

### Fresher/Sophister Module Description Template 2026-27

**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](mailto:jorgena@tcd.ie) and Mark Faulkner [mark.faulkner@tcd.ie](mailto: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 language used in lowland Britain between the fifth and eleventh century alongside Celtic languages, 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, the module interrogates ideas of linguistic, national, cultural and, especially, literary origins. In the earlier part of the term, the texts are chosen to explore the stories the early English told about their past and their relationships to the peoples around them. We then think further about the emergence of literature in English, both poetry and prose. While the oldest written texts in English come from the Old English period, they are often not 'original'; rather, they are translated from Latin, or are retellings of earlier stories that circulated orally. Old English texts have in turn been translated and adapted into modern English, sometimes in highly creative ways. The second half of the term thus has a focus on translation and adaptation.

#### **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 English 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
- 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:**

25% grammar tests

75% creative translation with commentary OR analysis of a published translation (1500 to 2000 words)

**Preliminary Reading List:**

Textbook:

Peter S. Baker, *Introduction to Old English*, 3<sup>rd</sup> 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*, 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

