

An introduction to Traditional Grammar

GRAMMAR. *n.f.* [*grammaire*, French; *grammatica*, Latin; γραμμαζική.]

1. The science of speaking correctly; the art which teaches the relations of words to each other.

We make a countryman dumb, whom we will not allow to speak but by the rules of *grammar*. *Dryden's Dufresney*.

Men, speaking language according to the *grammar* rules of that language, do yet speak improperly of things. *Locke*.

2. Propriety or justness of speech; speech according to grammar.

Varium & mutabile femper femina, is the sharpest satire that ever was made on woman; for the adjectives are neuter, and animal must be understood to make them *grammar*. *Dryden*.

3. The book that treats of the various relations of words to one another.

GRAMMAR School. *n.f.* A school in which the learned languages are grammatically taught.

Thou hast most traitorously corrupted the youth of the realm in erecting a *grammar school*. *Shakespeare's Hen. VI*.

The ordinary way of learning Latin in a *grammar school* I cannot encourage.

GRAMMARIAN. *n.f.* [*grammairien*, French, from *grammar*.]

One who teaches grammar; a philologist.

GRAMMATICASTER. *n.f.* [Latin.] A mean verbal pedant; a low grammarian.



1. INTRODUCTORY

This guide was designed mainly to introduce students who have not been taught grammar at school to some basic grammatical terms and concepts. It is deliberately conservative (and in some ways over-simplified), keeping as far as possible to the terminology of “traditional grammar”, since this is used in most of the dictionaries and textbooks you will be working from. For criticisms of “traditional grammar” and an account of recent developments in grammatical analysis and terminology, consult any recent introductory work on linguistics.

Use this guide to check your knowledge of the basic terms and concepts, to help you with grammatical exercises, and for general reference. Section 2, **The Basics**, covers the most important concepts and terms. Section 3, **Old English**, deals with the special problems of Old English grammar. The technical terms used are normally explained on their first appearance, but for quick reference, use the **Index**.

2. THE BASICS

2.1 Grammar deals with two aspects of language, *accidence* and *syntax*.

i) *Accidence* is mainly concerned with the way in which individual words vary in form according to their grammatical function: e.g. **book, books; write, wrote**. This variation in form is known as *inflexion*.

ii) *Syntax* is concerned with the way in which individual words are put together to make sentences.

2.2 **THE PARTS OF SPEECH:** Words can be classified into 9 categories: noun, adjective, adverb, verb, article, pronoun, preposition, conjunction, and interjection.

2.3 *Noun:* the name of a person, place, or thing: **Clarissa, Middlemarch, book**. Nouns can be inflected to indicate the *plural* (**book, books; man, men**) and (in some instances) the *possessive* (or *genitive*) *case* (see 3.4,3.7): **Shakespeare’s Sonnets, the wife’s admirers, the men’s room, a week’s holiday**.

2.4 *Adjective*: a word describing (or qualifying) a noun: **purple patches, a handsome husband, the posture is ridiculous, the three Musketeers, the fifth column, my country, that woman.** Some adjectives are inflected to indicate the *comparative* (**happier**) and *superlative* (**happiest**); others use **more** and **most** instead: e.g., **Mamma says that she was then the prettiest, silliest, most affected husband-hunting butterfly she ever remembers.**

Most adjectives can be used either *attributively* (**the green hat**) or *predicatively* (**the hat is green**): e.g.,

Johnson: I had no notion that I was wrong or irreverent to my tutor. Boswell: That, sir, was great fortitude of mind. Johnson: No, sir, stark insensibility.

2.5 *Adverb*: a word qualifying an adjective (**very fat, so sweet, seriously displeased**), a verb (**he almost ran, I read slowly**), another adverb (**I read incredibly slowly, I am most seriously displeased**), or the sentence as a whole (**Then my trousers fell down. Fortunately nobody noticed**). Most adverbs form their comparative and superlative with **more** and **most**, but a few are inflected (**faster, fastest**). The characteristic adverb-ending is **-ly**.

2.6 *Verb*: a word expressing a state or action: **be, have, do, run, write, love, give, can, must.**

i) *Main verbs and auxiliary verbs*:

Verbs are divided into two classes, *main verbs* and *auxiliary verbs*.

