

Adverbs, Conjunctions, and Prepositions Overview

Adverbs, conjunctions, and prepositions are the small words that enhance, join, and show the relationship between nouns, adjectives and verbs in a sentence. Unlike nouns and adjectives, they are uninflected for case, gender, or number.

Adverbs

Adverbs are words that describe verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs in more detail. For example, in the sentence, '*Sancta Maria forhtode ond eaðmodlice ondsvarode him* - *Saint Mary was afraid and humbly answered him*', the adverb '*eaðmodlice*' modifies the verb '*ondsvarode*'.

Many adverbs are formed from other nouns and adjectives by adding an '**e**' like '*hearde* - *severely*', '**lice**' like '*leoflice* - *lovely*' or '**unga**' like '*eallunga* - *entirely*', but some adverbs are standalone and just need to be memorized. Adverbs also have comparative and superlative forms, which are made by dropping the final vowel in the adverb and adding '**or**' or '**ost**'.

Base Form	Comparative	Superlative
hearde	heardor	heardost
soþe	sopor	sopost
leoflice	leoflicor	leoflicost
eadmodlice	eadmodlicor	eadmodlicost

Conjunction

Conjunctions are words that join other words, phrases or clauses together. Some are short and easy to recognise, for example, '*ond - and*', '*ac - but*', or '*swa þæt - so that*'. However, conjunctions also come in pairs that relate sentence elements to each other. For example, in the sentence, '*Swa swa lim gefæsnað fel to sumum brede, swa getigð seo conivnctio þa word togædere - Just as lime fastens skin to a board, so the conjunction ties words together*', the first conjunction '*swa swa - just as*' and the second conjunction '*swa - so*', work together to relate the first clause to the second.

Old English	Modern English	Old English	Modern English
ac	but	ond	and
ne	nor	oppe	or
for þæm þe	because	swa þæt	so that
þeah	although	eac	also

Prepositions

Prepositions like 'in', 'on', 'æfter', and 'mid' help establish relationships in time, space, and among people and things. For example, in the sentence, '*Fram þisum men ic underfeng feoh - From this man I took money*', the relationship between the speaker, the man, and the money is established by the word '*fram*'.

In Old English, most prepositions are followed by the dative case.

Only Dative			
Old English	Modern English	Old English	Modern English
æfter	after	eac	besides/including
ær	before	for	for/because of
æt	to/by way of	fram	from/by
be	by/about	mid	with
beæftan	behind/after	of	of/from
beforan	before/ in front of	ongean	against/towards
betweox	between/ among	to	to
butan	excluding	wip	against

There are a few prepositions which change meaning depending on whether they are followed by a word in the accusative or dative. A preposition usually precedes the accusative if the preposition itself specifically relates to motion or time.

Dative or Accusative		
Old English	Dative English	Accusative English
binnan	in/within	into
bufan	above/upon	over(movement)
in/innan	in	into
ofer	above/over	over(movement)
on	on/in	onto/into
under	under/beneath	under(movement)

There are four prepositions which only precede the accusative case. These are '*geond - through*', '*oð - until*', '*þurh - through*' and '*ymb - surrounding/about*'.

Dative or Accusative	
Old English	Modern English
geond	through
oð	until

þurh

through

ymb

surrounding/about

Some prepositions could be considered false friends, as they look like one word but represent another. For example, the word '*æt*' means 'to' and the word '*wip*' means against. It is common to see '*wip*' used at the beginning of medical instructions in leechbooks to indicate what the recipe is used for, in which case it might be more correct to translate it as 'for'. For example, '*wip aslepnum lic - for a numb body*' or '*wip nædran flite - for a snake bite*'.