

2.3 Individual Consonants

A. The **stop consonants** were distinguished in pairs by voice and in sets by position.

/p	t	k	Unvoiced	[p	t	k
b	d	g/	Voiced	b	d	g]

The **nasals** and **liquids**, not distinguished by voicing, form separate pairs.

/m	[m	/l	[l
n/	n, ŋ]	r/	r]

The spellings correspond closely to those of the descendant phones in Modern English: **p, t, c** (also **k** in later texts), **b, d, g; m, n; l, r**. The 'Insular **g**' used in writing Old English has the distinctive shape **ȝ**; it is retained in both the Prose Readings and the Verse Readings.

The pair /p b/ was **bilabial**. Articulation of /t d/ was probably **dental** (rather than alveolar as it is in Modern English). The pair /k g/ was **velar**. The sound [ŋ] was an allophone of /n/, splitting off as a new phoneme only in Middle English; [ŋ] occurs only before /k/ and /g/, never in word-final position. (The contrast **win** – **wing** was not possible.) The liquid /r/ was probably trilled or tapped.

Reduplication in spelling indicates lengthening (i.e., increased duration) of the articulation of a consonant: **næddre** 'adder,' **blæddre** 'bladder.' Contrast of normal and lengthened consonants at the end of a word(-root) did not distinguish morphemes in Old English. Consonants were never lengthened initially in words. But medially, lengthened and non-lengthened consonants did contrast: **swellan** '(to) swell,' vs. **swelan** '(to) burn,' **racca** 'part of a ship's rigging' vs. **raca** 'rake.'

Adaptation of the roman alphabet to write English was new and without accumulated errors or mismatches of spelling and sounds resulting from language change. *A letter was not written unless there was a sound (or feature) it represented.* For learning this language, therefore, every spelled consonant should be restored with a spoken consonant (or distinctive feature of one).

In the illustrative lists for the consonants, primary accent is on the first syllable in all the examples.

/p/	pæll	silk robe	hēap	crowd, band	pīpe	pipe, tube
	pǣl	javelin	dēop	deep	uppan	on, upon
	palm	palm	grāp	(he) attacked	grīpan	(to) attack
	plot	plot of ground	nāp	(it) darkened	nīpan	(to) darken
	port	port, harbor	wearp	(he) cast	weorpan	(to) cast
	prēost	priest	healp	(he) helped	helpan	(to) help
	prīm	the first hour	lēap	basket	open	open, evident
	pund	pound	ūp	up	pāpa	pope
	penn	pen, fold	sæp	sap, juice	dyppan	(to) dip
	pening	penny, coin	top	top	lippa	lip
	pinn	pin, peg	rāp	rope	pipor	pepper
/b/	bæc	back	lamb	lamb	stybb	stump
	bǣl	fire, pyre	web	web	libban	(to) live
	bān	bone	neb(b)	beak, face	cribbe	stall, crib
	bāt	boat	clamb	(he) climbed	hæbbe	(I) have
	blæd	glory; success	wamb	belly	nebb	beak, face
	blēo	color	camb	comb; crest	sibb	peace
	brēost	breast, mind	dumb	dumb, silent	ebba	ebb, low tide
	brim	surf, sea	ymb	by, about	lybb	drug, poison
	belt	belt, girdle	rib	rib	ribbe	rib-wort
	binn	bin, basket			hebban	(to) raise
	bār	boar			abbod	abbot
/t/	tūn	enclosure, town	hit	it	swēte	sweet, pure
	tam	tame, mild	wit	we-two	winter	winter
	tō	to; too	belt	belt, girdle	settan	(to) set
	twā	two; twice	munt	mountain	sittan	(to) sit
	twelf	twelve	sealt	salt	heorte	heart,
	tīd	time, while	sweart	swarthy; evil		spirit
	trum	secure, strong	heorot	hart, stag	mete	food
	tīr	fame, glory	hāt	heat; hot	wæter	water
	tīen	ten	stræt	street	smitte	smudge
	tempel	temple	gāt	goat	setl	seat
	tappere	tapster	gæt	goats	otor	otter

