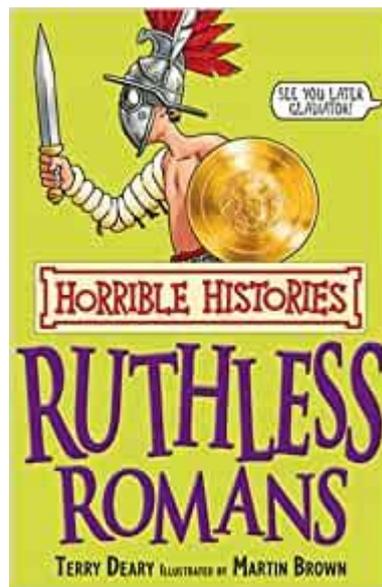


# English Language

# Editorial Writing



## Task

It's a real skill, taking dry, dull information and turning it into something lively and interesting. It's a skill you have to develop on the A Level English Language course.

Read, annotate and synthesise the information given on early English then using the information, write an introductory chapter for the newest addition to the 'Horrible Histories' collection: '*Loony Language: A guide to Early English*'. You'll need to look at an example of Horrible Histories and analyse the style to make your chapter authentic. Visit your local library or raid your kid sister/brother's bookshelf.

✓ Opening chapter (500-750words)

## The Indo-European languages

The language family to which English belongs is sometimes known as the Indo-European group, a description which indicates the geographical spread of the languages in this family over a long historical period.

One convenient way to represent the long-term change as new languages arise out of prototype or "parent" languages is to use a diagram like a family tree or genealogy. This kind of diagram is helpful so long as you are aware of its limitations. For example, it might lead you to suppose that new languages appear in a definite way, to which we can assign a date (as with the birth of a child). But this is never the case (except with invented languages, like Klingon). Language change does not occur at the same rate in all places. Thus the language of the 14th century author of Pearl and Gawain and the Green Knight has many features we find in Old English, while Chaucer, writing at more or less the same time, uses a variety (or varieties) of written English which are far closer to the forms we use today. This may be associated with a north-south divide, though we know too little to assert this with any great confidence.

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## The early history of English

The period before English began

The original inhabitants of the British Isles did not speak English, but Celtic languages. Modern forms include Welsh, Scots and Manx Gaelic, Erse (Irish) and Breton, which are living languages, as well as dead languages like Cornish. (Simeon Potter, in *Our Language*, states [p. 18] that the last speakers of Manx died around 1960, their cottages being made into a museum. But I am assured by a resident of the island that there are now many living speakers of Manx. If Potter's statement is correct, then there has been a revival of the language in the last 40 years.)

Old English

English comes from the language of the Germanic tribes who arrived in England in the 5th and 6th centuries AD. These were Jutes, Saxons and Angles. They organized themselves into kingdoms (such as the West Saxons, South Saxons, East Saxons and East Angles). Once they settled in England, their language developed separately from the various forms found in what is now Germany. The Angles were the Engla, the country Englalond and their tongue Englisc. The form of English spoken at this time is Old English (sometimes known as Anglo-Saxon).

The Angles, Saxons and Jutes did not at first write their languages apart from perhaps making marks on objects to serve as lucky charms or to show ownership (for this they would use the Germanic characters known as runes). The first extended written English texts were made by missionary priests, who spoke and wrote Latin. They adapted the Roman alphabet, adding the letters æ (known as "ash") ð ("eth") and þ ("thorn") — though these letters are not used in English today (æ corresponds to the vowel in ash; ð and þ are used interchangeably for both consonants represented by "th", as in "cloth" or "clothe"). Their spelling approximated to that used for similar sounds in Latin, but was not standardized. The priests' purpose in writing was to produce English texts for a handful of educated and literate men to read aloud to the illiterate and largely pagan people whom they sought to bring into the church.

About half of the common vocabulary of Modern English comes from Old English, especially names of everyday objects and basic processes. Forms of words varied according to syntax: inflection, case endings, declensions and grammatical gender are all found (as in modern German). Nearly all of these have disappeared from the language as spoken today.

