyninge	þæm cyningum	þæm scipe	þæm scipum	þære cwene	þæm cwenum

While the various demonstratives and suffixes may seem like a lot to remember, there are many similarities between the genders. For example, the demonstrative pronoun *'þæm'* always signifies the dative, and the '**um**' ending always signifies the dative plural. Similarly, the demonstrative pronoun *'þara'* and the suffix '**a**', always signify the genitive plural. While the genitive and dative declensions for masculine and neuter nouns are identical, you only ever see the demonstrative pronoun 'þære' with feminine nouns.

While almost all nouns follow these declensions, sometimes declensions can cause variations in the stem of the noun.

Disyllabic nouns

Nouns with two syllables, or 'disyllabic nouns', lose the unstressed vowel of their second syllable when an inflectional ending adds a syllable. We saw this with the feminine noun, ceaster, and the masculine noun, þegen which loses their second 'e' when declined. This is known as syncopation and the rule applies across all genders. For example, look at fugol - bird in the sentence below.

We lufiaþ þa fuglas on þære ceastre
Subject — verb — direct object — Prep — Indirect Object

Fugol - Bird		Heafod - Head		Sawol - Soul	
se fugol	þa fuglas	þæt heafod	þa heafdu	seo sawol	þa sawla
þone fugol	þa fuglas	þæt heafod	þa heafdu	þa sawle	þa sawla
þæs fugles	þara fugla	þæs heafdes	þara heafda	þære sawle	þara sawla
þæm fugle	þæm fuglum	þæm heafde	þæm heafdum	þære sawle	þæm sawlum

Nouns ending in a vowel

Nouns which end in a vowel (except u) are generally weak. However, there are a handful of exceptions and when a strong noun ends in a vowel, like *ende - end, stede - place, rice - kingdom, wite - punishment*, or *clawu - claw*, they usually drop their vowel when a suffix is added.

He wealdeþ wite mid isenum clawum
Subject — verb — direct object — Prep — Adjective — Indirect Object

Fugol - Bird		Heafod - Head		Sawol - Soul	
se fugol	þa fuglas	þæt heafod	þa heafdu	seo sawol	þa sawla
þone fugol	þa fuglas	þæt heafod	þa heafdu	þa sawle	þa sawla
þæs fugles	þara fugla	þæs heafdes	þara heafda	þære sawle	þara sawla
þæm fugle	þæm fuglum	þæm heafde	þæm heafdum	þære sawle	þæm sawlum

Nouns with a stem ending in 'h'

Nouns that have a stem ending in '**h**' lose it when declined. This can happen one of two ways.

If the noun ends in a consonant + h, like *mearh - horse*, *wealh - foreigner* and *feorh - life*, the noun loses the 'h' when declined.

If the noun ends in a vowel + h, like *scoh - shoe* and *feoh - cattle/wealth*, the word loses the '**h**' and the unstressed vowel when declined. For example, the plural accusative form of the strong masculine noun scoh is scos not scoas, even though the usual strong masculine plural accusative ending is '**as**', because the '**a**' is dropped. However, you should note that *feoh* only has a singular form, much like the modern words 'cattle' and 'wealth' do not have plural forms.

þa wealas habbaþ scos ond mearas

Subject — verb — direct object — Prep — Direct Object

Consonant + h		Vowel + h		Vowel + h	
se wealh	þa wealas	se scoh	þa scos	þæt feoh	-
þone wealh	þa wealas	þone scoh	þa scos	þæt feoh	-
þæs weales	þara weala	þæs scos	þara scona	þæs feos	-
þæm weale	þæm wealum	þæm sco	þæm scom	þæm feo	-

Nouns with 'æ' in the stem

Monosyllabic nouns with a short '**æ**' in the stem, such as *hwæl - whale, fæt - cup*, and *dæg - day*, undergo a sound-change to '**a**' when declined in the plural. This is because the plural suffixes contain the back vowels 'a' and '**u**'. Words with a long '**æ**', such as *dæd - deed, læcce - leech*, or *dæl - part,* retain their '**æ**' in the plural.

Hwæl - Whale		Fæt - Cup		Dæg - Day	
se hwæl	þa hwalas	þæt fæt	þa fatu	se dæg	þa dagas
þone hwæl	þa hwalas	þæt fæt	þa fatu	þone dæg	þa dagas
þæs hwæles	þara hwala	þæs fætes	þara fata	þæs dæges	þara daga
þæm hwæle	þæm hwalum	þæm fæte	þæm fatum	þæm dæge	þæm dagum

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. 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.

Glossary of Nouns in this Module

Strong Masculine Nouns	Strong Neuter Nouns
Æþeling - Prince	Bearn - Child
Abbod - Abbot	Fæt - Cup
Beag - Ring	Feoh - Wealth/Cattle
Beorg - Mountain	God - Deity
Biscop - Bishop	Heafod - Head
Cyning - King	Hus - House
Dæg - Day	Rice - Kingdom
Ende - End	Scip - Ship
Engel - Angel	Wæl - Slaugher
Fugol - Bird	Wif - Woman
Gar - Spear	Wite - Punishment
Hafoc - Hawk	Word - Word
Here - Army	
Heofon - Heaven	**Strong Feminine Nouns**
Hlaford - Lord	Bryd - Bride
Horshwael - Walrus	Ceaster - City
Hwæl - Whale	Clawu - Claw
Mearh - Horse	Cwen - Queen
Mona - Moon	Dæd - Deed
Scoh - Shoe	Giefu - Gift
Stan - Stone	Ides - Lady
Stede - Place	Lar - Teaching
Tun - Town	Lufu - Love
Ðegen - Thane	Sawol - Soul
Wealh - Foreigner	Sceadu - Shadow
Wiking - Viking	Treow - Tree