/d/	dūn	hill, 'down'	dēad	dead	landes	land (<i>infl.</i>)
	dæl	portion, part	wyrd	fate	wurdon	became
	drēam	joy	word	word, state- ment	wordes	word, state- ment (<i>infl.</i>)
	dōm	judgment, authority	sweard	hide, rind	bedd	bed, couch
	draca	dragon, sea- monster	hold	faithful, loyal	wedd	pledge, agree- ment
	dimm	dim, obscure	mid	with	fōda	food
	dēor	animal	hād	rank; form	medu	mead (drink)
	duru	door	snōd	head-dress	ende	end
/k/	cribb	stall, 'crib'	dranc	(he) drank	drincan	(to) drink
	cēne	bold	swanc	(he) labored, toiled	swincan	(to) labor, toil
	cyrtel	kirtle				
	cyning	king	folc	folk, people	folces	folk (<i>infl.</i>)
	cēol	ship	weorc	work, deed	weorces	work (<i>infl.</i>)
	clamb	(he) climbed	ēac	also	ēacen	increased
	cēpan	(to) keep	ac	but	locc	lock of hair
	cwic	alive	bōc	book	rocc	over-garment
	cnīf	knife	sēoc	sick	sticca	stick, peg
	cnoll	knoll	meolc	milk	lūcan	(to) lock, enclose
	cnyttan	(to) fasten, knit	blæc	black	wōc	(he) awoke
	cnēo	knee	blāc	bright, shining	hnecca	neck
	cnæpp	summit	āc	oak	tācen	sign
/g/	gār	spear	sprang	(he) sprang	springan	(to) spring
	gēs	geese	sang	(he) sang	singan	(to) sing
	gōs	goose	streng	string, rope	engel	angel
	gāst	spirit, ghost	strang	strong, bold	angel	fish-hook
	glæd	bright, joyous	fēng	(he) seized	hungor	hunger
	grēne	green	lang	long, tall	finger	finger
	grund	bottom	leng	longer	lengest	longest
	gnæt	gnat, midge	dung	dung	lagu	law

/l/	lār	lore, learning	hāl	whole, sound	willan	(to) wish,
	lāf	remnant	eall	all, everything		be willing
	lāc	play; gift	weall	wall, rampart	ellen	zeal, courage
	lȳtel	little	til	good	weallan	(to) well,
	lind	linden, lime- tree	dol	foolish		bubble
			ād̥l	sickness	swelan	(to) burn
	libban	(to) live	stræ̆l	arrow	swellan	(to) swell
	lyft	sky, air	stōl	stool, seat	feallan	(to) fall
	lang	long	stæ̆l	place, spot	spillan	(to) waste
	leng	longer	sæl	room, hall	syll	sill, base
/r/	rād	(he) rode	ær	before	word	word
	rest	rest, quiet	lār	lore, learning	feorr	far, distant
	rinc	man, warrior	for	for	faran	(to) travel
	rēod	red, ruddy	tūr	tower, fortress	ord	point, spear
	rāp	rope	ēar	ear of corn	ēare	ear
	ræd	advice, plan	timber	building	timbrian	(to) construct
	ræs	onrush		material	māra	more
	rōd	rood	hār	hoary, gray	ōra	ore
	rēad	red	bær	bare	bora	ruler
	rēc	smoke	bær	bier	mere	sea, ocean
/m/	mā	more	eom	(I) am	fruma	origin
	mæd	pasture	ēam	uncle	tīma	space of
	mīn	my, mine	holm	wave, ocean		time
	mē	me	wyrm	worm, dragon	nama	name
	mid	with	earm	arm; poor	samod	together
	mētan	(to) meet	rūm	spacious	lēoma	beam, radiance
	mīl	mile	nam	(he) took	niman	(to) take
	mete	food	rīm	number	rima	rim, border
	mōd	heart, mind	healm	stalk, stubble	hama	covering
	milt̥s	mercy	ōm	rust	hāma	cricket

/n/	nā	not, no	ān	one	wynn	joy, delight
	ne	not, neither, nor	in	in, on, at	dunn	dun, dark- colored
	nū	now	dōn	(to) do	inn	lodging
	næs	= ne wæs wasn't	on	upon, among	bana	slayer
	nære	= ne wære weren't	earn	eagle	ancor	anchor
	nolde	= ne wolde wouldn't	torn	anger, misery	sōna	at once
	nāt	= ne wāt know not	rūn	mystery	bēna	petitioner
	nædl	needle	nān	none, not one	bune	cup
			stān	stone	wana	lack
			wan	lacking	cyning	king
			gān	(to) go, move	panne	pan
			bēn	request	denn	den, lair
			lān	loan, gift		

B. The glide /w/ [w] was spelled either **u**, **uu**, or **p** (*p* is called 'wen' or 'wynn'); it is usually replaced with **w** in modern editions.