Old English elements can often be found preserved in place names. These may be evidence of early settlement by Angle, Saxon or Jute - but not always so, as they are commonly used in later times to name new settlements. Familiar Old English elements include: -bury, -church, -end, -ey, -field, -ford/forth, -ham, -hill, -ing, -ingham, -ingley, -ington, -land, -ley, -mere, -mill, -stone, -sty, -ton, -wald/-wold/-wood, -wick

#### Scandinavian influences

At the end of the 8th century the first Viking raiders came to Britain. In the 9th century, their raids became more frequent, culminating in invasion, conquest and the establishment of the Danelaw: this was the area of England (most of it) subject to Viking rule, with its capital at York. Ordinary people were not generally harmed once the Vikings were settled in the country. In 937 the West Saxon royal house under Aethelstan defeated the Vikings at Brunanburh, and within a few years, the Danelaw came to an end. But there were still Viking rulers who claimed the throne (Sweyn and Cnut in the 11th century). On the death of the Saxon king of all England, Edward the Confessor, one of his nobles, Harold Godwinson (son of Godwin, Earl of Wessex) seized power. At Stamford Bridge (in what is now East Yorkshire) in 1066 he defeated another Harold, a Norwegian invader, but fell at Hastings to William. William was also a Viking; but the Normans had long been settled in France and their language was French.

The Scandinavian (Viking) invaders of the 8th century and beyond were quite closely related to the original Germanic settlers of England, as was their language. The Viking influence on our language lies in two things.

- Negatively, speakers of Norse languages helped erode the inflexional endings of Old English.
- Positively, they made additions to the English lexicon.

We can consider these under a number of clear headings:

Place names and landscape features | Street names | Family names | Words preserved in dialects | Cognate pairs | Words with shared origins | Legal or governmental terms | Parts of the body and animal names | adjectives | verbs | prepositional phrases

#### Place names and landscape features

- -by ending, from Norse byr (=village) in Whitby, Derby, Ferriby, Grimsby
- -beck (=brook) in Birkbeck, Troutbeck
- -brack, -breck, -brick (=slope) in Haverbrack, Norbreck, Scarisbrick
- -dale (=valley) in Calderdale, Dovedale or Wensleydale
- -fell (=hill) in Scafell Pike, Whinfell
- -force/foss (=waterfall) in Catfoss, Fangfoss, High Force and Wilberfoss
- -garth (=yard) in Applegarth, Arkengarthdale
- -mel(l)s (=sand-dunes) as in Cartmel or Ingoldmells
- -ness (=headland/promontory) as in Dungeness, Holderness or Skegness

-carr (=damp wasteland), -ghyll/-gill (=ravine or gorge), -holm(e), -keld (=spring), -kirk (=church), -rigg (=ridge), -scar (=cliff/rock outcrop), -set(t) (=summer pasture), -side, -thorpe (=settlement), -tarn (=lake), -thwaite (=settlement), -toft and -with are also elements in Scandinavian place names.

Many of these place names have a personal name as the first element. Thus Grim is the founder of Grimsby and Olaf (otherwise known as Anlaf) is the founder of Anlaby (near Hull). Bubwith is "Bubba's wood".

Sometimes the name contains other elements that describe the place. Thus

- Holbeck is "the place of the low-lying stream"
- Hunmanby is the "dwelling of dog keepers" (or "houndmen")
- Skipwith is the "sheep wood", and

- Whenby is “the place” or “farmstead of women”

Some names are hybrids (mixtures) of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian elements. So Grim (a Viking prince) named not only Grimsby but also Grimston - where -ton is an Angle noun. This example is used as the generic noun for such mixed names or “Grimston hybrids”.