The great majority of verbs function as main verbs, which can be used on their own in a sentence: **Run! I send no compliments to your mother. I saw something nasty in the woodshed.**

A small number of very common verbs (e.g. **can, may, will, must, dare**) function as auxiliary verbs. As the term suggests, auxiliary verbs act as a support system to the main verbs, and will only occur together with a main verb, either expressed or understood: e.g. **I cannot reconcile my heart to Bertram. I may, I must, I can, I will, I do / Leave following that, which it is gain to miss. He would say that, wouldn't he?**

The verbs **do, have, and be** can be used either as main verbs (**I have an overdraft at the bank, I do as little work as I can, Why am I a**

fool?) or as auxiliaries (**We have seen the lions at Longleat. You don't mind if I smoke, do you?—Yes, I do! Why are we waiting?**).

Auxiliary verbs can be used to form questions (**Why does he conduct the music with a poker?**) and negative statements (**A lady does not move**) and to express *tense*, *mood*, *voice*, and *aspect* (see next four sections).

ii) *Tense*: Indicates the time at which, or during which, the action described by the verb takes place. Only two tenses are marked by inflexion in English, the *present* (**I/you/we/they run, he/she/it runs**) and the *past* (**I ran, etc.; I walked, etc.**). Other tenses are formed *periphrastically* (that is, by the use of auxiliary verbs): e.g. the *perfect* (**You have wasted two whole terms**) and the *pluperfect* (**Mr. McKnag had been so shocked by Flora's letter that his old trouble had returned**) are formed by adding **have** to the main verb, and the *future* usually by adding **will** or **shall** (**Cousin Stephen, you will never be a saint. Not only marble, but the plastic toys / In cornflake packets will outlive this rhyme**).

iii) *Mood*: The verb has three moods:

a) *Indicative*, used for statements and questions (**No man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money. Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?**). By far the most common mood.

b) *Imperative*, used for commands (**Publish and be damned! Unhand it, sir! Do not lean out of the window. Keep Britain tidy**).

c) *Subjunctive*, used to express wishes, demands, and hypothetical or unreal conditions (**I wish I were dead! I insist that he leave [or should leave] at once. If you were to read Richardson for the story, your patience would be so fretted that you would hang yourself. Had we but world enough and time, / This coyness, lady, were no crime. Be that as it may . . .**).

Apart from the dropped -s ending in the present tense of verbs (as in **that he leave**), which tends in any case to be an American rather than an English idiom, the only distinctive subjunctive forms in modern English are found in the verb **to be** (present tense **be**, past tense singular **were**), so the subjunctive mood is mainly indicated by past

tense forms (If I *said* you had a beautiful body, would you hold it against me?) or by the use of auxiliary verbs (If I were as rich as Mr. Darcy, I *should* not care how proud I was. I *would* keep a pack of foxhounds, and drink a bottle of wine every day.

iv) *Voice*: The verb has two voices, active (e.g. I *write* my essays at the last minute. The dog *bit* the man) and passive (e.g. My essays *are written* at the last minute. The man *was bitten* by the dog). The passive is formed by the verb **be** and the *past participle* of the verb (see section vi) below).

v) *Aspect*: indicates the way in which the action or state described by the verb is regarded (e.g. as completed or in progress); compare the simple past tense form I **wrote** with the forms I **was writing** (*progressive aspect*) and I **have written** (*perfective aspect*).

vi) *Finite and non-finite forms*: A finite form of the verb is one that expresses tense and mood. The non-finite forms of the verb are:

a) the *infinitive*: this usually has **to** in front of it, except after auxiliary verbs: We laugh at the elixir that promises *to prolong* life to a thousand years; and with equal justice may the lexicographer be derided who, being able *to produce* no example of a nation that has preserved their words and phrases from mutability, shall *imagine* that his dictionary can *embalm* his language, and *secure* it from corruption and decay, that it is in his power *to change* sublunary nature, or *clear* the world at once from folly, vanity, and affectation.

b) the *present participle*: marked by its ending in **-ing**: We were *working* in the Library. The English winter, *ending* in July I To recommence in August . . .)

c) the *past participle*: Usually (though not always) ends in **-ed** (I love, I have *loved*, I was *loved*) or **-en** (I write, I have *written*, it was *written*). E.g.: The English language, while it was *employed* in the cultivation of every species of literature, has itself *been* hitherto *neglected*; *suffered* to spread into wild exuberance, *resigned* to the tyranny of time and fashion, and *exposed* to the corruptions of ignorance, and caprices of innovation.