/w/	wē	we	swā	so, as	hrēaw*	raw
	wæs	(he) was	swān	swain	snāw	snow
	wæron	(we) were	swan	swan	sāwol	soul
	willan	(to) wish, be willing	twelf	twelve	āwa	always, ever
	wolde	(he) wished	twinn	double	hāwung	observation
	wītan	(to) depart	hwær*	where	hīw	appearance
	witan	(to) know	hwā	who	hlæw*	mound
	wāt	(he) knows	hwæs	whose	nīwe	new, fresh
	writen	written	hwæm	whom	ēow	you
	wrist	wrist	hwone	whom	ēower	your
	wlips	lipping	dwolma	chaos	grōwan	(to) grow
	wlanc	splendid, proud	dwīnan	(to) waste away	īw	yew(-tree)
	wræstlere	wrestler	cwīc	quick, living	æwe	married
			cwēn	queen, woman	mæw	mew, sea-gull

*See note on *hw*-, *hr*-, and *hl*- spellings, next.

The **glottal spirant** /h/ was [h]; it was spelled **h**. Except in prehistoric Old English it occurred only in initial position.

/h/	hē	he	hlædder*	ladder
	his	his	hlāf	loaf
	him	him	hlanc	lank, thin
	hine	him	hlēo	covering, protector
	hit	it	hlūd	loud, sonorous
	hēo	she	hlid	covering, lid, door
	hī, hīe	they; them	hnitu	louse-egg, nit
	him	them	hnutu	nut
	hiera	their(s)	hring	ring
	hengest	horse	hwæt	what
	hors	horse	hwelp	whelp
	horn	horn	hwæl	whale
	hæbbe	(I) have	hwēol	wheel
	hār	hoar, gray	hrōf	roof, ceiling
	hell	hell	hwisprian	(to) whisper
	hēr	here	hwistle	pipe, whistle
	hāt	hot	hwistlere	piper, whistler
	henn	hen	hnappian	(to) nap, slumber

Prehistoric OE

*wrēohan	>
*sleahan	>
*seohan	>

Historic OE

wrēon	(to) cover
slēan	(to) strike, slay
sēon	(to) see

*The *hl-*, *hr-*, *hn-*, *hw-* spellings have been analyzed alternatively as employing an *h*-spelling as a diacritic to mark voiceless [l̥, r̥, n̥, w̥], which could then be classed as allophones of /l r n w/. But in view of contrasting pairs such as **hlāf** 'loaf' **lāf** 'remnant,' it seems almost certain that the spellings do represent consonant clusters with *h*.

Another consonant /ġ/ was also spelled **g**. It is represented here as **ġ**. Variant spellings of a number of words indicate that it was evolving from a voiced **palatal spirant** [g] into a **glide** [j]. Its reflex in Middle English is usually /y/, as in *yes, ye, yeer, yaf, yong*, etc.

/ġ/	ġea	yea, yes	læġde	(he) laid	læġ	(he) lay
	ġē	ye, you (pl.)	sæġde	(he) said	wæġ	wave
	ġear	year	dīeġlan	(to) conceal	weġ	way
	ġeaf	(he) gave	seġl	sail	hālġ	holy
	ġierwan	(to) prepare	næġl	nail	werġ	weary
	ġeong	young	reġn	rain	wiġ	battle
	ġeolo	yellow	bræġen	brain	dæġ	day
	ġeard	yard	twēġen	two, twain	mæġ	kinsman
	ġeond	throughout	bēġen	both	mæġ	(he) is able
	ġēoc	help	eġe	fear	huniġ	honey
	ġeoc	yoke	sleġe	slaying	hīeġ	hay
	ġeorn	eager	tæġl	tail	græġ	grey
	ġiellan	(to) yell, shout	stæġer	stair(-case)	æġ	egg
	ġiet	yet, hitherto	fæġer	fair, lovely	cæġ	key
	ġeāra	of yore, formerly	wæġn	wagon, wain	clæġ	clay

C. Two **palatal affricates** (articulated in same position as /ġ/) were distinguished by voice:

/č	[č], alternate notation [tʃ]
ĵ/	[j], alternate notation [dʒ].

