

Rhythm



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Types of Metrical Position

Position	Notation	Expected Word Stress*	Examples
Lift	/	Primary	wordum ; here**
Half-lift	\	Secondary or tertiary	gūþ bill ; hā lignes
Dip/Drop	x	None	word um

* Secondary stress may be elevated to a lift, and tertiary stress demoted to a drop, as needed; see below.

** Two syllables may count as one metrical position by resolution; see below.

Syllable Count

Some dips may have any number of syllables, while others are limited to just the one:

Table 2: Unstressed syllable allowances by Sievers type

Type	Basic Pattern	Maximum Pattern	Polysyllabic Example
A	/x/x	xx/xxxxx/x	ræs de on ðone rō fan
B	x/x/	xxxxx/xx/	syþðan hē hire fol mum æt hrān
C	x//x	xxxxxx//x	þonne hē on þæt sinc stara ð
D1	//^x	xx/xxx/^x	hā þenes hand sporu
D2	//x\	xx/xxx/x\	wom wundor be bodum
E	/xx/	/xxx/	fæder æþelum on fōn

More on Sievers types in the upcoming video on that topic.

Three Word Classes

Particles: not normally stressed

- ▶ Finite verbs
- ▶ Personal pronouns
- ▶ Demonstrative pronouns
- ▶ Demonstrative adverbs
- ▶ (Conjunctions)

Proclitics: not normally stressed

- ▶ Prepositions
- ▶ Demonstratives
- ▶ Possessives
- ▶ Copulative conjunctions (*and, ne*)
- ▶ Prefixes

Stress words: always stressed

- ▶ Nouns
- ▶ Adjectives
- ▶ Nonfinite verbs
- ▶ Heavy adverbs (e.g. *singallīce*)
- ▶ Heavy pronouns (e.g. *gehwilc*)

NB parts of speech do not fit neatly into these word classes! See Momma, *The Composition of Old English Poetry*.

Poetic Word Order

- ▶ **Particles** are normally clustered at the start of the clause.
- ▶ **Proclitics** appear ahead of the stress words with which they are associated.

(1) [×]Wæs [×]se grimma gæst | Grendel hāten

Beowulf 102 (types B, A1)

(2) [×]Ne [×]nōm [×]hē in [×]þǣm wīcum

Beowulf 1612a (type A3)

These receive stress if displaced.

Displacement Stress: Proclitics

Proclitics take on stress if they appear *after* the stressed element with which they are associated.

(3) / \ × /
mancynne fram

Beowulf 110b (type E)

Displacement Stress: Particles

Particles take on stress if they appear *after* a stressed element *in the clause*.

(4) / × / ×
ellen fremedon

Beowulf 3b (type A1)

(The clause is “hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon”; as in German, the fact that this is a subclause forces the finite verb to the end.)

However, metricists also concede stress in particle position if the verb alliterates:

(5) / × × × / × | × × × / / ×
Wunað hē on wiste. | Nō hine wiht dweleð

Beowulf 1735 (types A, C)

Secondary Stress

The second element of a nominal compound normally receives secondary stress, requiring it to be accommodated in type A2, D, or E as a half-lift:

(6) / × / \ ×
māre mearc**st**apa *Beowulf* 103a (type D1)

(7) / \ × /
heal**æ**rna mǣst *Beowulf* 78a (type E)

Secondary stress is bumped up to primary if the metre requires it as the second lift:

(8) / × / ×
þēodg**estr**ēonum *Beowulf* 44a (type A1)

(9) / / \ ×
þēod**cy**ninga *Beowulf* 2a (type D1)

More on the Syllable

Syllabification

- ▶ A single consonant between two vowels is assigned to the following syllable.
 - ▶ gu·ma, sǣ·we, etc.
- ▶ Two consonants (or a geminate) are evenly distributed between the preceding and following syllable.
 - ▶ wor·dum, man·na, etc.

