

Case

Compared to Modern German, the first thing to note about case in Old English is that nouns take inflectional endings beyond the genitive, plural, and dative plural forms still found in German. However, a second difference that is particularly pertinent to the poetry is that case is not as prone to be governed by a verb or preposition. Where inflected nouns occur without such governing elements, you will have to cycle through the functions of the cases and use context to decide which one applies. When dealing with accusative or dative/instrumental forms, your translation will almost certainly have to contain a preposition.

Here are the functions of the dative (and subsumed instrumental) to start you off.

Dative and Instrumental

These cases had largely merged by the time Old English was written down. Uses 3, 6, and some instances of 7 can still be identified as instrumental in origin, as accompanying pronominal forms *þȳ*, *þon*, *þȳs* make clear. The instrumental case also remains visible in PDE *why* (OE *hwȳ*).

1. **Interest:** Indicates, roughly speaking, *to whom* something is done or *from whom* something originates. With reference to its more typical functions, it is sometimes called the *dative of benefit or harm*. When used without a preposition, it is typically governed by a verb (of giving, saying, obeying, etc.) or an adjective.
 - Se **ðam** **werude** geaf mod and mihte.
 - Ða þæt inwitspell Abraham sægde **freondum sinum**.
 - He fremede swa and **freat** hyrde.
 - **Ðam** **cyninge** wæs gecyð þæt hi woldan hine besyrwan æt his life.
 - Ða wearð yrre god and **þam** **werode** wrað.
2. **Possessor:** Identifies *whose* something is; used in lieu of the genitive case.
 - **Him** wæs beorht wela.
 - **Him** wæs geomor sefa.
 - **Hire** wæs micel wund open on ðæm swyran.

3. **Instrumental (or Means)**: Identifies the object by means of which the action is carried out.
 - **Handum** brugdon hæleð of scæðum hringmæled sweord.
 - Cleopað þonne swa cearful **cealdan reorde**.
 - Her lið **sweorde** geheawen, beheafdod healdend ure.
 - Se palm þe drihten sylf sette **his agenum handum**.
 - Gif þin willa sie, wuldres aldor, þæt me wærlogan **wæpna ecgum, sweordum**, aswebban, ic beo sona gearu.
4. **Manner**: Describes *how* the action in the verb is carried out. Single nouns thus declined are often parsed as adverbs.
 - Þa wæs gast ofer holm boren **miclum spedum**.
 - Þegnas þrymfæste þeoden heredon, sægdon **lustum** lof.
5. **Respect**: Qualified “with respect to *something*”. The noun *something* is in the dative; if it is governed by an adjective, as it most commonly is, the adjective is in whatever case the syntax calls for (i.e. often *not* the dative; contrast Instrumental and Manner above). Alternatively, the noun may be governed by an adverb.
 - Ðonne bið gehefgad haswigfeðra, gomol, **gearum** frod.
 - Geseah ða on searwum sigeadig bil, eald sweord eotenisc, **ecgum** þyhtig.
6. **Accompaniment**: Identifies *in the presence of whom or what* the action is carried out.
 - Gewiton hie feower þa þeodcyningas **þrymme micle** secan [...] Sodomān.
7. **Time**: Expresses the time of occurrence or recurrence of the action. Cf. the accusative of time, which expresses duration.
 - Heorot eardode, sincfage sel **sweartum nihtum**.
 - **Þy geare** wæs senoð æt Heorotforde.
 - Barrabas wæs þær **þy siðe** on bendum.
 - Do him nu swa ðu dydest **dagum** Madiāne and Sisare.
 - Se wæs to casere gecoren [...] æfter Cristes acennednyse **twam hund gearum**.
 - **Hwilum** se wonna læg læhte wið þes laþan.

8. **Comparison:** Expresses the second item to which a first item is compared. Always governed by a verb or adjective of comparison.
 - He geanlicode his lichaman **heofonlican hlafe**.
 - Hie wæron **englum** gelice.
9. **Absolute:** Establishes the context leading up to the action. Usually a literal translation of a Latin ablative absolute, and thus frequently contains a past participle.
 - **Þam gedonum** andswarige eall chor.
 - **Him ondweardum** [heo] het secgan þæt swefn.
10. **Measure:** Specifies the degree of difference expressed by a comparative. Often translates as “the stronger”, “the more clearly”, etc.
 - Man bið **þy** strengra þe he bið micel on his lichoman.
 - Ic ðe mæg sum bispell secgan, þæt þu meht **þy** sweotolor ongitan.