Note: sometimes the past tense form of the verb is the same as that of the past participle, and the context must be used to distinguish them. Compare **I walked home, she won the match** (past tense, finite form) with **I have walked home, the match was won** (past participle, non-finite form following auxiliary verb).

All other forms of the verb are finite. Test your recognition of finite and non-finite forms on this example:

**The Devil, *having* nothing else to do,
Went off to *tempt* my lady Poltagrue.
My Lady, *tempted* by a private whim,
To his extreme annoyance, *tempted* him.**

2.7 *Article:* This minute category contains only the definite article (**the**) and the indefinite article (**a, an**).

2.8 *Pronoun:* A word used as a substitute for a noun: **he, himself, that, what, who, each, either, some, one**.

There are several different kinds of pronoun, including *personal* (**I, you, he**, etc.); *possessive* (**my, mine**, etc.); *reflexive* (**myself**, etc.); *relative* (**who, which, that**; e.g. **the woman who rode away, the book that I bought**); *interrogative* (**who, what, which**; e.g. **what was that? I asked her who was there**); and *demonstrative* (**this, that**; e.g. **Drink this**).

i) *Case:* Six pronouns, **I, we, he, she, they**, and **who**, have three different case-forms (see 3.4): the *subjective* (or *nominative*) (**I go to work. Who is it?**); the *possessive* (or *genitive*) (**That's my book. Whose is it?**); and the *objective* (**She hit me. By whom?**).

ii) *Person:* Personal, possessive, and reflexive pronouns distinguish *person* in both singular and plural:

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1st person	I, my, myself	we, our, ourselves
2nd person	you, your, yourself	you, your, yourselves
3rd person	he, she, it, etc.	they, their, etc.

iii) *Gender:* Personal, possessive, and reflexive pronouns also distinguish *gender* in the third person singular. In Modern English, this means that the form varies according to the sex (or lack of it) of what is

being talked about: *masculine* (**he**) for male persons and (sometimes) animals, *feminine* (**she**) for female, and *neuter* (**it**) for other things.

2.9 *Preposition*: used to relate nouns or pronouns grammatically to the rest of the sentence. Can be *simple* (**at, on, by, through, with**) or *compound* (**away from, because of, by means of**).

2.10 *Conjunction*: used to link words or groups of words. Conjunctions can be *co-ordinating* (**and, but, or**) or *subordinating* (**if, although, because, that, when, so that**); see 2.17. Like prepositions, they can be either *simple* (**if, and, but**) or *compound* (**so that, provided that, as long as**).

2.11 *Interjection*: an exclamation, grammatically independent of the rest of the sentence: **Alas! Oh dear! Damn!**

2.12 NOTE: Many words can be classified in more than one way, and their function in the sentence should always be taken into account. For instance, **that** in *that man* functions as an adjective; in **I like that** as a demonstrative pronoun; in **I wouldn't go that far** as an adverb; in **the book that I bought** as a relative pronoun; and in **He said that he would come** as a subordinating conjunction. When in doubt, look carefully at the context.

2.13 **THE SENTENCE** is a self-contained syntactical unit. It is traditionally divided into two parts, *subject* and *predicate*.

2.14 *The subject* of a sentence represents the person or thing about which a statement is being made:

The cat sat on the mat. All Ireland is washed by the Gulf Stream.

When the verb is *active* (e.g. **sat**), the subject carries out the action; when it is *passive* (e.g. **is washed**), the subject is affected by the action. The usual position for the subject is at the beginning of the sentence, but this is not invariable:

What am I to do?

Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?

Last night we stayed up late.

Or even: **Him the almighty power/ Hurl'd headlong.**

In imperative sentences the subject is usually not expressed:

Run! Make my day! Don't even think about parking here!

2.15 *The predicate* includes all parts of the sentence other than the subject. It can contain several elements, but the only essential one is a *finite verb* (**Run! Birds fly**). Other possible elements are:

- i) *an object*: Some verbs take a direct object (**I need a drink. She hit him**), others both a direct and an *indirect object* (**Give me the daggers. Don't bring Mr. Elton any more wine**). The indirect object always comes before the direct object; it can be replaced by a phrase with **to** or **for** (**Give the daggers to me. Don't bring any more wine for Mr. Elton**). Verbs which take an object are known as *transitive*, those which don't (e.g. **He laughed, It's raining**) as *intransitive*.
- ii) *a complement*: this can be either a *subject complement* (**She is fat. He became a midwife. You seem surprised**) or an *object complement* (**Drinking makes me fat. They appointed him chairman. He proved them wrong**). Subject complements refer back to the subject of the verb, object complements to its object.
- iii) *an adverbial element*: May qualify the verb (**That will do nicely. March indefatigably on**) or the sentence as a whole (**Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn**).