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Length

A short syllable ends in a short vowel; anything else is long.

Resolution

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A resolved sequence is indicated in scansion by a bow.

(14) $\overset{/}{\text{dug}}\overset{\times}{\text{u}}\overset{\times}{\text{ðe}} \text{ ond } \overset{/}{\text{iog}}\overset{\times}{\text{o}}\text{þe}$

Beowulf 1674a (type A1)

(15) $\overset{/}{\text{her}}\overset{\backslash}{\text{e}}\overset{/}{\text{sp}}\overset{\times}{\text{e}}\overset{\backslash}{\text{d}} \text{ gýf} \overset{/}{\text{en}}$

Beowulf 64b (type A2)

(16) $\overset{/}{\text{sund}}\overset{\backslash}{\text{w}}\overset{/}{\text{u}}\overset{\times}{\text{d}} \text{ sō} \overset{/}{\text{hte}}$

Beowulf 208a (type A2)

When Is Resolution Suspended?

- ▶ If it would yield fewer than four metrical syllables:

(17) / / \ ×
wīs wordcwida

Beowulf 1845a (type D1; see Bliss §§36, 39 for more examples)

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(17) / / \ ×
wīs wordcwida *Beowulf* 1845a (type D1; see Bliss §§36, 39 for more examples)

- ▶ If the first syllable *and* the preceding syllable are under primary stress (types C and D):

(18) × × / / ×
þonne wīg cume *Beowulf* 23b (type C)

Contraction

Table 3: Selection of contracted Old English verbs

Old English	Proto-English
þēon I “thrive”	*tīhan
flēon II “flee”	*fleuhan
sēon V “see”	*sehan
slēan VI “strike”	*slahan
fōn VII “receive”	*fōhan

(21) / \ × /
nīðwundor **sēon**

Beowulf 1365b (type E)

(22) / × / ^ ×
man ge**þēon**

Beowulf 25b (type A1)

Parasiting

Table 4: Some instances of epenthesis in Old English

Earlier Form	Later Form
māþm	māþpum
wundr	wundor
frōfr	frōfor
wāpn	wāpen
wintr	winter

Parasiting

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māþm	māþpum
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(23) $\text{sin}^{\prime} \text{mā}^{\backslash} \text{þ}^{\backslash} \text{ō}^{\prime} \text{um}^{\times} \text{sēlra}$

Beowulf 2193a (type A2)

Syncope

Table 5: Declension of *beafod* (n)

Case	Singular	Plural
Nom	hēafod	hēafdu
Acc	hēafod	hēafdu
Gen	hēafdes	hēafda
Dat	hēafde	hēafdum

Syncope

Table 5: Declension of *heafod* (n)

Case	Singular	Plural
Nom	hēafod	hēafdu
Acc	hēafod	hēafdu
Gen	hēafdes	hēafda
Dat	hēafde	hēafdum

(24) [×] cwæð þæt se ælmiht[×]īga[×] [/] [/] [×]

Beowulf 92a (type C)

(25) [×] meltan mid þām mōdi[×]gan[×] [/] [/] [×]

Beowulf 3011a (type A1)

Emulating Old English Metre 1/2

No greater host
of folk hath fallen before this day
in this island ever by the edge of swords
in battle slaughtered, as books tell us
and ancient authors, since from the east hither
Saxon and English from the sea landed,
over the broad billows Britain assailing,
the Welsh smiting on war's anvil,
glory seeking great men of old,
in this land winning a lasting home.

Tolkien, "Old English Verse" 224–225

Emulating Old English Metre 2/2

If Lancelot hath loyal purpose
let him prove repentance, his pride foregoing,
uncalled coming when his king needeth!
But fainer with fewer faithful-hearted
would I dare danger, than with doubtful swords
and tarnished shields of truant lieges
our muster swell. Why more need we?

Tolkien, “The Fall of Arthur” lines 195–201

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