

Adjectives Overview

Old English adjectives have inflectional endings based on their case, number, gender, and strength.

Adjectives can be either **strong** or **weak**, and the strength of an adjective depends on whether the adjective is associated with a demonstrative pronoun or possessive adjective.

Examine 'god' in these two sentences: '*þæt wæs god cyning* - *That was a good king*' and '*se goda cyning onfeng him* - *the good king received him*'.

Weak Adjectives

Weak adjectives appear in a sentence when linked to a noun with a demonstrative pronoun or possessive pronoun. For example, in the sentence '*se goda cyning onfeng him* - *the good king received him*', the adjective '*goda*' is modifying '*cyning*' which is modified by the demonstrative '*se*'. This means '*god*' is weak.

<u>Se</u>	<u>goda</u>	<u>cyning</u>	<u>onfeng</u>	<u>him</u>
Demonstrative Pronoun	Weak Adjective	Subject Noun	Verb	Object Pronoun

Most weak adjective endings are '**an**', but the masculine nominative singular can be recognised by the suffix '**a**', the feminine and neuter nominative and the neuter accusative end in '**e**', the genitive plural ends in '**ra**' or '**ena**', and the dative plural ends in '**um**'.

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Nominative	goda	gode	gode	godan
Accusative	godan	gode	godan	godan
Genitive	godan	godan	godan	godra/godena
Dative	godan	godan	godan	godum

Strong Adjectives

Strong adjectives are linked to nouns without any demonstrative or possessive pronoun. For example, in the sentence '*þæt wæs god cyning* - *That was a good king*', even though the sentence has the demonstrative '*þæt*', '*god*' is modifying '*cyning*', which is not modified by a demonstrative. This means that '*god*' is strong.

<u>þæt</u>	<u>wæs</u>	<u>god</u>	<u>cyning</u>
Demonstrative Pronoun	Verb	Strong Adjective	Object Noun

Strong adjectives are considered grammatically strong as they have more inflectional endings than weak nouns. If you have difficulty remembering the endings, consider the endings you learned for strong nouns and demonstratives. For example, compare the strong masculine accusative demonstrative '*þone*' and the masculine accusative adjective ending '*ne*', or the feminine genitive and dative demonstrative '*þære*' and the feminine genitive and dative demonstrative '*re*', or the plural dative noun ending '*um*' which is shared with the masculine and neuter singular adjective endings.

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Nominative	god	god	god	gode/godu/goda
Accusative	godne	god	gode	gode/godu/goda
Genitive	godes	godes	godre	godra
Dative	godum	godum	godre	godum

Comparatives and Superlatives

Comparatives and Superlatives remain similar to modern English with comparatives containing an 'r' after the stem but before the suffix, and superlatives gaining the suffix 'ost'. For example, '*heardra - harder*' and '*heardost - hardest*'.

Most comparatives and superlatives follow this regular pattern. However, some undergo a vowel change in the stem called '*i-mutation*' with 'ea' becoming 'ie', 'eo' becoming 'i', and 'a' becoming 'e'.

Nominative	Comparative	Superlative
halig	hailgra	haligost
wise	wisra	wisost
heard	heardra	heardost
æðele	æðelra	æðelost
niwe	niwra	niwost
heah	hiera	hiebst
eald	ieldra	ieldest
geong	gingra	gingest
lang	lengra	lengest
strang	strengra	strengest

There are also four irregular adjectives: '*god*', '*micel*', '*lytel*' and '*yfel*'.

Nominative	Comparative	Superlative
god	betera	betest
lytel	læssa	læst
micel	mara	mæst
yfel	wiersa	wierst

Comparatives always decline weak, while superlatives decline weak or strong depending on whether or not they are associated with a demonstrative or possessive pronoun. Examine the sentence, *'he sende to Egipta wisoste witan - he sent for Egypt's wisest magician'*.

He	sende	to	Egipta	wisoste	witan
Subject Pronoun	Verb	Preposition	Possessive Noun	Superlative Adjective	Direct Object

Disyllabic Adjectives

Just like nouns, adjectives with two syllables will often lose the unstressed vowel of the second syllable when it gains a suffix. This is more likely to happen if the suffix begins with a vowel. So the weak plural nominative of halig is almost always written halgan. You will also see this with hefig - heavy and yfel - evil. Note, that though 'hefig' loses its 'i', the 'g' stays soft like a modern 'y'.

	halig - holy		hefig - heavy		yfel - evil	
	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong
Nominative	halga	halig	hefga	hefig	yfla	yfel
Accusative	halgan	haligne	hefgan	hefigne	yflan	yfelne
Genitive	halgan	halges	hefgan	hefges	yflan	yflēs
Dative	halgan	halgum	hefgan	hefgum	yflan	yflum

Adjectives Ending in a Vowel or H

Monosyllabic words ending in a vowel or 'h' drop their vowel/h when they gain a suffix. The nominative plural of words like 'heah - high' and 'hnah - lowly' can be written 'hean' and 'hnan', but it is more common for 'h' to be replaced by a soft 'g' making 'heagan' and 'hnagan'.

	heah - high		hnah - low		swete - sweet	
	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong
Nominative	heaga	heah	hnaga	hnah	swete	swete
Accusative	heagan	heagne	hnagan	hnagne	swetan	swetne
Genitive	heagan	heages	hnagan	hnages	swetan	swetes
Dative	heagan	heagum	hnagan	hnagum	swetan	swetum

Adjective Glossary

Æðele - Noble

Denisc - Danish

Eald - Old

Eapmod - Humble

Geong - Young

God - Good

Halig - Holy

Hefig - Heavy

Heah - High

Heard - Hard

Hnah - Lowly

Lang - Long

Ligen - Flaming/Fiery

Lytel - Little

Manig - Many

Micel - Much/Big

Milde - Mild

Niw - New

Strang - Strange

Swete - Sweet

Wis - Wise

Yfel - Bad/Evil