2.16 **THE PHRASE** is a small group of words which functions in the same way as a single part of speech; unlike the sentence, it does not have both a subject and a predicate. Traditional grammar concentrates on a few specific types of phrase:

- i) *the prepositional phrase*, which is introduced by a preposition (**under a cemetery wall; by the rules of grammar; with his muddy boots on**).
- ii) *the participial phrase*, which includes a present or past participle (**pouring himself a drink; all things considered**).
- iii) *the infinitive phrase*, which includes an infinitive (**to learn my ABC; to be a pilgrim**).

Individual nouns (or pronouns), adjectives, and adverbs, can be replaced by phrases of this kind:

The end of writing is to instruct (cf. **The end of writing is instruction: noun**).

I saw a women wearing a St. Laurent suit (cf. **I saw a fashionable woman**: *adjective*).

All things considered, it's not worth it (cf. **Ultimately it's not worth it**: *adverb*).

2.17 **THE CLAUSE** is a group of words containing its own subject and predicate. Clauses can be either *main clauses* or *subordinate* (“dependent”) clauses.

A *simple sentence*, with a single subject and predicate (e.g. **The cat sat on the mat**), consists of a single main clause.

A *compound sentence* contains more than one main clause (**She gave me a ring but I diced it away. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness to the flesh**). The main clauses are linked by *co-ordinating conjunctions* (e.g. **and, but, or**). Where the subject of the two clauses is the same, it need not be expressed in both: **They cut me up with a knife and fork / and tied me to a cabbage stalk**.

A *complex sentence* is one which contains not only a main clause (or clauses) but at least one *subordinate clause* (**There'd be no kissing if he had his wish. When I'm a veteran with only one eye, I shall do nothing but look at the sky. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done**).

Subordinate clauses can be introduced by:

subordinating conjunctions: **if, because, although, since**, etc.;

relative pronouns: e.g. **We have done those things which we ought not to have done. I met a man who wasn't there**.

interrogative pronouns: e.g. **I've no idea who she was**.

relative adverbs: e.g. **Where there is leisure for fiction, there is little grief**.

interrogative adverbs: e.g. **I don't know how you could do such a thing**.

- or sometimes *inverted word-order*; **Had you been there . . .**

Relative pronouns are sometimes omitted: e.g. **Well, Lulu, here is another book and we have not read half the ones we have got yet**.

Subordinate clauses, like phrases, can replace nouns (or pronouns), adjectives, or adverbs:

i) *noun clause*: **What's to come is still unsure. I know that he's here**.

(cf. *The future* is still unsure. I know *that*.)

ii) *adjectival clause*: I met a man *who was over eighty* (cf. I met an *old man*).

iii) *adverbial clause*: He went home *when it was dark*. I left the party *because they threw me out bodily*. (Cf. He went home *late*. I left the party *reluctantly*).

Is the following sentence simple, compound, complex, or compound *and* complex?

Full of quiet dignity, and so obviously an English gentleman of perfect breeding and impeccable taste, even in the khaki shorts, sun-helmet and Old School Tie appropriate to the burning tropical sun, his bronzed clean-cut countenance radiant with the unselfconscious superiority so much admired - yet so vainly imitated - by less fortunate nations untouched as yet by the public school tradition, the Civil Engineer; watching the gradual but irresistible collapse of his new bridge into the brown, swirling waters of the flooded river hundreds of feet below, and ignoring, with the ease of long practice, the coarse but good-natured badinage of his workmen and the less friendly, indeed actively hostile, criticism of the representatives of the local authorities, consoled himself by imagining, with a thrill of anticipatory aesthetic pleasure, the excellence of the English prose, beautifully phrased and brilliantly punctuated, soon to be enshrined in his report justifying and explaining this unfortunate contretemps - an exquisite prose developed through his regular attendance at the admirable lectures on the Use of English provided, regardless of trouble and expense, though without extra emolument accruing to the Lecturer dedicated to the task, by the benevolent authorities of his old University.