#### Street names

The standard Scandinavian ending for a street name is -gate, from Old Norse gata, which means a way, street or road. Not all names ending in gate date from Viking times - later ages may have copied it from older examples. Nevertheless, we can see this form in cities such as Leeds and York and towns like Beverley. Examples include:

- Briggate (=bridge street)
- Coppergate (=street of the cup makers)
- Kirkgate (=church street)
- Skeldergate (=street of the shield makers)

A list of street names in Beverley, East Yorkshire, reveals Scandinavian influences in, among others: Beckside, Cherry Garth, Flemingate, Hengate, Highgate, Hall Garth, Way, Holgate, Keldgate, Ladygate and Lairgate. We see a modern use of the form in Walkergate and New Walkergate - which are named after Admiral Walker (a 19th century deputy lieutenant of the East Riding). Street names from the Viking period do not use people's surnames.

#### Family names

Many family names or surnames contain Scandinavian elements - these may be names of places, Viking personalities, trades or occupations, and Norse gods. Examples include: Airey, Appleby, Asquith (Askwith), Beckwith, Brandreth, Chippendale, Fotherby, Fothergill, Grimshaw, Hague, Heseltine, Heslop, Hislop, Hogarth, Holmes, Kendal(l), Lofthouse, Pickersgill, Rowntree, Scargill, Schofield, Stockdale, Sykes, Thackeray, Thorpe, Threllfall, Thwaite(s), Willoughby, Wolstenholme and York.

From the name of the god, Thor we get such forms as Thorburn, Thurkettle, Thurstans, Thurston, Turpin and Turtle.

#### Words preserved in dialects

While some Scandinavian lexis is found in modern standard English forms, there are other words - such as addle (=earn), binks (=benches) and ettle (=strive) - that have remained in use in regional varieties of English, especially the many dialects of Yorkshire and the Humber. Here are some examples of words of Viking origin in common use among Yorkshire dialect speakers:

- brandrith (=iron pan rack over a fire; from Norse brandr)
- crake (=crow; Old Norse kraka)
- femmer (=slight, light or weak; from Old Norse fimmer)
- flit (=to move house; from Old Norse flytja)
- laik or lek (=play; Old Norse leikr)
- ligg (=lie or lay; Old Norse liggja)
- reek (=smoke; Old Norse reykja)
- reckling (=weakest of the litter; Old Norse recklingr)

#### Cognate pairs

These are pairs of words descended from a common Germanic source, but entering English at different times, and which persist in both Old English and Scandinavian forms, with either identical or closely-related meanings. In each pair the first item comes from the Anglo-Saxon form, the second from the Scandinavian form:

- no/nay
- from/fro
- rear/raise
- shirt/skirt
- edge/egg (verb, as in egg on)

Words with shared origins

These are words where the Old English and Scandinavian forms were identical, and which have descended from either or more probably both:

- bring, come, hear, meet, ride, see, sit and think.

Legal or governmental terms

Among these are:

- law (this replaced Old English doom or dom)
- by-law (law of the byr or village)
- outlaw (man outside the law)
- husband (from hus-bondi - "householder" or "manager of a house")
- fellow
- husting
- riding, as in the East Riding of Yorkshire ( from thiring - "third part of")

Parts of the body and animal names

- calf
- leg
- skin
- skull
- bull
- kid
- reindeer (originally Norse rein, meaning "deer", with later addition of Old English deer, meaning "animal" - the whole word is thus a compound, meaning "deer-animal")

Adjectives

Many of these have become adverb, noun or verb by conversion:

- (a)thwart
- sly
- weak
- wrong

Verbs

- call
- cast
- cut
- flit
- glitter
- rake
- rive

- skulk
- take
- thrive
- want

Prepositional phrases

These are phrases formed by a verb followed by an adverbial preposition:

- take up, take down, take in, take off, take out

These were popular in Tudor times, disapproved by prescriptive grammarians in the 18th century but revived in modern times, largely thanks to US English influence. For a contemporary example, consider the well-known catchphrase of the late Dr. Timothy Leary:

- Tune in, turn on, drop out