

## Sample text (Prologue from Beowulf)

### HPÆT PE GARDE

na urear dagum. þeod cýninga  
hým se frumon huða æþelingas ellen  
fremedon. oft scyld scefing sceapena  
þreatum monegū mægþum meodo setla  
ofteah egsode eorl syððan ærest pearð  
fea sceaft funden he þæs frofre gebad  
peox under polcnum peorð myndum þah  
oð þ him æghwylc þara ymb sittendra  
ofer hron rade hyran scolde gomban  
gyldan.

### HPÆT PE GARDE

na ingear dagum. þeod cyninga  
þrym ge frumon Huða æþelingas ellen  
fremedon. oft scyld scefing sceapena  
þreatum monegū mægþum meodo setla  
ofteah egsode eorl syððan ærest pearð  
fea sceaft funden he þæs frofre gebad  
peox under polcnum peorð myndum þah  
oð þæt him æghwylc þara ymb sittendra  
ofer hron rade hyran scolde gomban  
gyldan

**Note:** this text is based on an original manuscript of Beowulf. The spacing between the words and letters may differ from other versions of the text. It is shown in an Old English font on the left (Beowulf) and a modern font on the right.

### Modern English version

LO, praise of the prowess of people-kings  
of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped,  
we have heard, and what honor the athelings won!  
Oft Scyld the Scefing from squadroned foes,  
from many a tribe, the mead-bench tore,  
awing the earls. Since erst he lay  
friendless, a foundling, fate repaid him:  
for he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throve,  
till before him the folk, both far and near,  
who house by the whale-path, heard his mandate,  
gave him gifts:

# The Canterbury Tales: General Prologue

BY GEOFFREY CHAUCER

*Here bygynneth the Book of the tales of Caunterbury*

Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote,  
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,  
And bathed every veyne in swich licour  
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;  
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth  
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth  
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne  
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,  
And smale foweles maken melodye,  
That slepen al the nyght with open ye,  
So priketh hem Nature in hir corages,  
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,  
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,  
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;  
And specially, from every shires ende  
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,  
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,  
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

English is weird. It can be understood through tough, thorough, thought though.

A complete correct English sentence.

**Buffalo Buffalo buffalo buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo.**

The wind was rough along the lough as the ploughman fought through the slough and snow, and though he hiccoughed and he coughed, he thought only of his work, determined to be thorough.

The New Yorker, July 25, 1994 P. 82

By Jack Winter, July 17, 1994

It had been a rough day, so when I walked into the party I was very chalcant, despite my efforts to appear grunted and consolate. I was furling my wieldy umbrella for the coat check when I saw her standing alone in a corner. She was a descript person, a woman in a state of total array. Her hair was kempt, her clothing shevelled, and she moved in a gainly way. I wanted desperately to meet her, but I knew I'd have to make bones about it, since I was travelling cognito. Beknownst to me, the hostess, whom I could see both hide and hair of, was very proper, so it would be skin off my nose if anything bad happened. And even though I had only swerving loyalty to her, my manners couldn't be peccable. Only toward and heard-of behavior would do. Fortunately, the embarrassment that my maculate appearance might cause was evitable. There were two ways about it, but the chances that someone as flappable as I would be ept enough to become persona grata or sung hero were slim. I was, after all, something to sneeze at, someone you could easily hold a candle to, someone who usually aroused bridled passion. So I decided not to rush it. But then, all at once, for some apparent reason, she looked in my direction and smiled in a way that I could make heads or tails of. So, after a terminable delay, I acted with mitigated gall and made my way through the ruly crowd with strong givings. Nevertheless, since this was all new hat to me and I had no time to prepare a promptu speech, I was petuous. She responded well, and I was mayed that she considered me a savory char- acter who was up to some good. She told me who she was. "What a perfect nomer," I said, advertently. The conversation became more and more choate, and we spoke at length to much avail. But I was defatigable, so I had to leave at a godly hour. I asked if she wanted to come with me. To my delight, she was committal. We left the party together and have been together ever since. I have given her my love, and she has requited it.

"O-U-G-H"

I'm taught p-l-o-u-g-h  
Shall be prononcé "plow."  
"Zat's easy w'en you know," I say,  
"Mon Anglais, I'll get through!"

My teacher say zat in zat case,  
O-u-g-h is "oo."  
And zen I laugh and say to him,  
"Zees Anglais make me cough."

He say, "Not 'coo,' but in zat word,  
O-u-g-h is 'off!'"  
Oh, Sacre bleu! Such varied sounds  
Of words makes me hiccough!

He say, "Again mon frien' ees wrong;  
O-u-g-h is 'up'  
In hiccough." Zen I cry, "No more,  
You make my t'roat feel rough."

"Non, non!" he cry, "you are not right;  
O-u-g-h is 'uff!'"  
I say, "I try to spik your words,  
I cannot spik zem though."

"In time you'll learn, but now you're wrong!  
O-u-g-h is 'owe!'"  
"I'll try no more, I s'all go mad,  
I'll drown me in ze lough!"

"But ere you drown yourself," said he,  
"O-u-g-h is 'ock!'"  
He taught no more, I held him fast,  
And killed him wiz a rough!

Charles Battell Loomis

Poems showing the absurdities of English spelling.