2.18 **APPOSITION**: When a noun (or pronoun) is followed by another noun describing it, the second noun is *in apposition* to the first: **Have you got Mr. Bones, *the undertaker*? I, *Tiresias*, have foresuffered all.**

3. OLD ENGLISH

Introductory: You will find a detailed account of Old English grammar in Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, edd., *A Guide to Old English* (5th edn., 1992), and you should learn to find your way round it as soon as possible - start with pages 1-7. Because it is so detailed, however, you may find it hard to sort out the wood from the trees at first. The notes here are intended to give you an overview of the main features of Old English grammar, to identify the main difficulties you will meet, and to explain the technical terms you will need to recognize.

The main difference between Old English (OE) and Modern English (MnE) is that OE is, like modern German, a highly inflected language. Grammatical relationships which in MnE are made clear by the use of prepositions, auxiliary verbs, and a rigidly fixed word-order are often shown in OE by inflexion instead, and you will have to pay close attention to inflexions in order to make sense of OE texts. The way in which inflexions vary in nouns, adjectives, and pronouns is known as *declension*; in verbs it is called *conjugation*.

3.1 DECLENSION

OE nouns, adjectives, and pronouns vary their forms according to their *number*, *gender*, and *case*.

3.2 *Number*: normally either *singular* (= one) or *plural* (more than one), as in MnE. However, a linguistic fossil, the *dual*, is preserved in the first and second person personal pronouns as an intermediate form between singular and plural: so we have **ic**, **thu** “**I**, **you**” (singular), **wit**, **git**, “**we (two)**”, “**you (two)**” (dual), and **we**, **ge**, “**we**”, “**you**” (plural: more than two).

3.3 *Gender*: MnE has *natural gender* (see section 2.8 ill) above): “**he**”, “**she**” and “**it**” refer to the actual gender of the person or thing being described. OE, however, has *grammatical gender*: as in modern French and German, every noun is assigned a gender which may have no logical connection whatever with what it describes. So OE **hlæfdige** “**lady**” is grammatically feminine, but OE **wif** “**woman**” is neuter, and **wifmann** “**woman**” is masculine.

3.4 *Case*: One of the ways in which inflexions can be used to express grammatical relationships. Case is used extensively in many languages (including German, Greek, and Latin), and you will need to master it to translate OE correctly. Very little of the OE case-system survives in MnE; the one area where it does survive to some extent is in the pronouns (see section 2.8 i) above), and you may find it helpful to start there. There are five separate cases in Old English: nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, and (less common) instrumental.

3.5 *Nominative*: The subject-case: **He andwyrde sona** “**He answered at once**”; **Him andwyrde se fæder** “**The father answered him**”. Note that in OE the subject is not necessarily placed at the beginning of the sentence, or even before the verb.

3.6 *Accusative*: Characteristically the direct-object case (**tha se engel gelæhte hine** “**Then the angel seized him**”; **tha stowe habbath giet his iefernuman** “**His successors still have that place**”). Note that in OE the direct object may be placed before the verb - as in the second example.

3.7 *Genitive*: Mainly possessive; can often be rendered by MnE “of”. **Godes engel** “**God’s angel**”; **on Cyres dagum cyninges** “**in the days of King Cyrus**”. Note: **hiera fif** “**five of them**”, **fela wundra** “**many wonders**”.

3.8 *Dative*: Characteristically the indirect-object case: **Sege thinum leodum miccle lathre spell** “**Give your people a much more hostile message**”; **He sealde ælcum anne pening** “**He gave each one a penny**”. Can often be rendered by “to” or “for” in MnE.

3.9 *Instrumental*: refers to the means by which, or the manner in which, an action is done, and can often be rendered in MnE by “by” or “with”: **lytle werode** “**with a small force**”, **wundum werig** “**worn out by wounds**”. Nouns have no separate instrumental inflexion, and use dative forms to express this case.

3.10 Note: All these cases except the nominative may also occur after prepositions (e.g. **on thone thriddan dæg** [accusative] “**on the third day**”; **with thæs hrofes** [genitive] “**towards the roof**”); and some prepositions can be followed by more than one case.

The above summary is only a rough guide to the meaning and function of the cases; for other uses, see Mitchell/Robinson, sections 188-92.

3.11 *Noun-declension*: Nouns (as in German) can have either a *strong* or a *weak* declension. These terms refer simply to the kind of inflexional endings they have. Strong nouns (e.g. **stan** “**stone**”, **hus** “**house**”, **giefu** “**gift**”) have a wide variety of inflexional endings; weak nouns (e.g. **sunne** “**sun**”, **nama** “**name**”) have endings predominantly in **-an**.

