Cases and Strong Masculine Nouns Overview

Old English is an **inflected language** and so uses a **case system** similar to that of modern Icelandic, Russian or German. This means the ending of nouns, adjectives and demonstratives change to indicate the grammatical function of the word. For example, whether it is the subject, the direct object, indirect object, or a possessive.

There are four main Old English cases: **The Nominative Case** indicates the subject of the sentence; **The Accusative Case** indicates the direct object of a sentence; **The Genitive Case** indicates possession; **The Dative Case** indicates the indirect object of a sentence.

Nominative and Accusative

The **nominative** is used for the *subject* of a sentence. A subject is the person, place, thing, or idea that is doing or being something. The **accusative** is used for a *direct object*, that is the person or thing which is the direct recipient of the verb. A verb which is directly acting on an object is known as a *transitive verb*.

In Old English, nouns in the **nominative** and **accusative** cases are often declined in the same way. The best way of telling the singular nominative and accusative nouns apart — if it isn't clear from context — is by using checking for a demonstrative: **se** for the nominative and **þone** for the accusative. For example, examine the below sentence. Though the word order does not match the word order of the above sentence, and there are no identifiable endings, you can see which is the subject and the direct object through examining the demonstratives.

The plural versions of the nominative and accusative are always the same, both in how they decline and in the demonstratives they use.

Nominative and Accusative Strong Masculine Nouns				
	Singular	**Plural**	**Singular Suffix**	**Plural Suffix**
Nominative	Se cyning	þa cyningas	-	-as
Accusative	þone cyning	þa cyningas	-	-as

Genitive

The **genitive** is the case of possession and can be used both subjectively — *the king's thane* — and objectively — *fear of the Lord*.

An easy way to tell if something should be in the genitive is to see if you can place 'of' in the sentence — *king of king's; one of the thanes; the children of the king; a child of five years*.

Genitive Strong Masculine Nouns				
	Singular	**Plural**	**Singular Suffix**	**Plural Suffix**
Genitive	þæs cyninges	þara cyninga	-es	-a

Dative

The **dative** is the case of the *indirect object*. This is a noun which is not the direct recipient of an action but is still affected by the verb.

In the above sentence, the *rings* are what is being directly acted upon, as they are what is being given. However, they are being given to the thane. So he is still being acted upon by the verb, but indirectly. As a result, *beag* is in the accusative and *þegen* is in the dative. An easy way to figure out if something is in the dative is to check for the distinctive **um** ending, the demonstrative **þæm**, or to check for a preposition such as 'to' or 'fram'.

	Dative Strong Masculine Nouns			
	Singular	**Plural**	**Singular Suffix**	**Plural Suffix**
Dative	þæm cyninge	þæm cyningum	-e	-um

It is important to understand how cases work, and to be able to identify which case a word is in, so as to understand the meaning of a sentence. While Old English often follows the *subject verb object* format of modern English, there are some common differences in word order which should be watched out for. For example, **possessives** often come after the noun it modifies, especially in direct address:

Old English: *Fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum*
Direct trans: *Father ours you who are in heaven*
Modern Eng: *Our Father who art in heaven*

Always remember that Old English has **case harmony**, so even if a word comes slightly earlier or later in a sentence than you might expect, it can generally be paired to the correct noun by comparing the case endings.

Glossary of Terms

Nouns

Cyning - King

Ðegen - Thane

Biscop - Bishop

Stan - Stone

Here - Army

Tun - Town

Beorg - Mountain

Beag - Ring

Æþeling - Prince

Wiking - Viking

Verbs

Feran - To Go
(Weak Class 1)

Gretan - To Greet
(Weak Class 1)

Slean - To Slay
(Strong Class 6)

Giefan - To Give
(Strong Class 5)

Cuman - To Come
(Strong Class 4)

Beon- To Be
(Irregular)