These phonemes, resulting from a split of /k/ and /g/ in English a little earlier than the earliest records, were spelled most often with letters also used to represent /k/ and /g/, but in some instances with letter combinations in which the second letter served as a diacritic for the first. Because only historical knowledge of pre-Old English can determine which phoneme is represented by **c** in many instances, modern editions commonly mark the **c** spelling of /č/ as **č**; it is so marked here. The spelling **cg** commonly represents /ĵ/; when **g** alone is the spelling of this sound, will be marked **ġ** in this Grammar (but left unmarked as **g** in the Readings.) Sometimes **e** was placed following **g** apparently as a diacritic to indicate /ĵ/. The phoneme /ĵ/ does not occur in word-initial position.

/č/	čēn	torch	iċ	I	miċel	great, much
	ċild	child	drenċ	drink	rīċe	kingdom
	ċeaster	castle, town	piċ	pitch	mēċe	sword
	ċēosan	(to) choose	swilċ	such (as)	drenċan	(to) give drink
	ċēapman	trader	hwilċ	which	biċċe	bitch
	ċēas	(he) chose	ælc	each	swilċe	such (a one)
	ċeaf	chaff	stenc	odor, scent	sēċan	(to) seek
	ċinn	chin	hċ	body	læċe	physician
	ċiriċe	church	beorċ	birch	tæċan	(to) teach
	ċēace	cheek, jaw	finċ	finch	streċċan	(to) stretch
	ċealc	chalk, lime	spræċ	speech	wæċċan	(to) watch
	ċīecen	chicken	cryċċ	crutch, staff	styċċe	piece, bit
	ċeorl	layman, freeman			ġiċċan	(to) itch
	ċyſe	cheese			tiċċen	kid
	ċīdan	(to) chide			ynċe	inch
	ċīdere	a chider			læċċan	(to) grasp
	ċīerran	(to) turn			cycene	kitchen
	ċeosel	gravel			wiċċa	sorcerer
					wiċċe	sorceress

/ĵ/	hecġ	hedge	swenġan	(to) strike
	secġ	man	senġan	(to) singe
	wecġ	wedge	menġan	(to) mix
	ecġ	edge, sword	twenġan	(to) pinch
	slecġ	hammer		
	brycġ	bridge		
	mycġ	midge		
	wicġ	steed		
	licġan	(to) lie		
	lecġan	(to) lay		
	secġan	(to) say		
	secġa	sayer		
	hycġan	(to) think		
	hrycġ	back, spine		
	cycġel	cudgel		

D. The **spirant** /s/ had two allophones—unvoiced [s] and voiced [z]. It is usually spelled **s**. Occasionally it is also represented when the cluster /ks/ is spelled **x**, as in **weaxan** ‘(to) grow, wax,’ and when the cluster /ts/ is represented by **z** (rarely, and typically in Biblical names), as in **Nazareth**.

Pronunciation of this spirant is voiced [z] within a morphic sequence of voiced sounds—either vowel or voiced consonant—when it follows a syllable that carries word-stress; otherwise it is unvoiced [s]. To put it another way, there were no distinctions among words in Old English made on the basis of the voicing or non-voicing of this spirant as [z] or [s], as there are in Modern English **zinc**–**sink**, **eyes**–**ice**. The lengthened spirant, spelled **-ss-**, is unvoiced.

Three additional spirants form a set in which each is distinguished by position of articulation; as with /s/, voice is non-distinctive and both voiced and unvoiced allophones occur, distributed in a way parallel to [s] and [z] for /s/. (It is not possible in Old English to have contrasts such as **vat**–**fat**, **save**–**safe**, **either**–**ether**.)

/f/	pronounced	as	[f]	or	[v]
/þ/	"	"	[θ]	or	[ð]
/x/	"	"	[x]	or	[χ]

Labio-dental /f/ was regularly spelled **f**. **Dental** /þ/ was spelled **ð** (‘eth’) or **þ** (‘thorn’). *These two symbols were interchangeable.* The lack of a symbol for this sound in the roman alphabet was made up for by marking a **d** with a stroke through its upper extension, to give **ð** (hence its also being called ‘crossed *d*’). Another solution to representing this sound was to borrow the symbol **þ** from the runic alphabet. Yet another (which was abandoned early) was to write **th** for the sound in initial position.