3.12 *Adjective-declension*: Adjectives, like nouns, can be declined either strong or weak (case-endings similar, but not identical, to those of nouns). But while a given noun will belong to *either* the strong *or* the weak declension (not both), the great majority of adjectives (as in German) can take either strong or weak inflexions according to their function in the sentence. Weak endings are always used after the definite article and the demonstrative adjectives “**this**” and “**that**”, and sometimes after possessive adjectives like “**my**” as well. Adjectives agree with the nouns they qualify in number, gender, and case.

3.13 *Pronoun-declension* is considerably more complicated than in MnE (see Mitchell/Robinson, sections 15-21); it will save you time in the long run to learn at least the forms of the personal pronoun (sections 18, 21).

You will also find that it saves time to learn the forms of the definite article (section 16), as this will often allow you to establish the case, number, and gender of the noun it goes with without having to identify the form of the noun itself (a task which can be difficult, time-consuming, and inconclusive). Note that i) the definite article doubles as the demonstrative adjective “**that**”; ii) **the** in Old English is *not* a form of the definite article but a (very common) indeclinable relative pronoun (“**who**, **which**, **that**”).

3.14 CONJUGATION

OE verbs have a larger number of distinct inflexions than MnE verbs, and a distinctive present and past subjunctive form. See Mitchell/Robinson, sections 87-134, for full details. The main types of verb are summarised below:

3.15 *Strong and weak verbs*: The two main types of verb in OE (as in MnE) are *strong* and *weak*.

Weak verbs, the more regular (and more common) type, normally form their past tense and past participle by adding an ending with **-d-**: e.g. **fyllan** [infinitive], **fylde** [past tense], **gefyllled** [past participle], which gives the MnE verb “**fill, [he] filled, [he has] filled**”. This has remained the dominant type of verb in Modern English: **love, loved, walk, walked**, etc.

Strong verbs form their past tense and past participle by vowel-change: e.g. **drincan** [infinitive], **dranc** [past tense], **gedruncen** [past participle], which gives MnE “**drink, [he] drank, [he has] drunk**”. Many strong verbs still survive in MnE: **ride, rode, ridden; choose, chose, chosen; run, ran, run; win, won**.

In OE there is sometimes vowel-variation *within* the present tense (**ic ceose “i choose”** but **he ciest “he chooses”**) or the past tense (**ic band “i bound”** but **we bundon “we bound”**) as well as *between* the present and past.

These vowel-changes are not always predictable (though the analogy of the corresponding MnE verb may sometimes help); when in doubt, look through Mitchell/Robinson, Appendix A (pp. 152-58), where you will find a list of all the verb-forms you are likely to encounter.

3.16 *Preterite-Present Verbs*: a small but frequently-occurring group of verbs, mainly auxiliaries, which have a present tense which is past (“preterite”) in form but present in meaning: e.g. **dearr “dare”, can “can”, mæg “may”**. They have acquired a new, weak past tense: **dorste “dared”, cuthe “could”, mihte “might”**.

3.17 *Anomalous verbs*: common verbs too irregular to fit into the previous categories: they include **wesan / beon “to be”, gan “to go”** (note the irregular past tense **eode “went”**), **willan “will”**.

3.18 **SYNTAX**: Consult Mitchell/Robinson, ch. 5. The most likely source of problems is word-order: the standard pattern of the MnE sentence, subject-verb-object, is much less common in OE, especially in the poetry. Those who have studied German will recognize the following features of OE word-order:

i) Infinitives or past participles may be placed at the end of a main clause: **Ic wolde thas lytlan boc awendan** “**I wanted to translate this little book**”.

ii) An object, complement, or adverb may be put at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis; in this case the subject will *follow* the verb: **Tha swigode se cyning** “**Then the king was silent**”.

iii) In subordinate clauses the verb is usually moved to the end of the clause: **thæt hie thone Godes mann abitan scolden** “**that they should eat up the man of God**”.

Because of this greater variety in word-order, you will need to look closely at inflexional endings to be sure you have understood the Old English correctly. So, for instance, don't assume automatically that a noun (or pronoun) at the beginning of a sentence is the subject of that sentence. Is it in the nominative case? If not, it can't be the subject. Does it agree in number with the verb that follows it? If it is singular and the verb is plural, it can't be the subject of that verb.

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