Poems about spelling are quoted on many websites. There are lots of others of course — so let us

hear of them from you — [enquiries@spellingsociety.org](mailto:enquiries@spellingsociety.org)

The classic spelling poem is The Chaos by Gerard Nolst Trenité, researched and published in full

by SSS in Journal 17 Item 6. It can be seen as a stand-alone pdf in Miscellaneous.

### The Chaos

I take it you already know  
Of tough and bough and cough and dough?  
Others may stumble, but not you,  
On hiccough, thorough, lough and through?  
Well done! And now you wish, perhaps,  
To learn of less familiar traps?  
Beware of heard, a dreadful word  
That looks like beard and sounds like bird,  
And dead: it's said like bed, not bead—  
For goodness sake don't call it deed!  
Watch out for meat and great and threat  
(They rhyme with suite and straight and debt).  
A moth is not a moth in mother,  
Nor both in bother, broth in brother,  
And here is not a match for there  
Nor dear and fear for bear and pear,  
And then there's dose and rose and lose —  
Just look them up - and goose and choose,  
And cork and work and card and ward,  
And font and front and word and sword,  
And do and go and thwart and cart —  
Come, come, I've hardly made a start!  
A dreadful language? Man alive!  
I'd mastered it when I was five!

Quoted by Vivian Cook and Melvin Bragg 2004, by Richard Krogh, in D Bolinger & D A Sears,

Aspects of Language, 1981, and in Spelling Progress Bulletin March 1961, Attributed to T S

Watt, 1954. Brush up on your English with Hints on Pronunciation for visiting Foreigners, from the Manchester Guardian.

Our Strange Lingo

When the English tongue we speak.  
Why is break not rhymed with freak?  
Will you tell me why it's true  
We say sew but likewise few?  
And the maker of the verse,  
Cannot rhyme his horse with worse?  
Beard is not the same as heard  
Cord is different from word.  
Cow is cow but low is low  
Shoe is never rhymed with foe.  
Think of hose, dose, and lose  
And think of goose and yet with choose  
Think of comb, tomb and bomb,  
Doll and roll or home and some.  
Since pay is rhymed with say  
Why not paid with said I pray?  
Think of blood, food and good.  
Mould is not pronounced like could.  
Wherefore done, but gone and lone -  
Is there any reason known?  
To sum up all, it seems to me  
Sound and letters don't agree.

This full version, in SSS Pyoneer September 1917 was taken from 'Ashore and Afloat'. A short version in the 1930 SSS pamphlet essay, "English as a World Language by Harold Cox, Former Editor Edinburgh Review, repeated in Bulletin Winter 1966, Item 4, says this poem was written by Lord Cromer and published in the Spectator of August 9th, 1902

1. Don't use no double-negatives.
2. Just between You and i, case is important, too.
3. Try to not ever split infinitives.
4. Its' important to use your apostrophe's correctly.
5. Corect spelling is esential.
6. Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
7. Don't be redundand; don't use more words than needed; it's highly superfluous.
8. Never use a longish word when a diminutive one will do.
9. Exaggeration is a trillion times worse than understatement.
10. Who needs rhetorical questions?
11. Unqualified superlatives are the worst of all.
12. If you reread your work, you will find on rereading that a great deal of repetition can be avoided by rereading and editing.
13. A writer must not shift your point of view.
- Fourteen: Be consistent!
16. And don't start a sentence with a conjunction.
17. Join-clauses good, like a conjunction should.
18. Don't overuse exclamation marks!!!
19. Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences, as of ten or more words, to their antecedents.
20. Make each pronoun agree with their antecedent.
21. Hyphenate between syllables and avoid unn-ecessary hyphens.
22. Write all adverbial forms correct.
23. Don't use contractions in formal writing.
24. Writers should never generalize.
25. Be more or less specific.
26. If any word is improper at the end of a sentence, a linking verb is.
27. Avoid trendy locutions that sound flaky.
28. Never, ever use repetitive redundancies.
29. Also, avoid awkward or affected alliteration. Always.
30. Everyone should be careful to use a singular pronoun with singular nouns in their writing.
31. If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times, resist hyperbole.
33. Don't string too many prepositional phrases together unless you are walking through the valley of the shadow of death.
35. If a dependent clause precedes an independent clause put a comma after the dependent clause.
36. One will not have needed the future perfect in one's entire life.
38. If this were subjunctive, I'm in the wrong mood.
39. Always pick on the correct idiom.
40. "Avoid overuse of 'quotation 'marks.'"
41. The passive voice should never be used.
42. Avoid run-on sentences they are hard to read.
43. Use the semicolon properly, always use it where it is appropriate; and never where it isn't.
44. Do not put statements in the negative form.
45. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
46. No sentence fragments.
47. Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.
48. Avoid commas, that are not necessary.
49. Writing carefully, dangling participles must be avoided.
50. Steer clear of incorrect forms of verbs that have snuck in the language.
51. Take the bull by the hand and avoid mixed metaphors.
52. The adverb always follows the verb.
53. Surly grammarians insist that all words ending in "ly" are adverbs.
54. It is not resultful to transform one part of speech into another by prefixing, suffixing, or other alterings.
55. Last, but not least, avoid cliché's like the plague. They're old hat.
56. Comparisons are as bad as clichés.