

Exam Specifications

Revision of January 15, 2025

The exam takes place in **KWZ 0.609** on Wednesday 12 February at 10:00. It will run for 60 minutes and covers only the seminar material. A practice environment with just a few example questions is already available on **Stud.IP** under Learning Modules.

Specification

Exam questions will represent a spread of weekly topics, but with an emphasis on basic and intermediate rather than advanced skills and concepts, as well as skills and concepts that have been practised or discussed interactively. Questions will be presented in a mix of formats. The following indications should give you an idea of what to expect, though they may not exhaust the types of formats and questions on the exam.

Principles of Prosody

For this introductory topic you should be prepared to discuss the concepts of stress-timing, syllable-timing, root stress, trochee, iamb, caesura, enjambment, the metrical foot, iambic pentameter, and complexity, but not the other concepts introduced by Russell and listed in the list of concepts for week one. There will not be much focus on general poetical principles, but you are expected to be able to adduce this knowledge in the context of Old English poetics.

The Alliterative Long Line

You should be able to identify, explain, and discuss the basics of Old English poetic form, including the units of the verse and the line, the principles that tie verses together into lines, different kinds of alliteration and the difference between structural and ornamental alliteration, the four-syllable principle, and the alliterative rule of precedence as defined in Terasawa. Questions on these matters are likely to include matching assignments (i.e. identifying different kinds of alliteration in lines given) but may also take the form of open questions.

Rhythm

This being a central focus of the course, you should come fully prepared to identify, analyze, and discuss the rhythmical qualities of Old English verse, including the different kinds of metrical position (lift, halflift, dip) and the concepts of stress word, particle, and proclitic along with the parts of speech most dependably associated with them and the conditions that assign lifts to the last two categories. There will be no major role for tertiary word-stress or syncope, and any appearance they make will not be heavily weighted. You should be able to recognize that a vowel printed with

a dot below does not carry a syllable (i.e. is a parasited or syncopated vowel), and you should know the implications of such to-be-ignored vowels for the dating of the original poem (see under Dating below). There will be no questions about *u*-apocope. You should expect questions about resolution, but of the most straightforward kind only, i.e. you will not be expected to know what contexts block resolution or what long syllables may be resolved, but you should be able to identify basic resolvable sequences and the resulting scansion. Long vowels in all text specimens will be indicated with macrons.

Sievers Types

This being a central focus of the course, you should come fully prepared to identify Sievers types and discuss the implications of their distribution in a poem (see Dating below). You should expect matching assignments (i.e. assign the correct Sievers type to each of the verses printed), but you may also be asked to apply and discuss your knowledge of Sievers types in open questions (see again under Dating below). You should be able to identify Sievers types A, B, C, D₁, D₂, and E, but the exam will focus heavily on the least complex patterns of these verses (i.e. not too many extra unstressed syllables, not too many instances of resolution or anacrusis). Light verses (type A₃) will not be part of identification assignments, though they may occur in questions about dating and style; and if you encounter verses of type A₂ in an identification assignment, it will suffice to identify them as A. Along the same lines, if you encounter expanded D types (D*₁, D*₂), it will suffice to identify them as D₁ or D₂. You should be able to explain the Sievers taxonomy briefly in an open question, including patterns of frequency and relevance to dating.

Words and Feet

For this topic you will only be expected to be able to explain the basic causal/logical relationship between everyday words and metre, without any of the theoretical sophistication brought to the issue by scholars like Russom. You may be presented with two or three straightforward verses containing more than two words each and asked to use these to illustrate your answer. You are not expected to know Bliss notation. This topic will not play a major role on the exam.

