

# CHASE

Consortium for the Humanities and the Arts South-East England

## Old English Language Training Word Order

The default word-order in Old English is **Subject-Verb**, as in Modern English, but there are a number of exceptions.

### Verb-Subject

**Verb-Subject** word order is common in questions, as in Modern English.

It is also common in independent clauses introduced by certain adverbs (*þa*, *þonne*, *þær*, *þanon*, *þider*), the particle *ne*, and the conjunctions *and* and *ac*.

Ða **cwæð** **Drihten** to Caine: Hwær is Abel ðin broðor?

Ða **andswarode** **he** and cwæð: Ic nat, segst ðu, sceolde ic minne broðor healdan?

Ða **cwæð** **Drihten** to Caine: Hwæt dydest ðu?  
Pines broðor blod clypað to me of eorðan.

### Subject...Verb

The finite verb can be delayed in subordinate clauses and clauses introduced by *and* or *ac*.

Nu secgað þa Deniscan þæt se Iouis wære, þe **hi** þor **hatað**, Mercuries sunu.

*Now say the Danes that this Jove was, whom they Thor call, Mercury's son.*

### Correlation

When a subordinate and an independent clause are correlated and introduced by the conjunction/adverb pairs *þa* (when/then), *þonne* (whenever/then), or *þær* (where/there),

The **subordinate** clause is usually Subject-Verb:

þonne **hē** **geseah** þā hearpan him nēalēcan,  
*when he saw*

The **independent** clause is usually Verb-Subject:

þonne **ārās** **hē** for forsome from þæm symble ond hām ēode tō his hūse.  
*then arose he*

## Anticipation

Old English sometimes uses an anticipatory pronoun:

He Drihten þæt ongeat and geseah...

*He, the Lord, perceived and saw that...*

He þæs wende þæt his wamb wære his Drihten God

*He this believed, that his belly was his Lord God.*

Poets can make good use of anticipatory pronouns in crafting instances of prolepsis and deliberate ambiguity:

Nu ic þe hate, hæleð min se leofa, þæt ðu þas gesyhðe secge mannum, onwreoh wordum þæt hit is wuldres beam, se ðe ælmihtig god on þrowode for mancynnes manegum synnum ond <i>Adomes</i> eadgewyrhtum. Deað <i>he</i> þær byrigde, hwæðere eft <i>Dryhten</i> aras mid his miclan mihte mannum to helpe	Now I command you, my beloved warrior that you about this sight speak to men uncover with words that it is the tree of glory that which Almighty God suffered on for mankind's many sins and Adam's ancient deeds Death he there tasted, yet after the Lord arose with his great power to help men
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[See Irvine, Susan, 'Adam or Christ? A Pronominal Pun in *The Dream of the Rood*', *Review of English Studies* 48:192 (1997), 433–447.]

## Periphrastic Verbs

Periphrastic: '(of a case or tense) formed by a combination of words rather than by inflection (such as *did go* and *of the people* rather than *went* and *the people's*).'

In Modern English the elements of a periphrastic verb are usually kept together, but in OE they can be separated:

**Hæfde** se cyning his fierd on tu **tonumen**

Had the king his army in two divided

In Modal + Infinitive constructions, the two verbs can be quite far apart:

And swa hit **sceal** nyde for folces synnan ær antecristes tocyme  
**yfelian** swyþe.

*And so it must necessarily for people's sins before the Antichrist's arrival  
become much worse.*

## Splitting of Heavy Groups

Old English has a tendency to split lengthy subjects, objects, and modifiers. So for example,

Frodo is walking to Mordor, and Sam

Is preferred over

Frodo and Sam are walking to Mordor

Here are some examples from Mitchell and Robinson section 149:

eower mod is awend, and eower adwlita

*your mind is changed, and your countenance*

Inwæres broþur ond Healfdanes

*Inwær's brother and Healfdane's—i.e., the brother of Inwær and Healfdane.*

þæt hi næfre ær swa clæne gold, ne swa read ne gesawon

*that they never before such pure gold, nor so red saw*