

Fresher/Sophister Module Description Template 2025-26

Full Name: Origins of English: Introduction to English Language and Literature before 1100

Short Name: Origins of English

Lecturer Name(s) and Email Address(es): Alice Jorgensen jorgena@tcd.ie and Mark Faulkner mark.faulkner@tcd.ie

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught MT/HT: HT

Year JF/SF/JS/SS: JF

Module Content:

This module offers an introduction to the earliest literature in English and the language in which it was written. Old English is the form of English used between the fifth and eleventh centuries alongside languages like Celtic, Old Norse and Latin. It is one of the earliest European vernaculars to have a substantial body of written literature. In the module, we will begin by reading some texts in translation and introducing basic aspects of the grammar of the language. After this, students will be supported to start reading texts in the original with the help of glossaries and other aids. At the end of the module we will read extracts from the most famous poem in Old English, *Beowulf*.

Thematically, we'll be discussing whether it makes sense to place the origins of the English people, English culture or English literary tradition in the Old English period. What stories did English-speakers in this period tell about their origins and how did they contrast themselves with other groups? How and why did people start writing Old English poetry and prose? And what uses have recent writers made of this ancient body of literature?

Hours

- One in-person lecture per week
- One recorded lecture per week, provided in Blackboard
- Two tutorials per week (weeks 2-11 inclusive)

Note that this pattern differs from other modules.

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this module, students should be able to

- translate Old English texts with the help of a glossary and other aids
- deploy a basic knowledge of Old English grammar
- relate selected Old English texts to their cultural and historical contexts
- examine ideas of identity and origins relating to English pre-1100 and its legacy
- analyse and evaluate translations of Old English texts

Learning Aims:

- lay the foundations for reading Old English texts in the original
- enable students to evaluate published translations
- provide some context and background for Old English literature
- think about the place of Old English and its literature within English Studies
- introduce some key texts, including *Beowulf*

Assessment Details:

30% midterm assignment: short tasks based on an assigned passage (wordcount TBC). Due beginning week 8

70% creative translation with commentary OR analysis of a published translation (1500 to 2000 words). Due at standard end-of-term essay deadline (deadline TBC)

Preliminary Reading List:

Textbook:

Peter S. Baker, *Introduction to Old English*, 3rd edn (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012)
[students will be expected to purchase this book]

Additional texts and translations:

Elaine Treharne (ed.), *Old and Middle English c. 890-c. 1450*, 3rd edn (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012)

George Jack (ed.), *Beowulf: A Student Edition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994)

Preliminary secondary reading:

Hugh Magennis, *The Cambridge Introduction to Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

Barbara Yorke, *The Anglo-Saxons* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999)

Please note:

- Curricular information is subject to change.
- Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.