The unvoiced allophone of **velar** /x/ was often spelled **h**, but also **g**; it did not occur initially, where /h/ is also spelt **h**. The voiced allophone of /x/ is normally spelled **g**. Both this last **g** and the **g** alternating with **h** for /x/ are not distinguished here by diacritical marking. The allophones are not easily distinguished in reading until their distribution in paradigms is observed (as they may be in listings of noun and verb inflections in subsequent chapters); a typical example is **dragan** : **drōh**, with [γ] and [x], respectively, ‘(to) draw : (I) drew.’

Unvoiced [s]		Voiced [z]	
/s-/		/-s/	
sæ	sea	wæs	(he) was
sæd	seed	ċeas	(he) chose
samod	together	græs	grass
swā	so, as	gærs	grass
slæp	sleep	hūs	house
smæl	thin, narrow	frēas	(it) froze
snotor	discerning		
/-ss- -s(s)/		/Vs(V)/	
wisse	(he) knew	égesa	awe, peril
læssa	less	égeslic	terrible
næss	headland	Témese	Thames
bliss	merriment	stānes	stone's
cyssan	(to) kiss	stānas	stones
/Vst/		/Vts/	
bist	(thou) beest	bletsian	(to) bless
wiste	(he) knew	blētsung	blessing,
mist	mist, dimness		favor
læst	least	Lazarus	Lazarus
west	west(-ward)		
westan	from the west		
/Vsp/		/Vps/	
æspe	aspen-tree	wæps	wasp
		hæpse	hasp
/Vsk/*		/Vks/	
fisc	fish	oxa	ox
disc	dish, bowl	tux	tusk
/sk-/*		/Vfs/	
scīr	shire	drīfst	thou drivest
scip	ship		
scop	poet, reciter	miscian	(to) mix

* /sk/ was [ʃ]: **scip** 'ship,' **wascan** '(to) wash,' **fersc** 'fresh'; see 2.4 B.

Unvoiced [f]		Voiced [v]	
/f-/		/VfV/	
for	for, on	stafas	staves
	account of	hōfas	hooves
fæder	father	wīfum	women (<i>infl.</i>)
fær	peril	ofer	over
fæt	vat, cup	ofen	oven
fela	many, much	ġeafon	(they) gave
firen	sin, outrage	eofor	(wild) boar
flān	arrow, dart	æfen	evening
flōt	deep water	hēafod	head
folc	nation	lifer	liver
foran	before	fefer	fever
fram	from; forth	dēofol	devil, demon
frēo	free, noble	hlāford	lord
full	full, entire	seofon	seven
fūl	foul	beafer	beaver
fnæst	blowing	hefġ	serious
fnæd	fringe	ufan	from above
flint	flint	Sæfern	Severn
flīes	fleece	/VfdV/	
		hæfde	(he) had
/-f(f)/		lifde	(he) lived
pyffan	(to) blow	/VlfV/	
		twelfe	twelve (<i>infl.</i>)
		delfan	(to) dig
		delfere	digger
/Vfs/		wulfas	wolves
drifst	thou drivest /	seolfer	silver
		/VrfV/	
/Vft/		hærfest	autumn
æfter	after	ceorfan	(to) carve
cræft	strength, cunning	hweorfan	(to) turn
scrift	penalty		
sceaft	origin		

Unvoiced [x]		Voiced [ɣ]			
/ǂxC/		/-x/	/ǂxV/		
uht	dusk	dāh, dāg	dough	dāgas	doughs
eahta	eight	drōg,	(he) drew	dragan	(to) draw
riht	right, rule	drōh		drōgon	(they) drew
niht	night	sāh	(it) sank	sīgan	(to) sink
wiht	creature	dweorg	dwarf		
miht,	might,	mearh	horse		
meaht	strength	scōh	shoe		
dohtor	daughter	þurh	through		
dryht	multitude	hēah	high		
dryhten	lord	nēah	near		
hleahtor	laughter	þēah	although		
nīehsta	next	holh	hole, hollow		
hyht	hope	lēah	lea, meadow		
		eolh	elk		
		pleoh	peril, risk		
		þrūh	trough		
		wōh	twisted, perverse		
				/ǂrxV/ and /ǂlxV/	
		beorg	hill	beorgas	hills
		bearg,	(I)	beorgan	(to) protect
		bearh	protected	burgon	(we) protected
/-xx-/		swealg,	(I)	swelgan	(to) swallow
pohha	bag	swealh	swallowed	swulgon	(we) swallowed
hliehhan	(to) laugh				