Rhythmic Prose

For this topic you should be able to explain (separately) what “poetic” elements are found in the writings of *Ælfric* and *Wulfstan*, and reflect on possible functions of such elements in the genre(s) in which these authors composed. If presented with an excerpt, you should be able to point to formal features and discuss them, and you may be asked to identify the author by his style. To this end, you will want to reread Master Hollowell’s article as well as the relevant sections in Terasawa. You should be familiar with, and able to put into practice, the syllable-counting principle distinguishing between classical verse, later (“debased”) verse, and *Ælfric*’s rhythmic prose. You should also take note of the discussion towards the end of the video on this topic of *Ælfric*’s translation philosophy and what we may infer about the connection between his aims as an author and his prose style. Questions on these matters are most likely to take the form of open questions, but there may be related matching questions on dating, style, or syllable counts.

Poetic Diction

For this topic you are expected to be able to discuss the difference between a poetic word and a word occurring only in the poetry; the relationship between poetic and archaic terminology; why poetic diction differs from prose diction; metonymic tendencies in the poetry as discussed in the video on this topic; and how to use the *Dictionary of Old English* to analyze the distribution of words in the corpus. To this last end you will not need to memorize the titles of search fields and buttons on the *DOE* website, but rather give abstract instructions such as “add a second search field to limit matches to *Beowulf* only.” You should come prepared to explain alliterative rank in its most basic form with reference to the relative frequency with which a set of synonyms occurs in alliterative position and the most basic implications for where in the line these words should be expected to occur and why. Questions on poetic diction are most likely to take the form of open questions, and may print brief excerpts for you to comment on. A glossary will be provided only if is necessary for you to understand the content of an excerpt.

Performance

If this topic makes it onto the exam, you will likely be asked to apply your understanding of Old English metrics to practical considerations such as instrumentation, pace, rhythm, melody, and the like. As we do not know precisely how poems were performed, there may be some room for creative interpretation here, and points can be lost only on misapplying or failing to apply your knowledge of metre, archaeology, and literary accounts of early medieval performance to the extent that these are brought up in class. Questions on this topic can only take the form of open questions, but they are unlikely to play a big role on the exam.

Riddling

Come prepared to explain the narrow definition of the kenning as adhered to by Harleman Stewart, and to identify and discuss key characteristics of Old English riddles. Have at least a rudimentary understanding of the role of riddles in early medieval education and the transmission (i.e. manuscript) context of the Old English riddles. Questions on this topic can only take the form of open questions, but they are unlikely to play a big role on the exam.

Dating

Come prepared to identify and discuss the main criteria for the dating of Old English verse, but also count with the likelihood that you will be presented with a brief passage or two and asked to date it as either earlier or later in the Old English poetic tradition and explain your reasoning. For open questions and multiple choice questions on dating, you should be able to *list* the criteria discussed in Terasawa and the more straightforward of the criteria adduced by Fulk and summarized in the slides, but you won’t need to be able to *explain* or identify parasiting or contraction after loss of *b*, and you won’t even have to be aware of the relevance of resolution and Kaluza’s Law, analogical shortening and lengthening, or tertiary stress. Not specifically addressed in either Terasawa or Fulk, but mentioned in class, is the fact that Sievers types D and especially E became rarer in late verse; this too you will be expected to know, and be able to apply. When confronted with one or more passages of verse, you should be able to date them as either “early” or “late” on the basis of the presence or absence of alliteration between velar and palatal *g*; the frequency of Sievers types D

and E; the use of rhyme; and the use or absence of contraction of negation and/or pronouns. In addition, you should be able to recognize that a line that alliterates on the final lift of the off-verse is characteristic of late verse.

Adjacent Traditions

For this topic you are expected to have a basic understanding of the similarities and differences between Old Low German and Old English verse form, and of the relationship between the Old Low German *Genesis* and the Old English *Genesis B*. If presented with lines from both, you should be able to tell the difference and explain your reasoning. You are not expected to memorize the rules of Old Norse metre, but you should have a basic understanding of the degree to which the principles underlying Old English poetic form are also found in Old Norse, and be able to engage in informed speculation about what this might mean for the history of these poetic traditions.

Student Presentations

Student presentations do not count as exam material.

How to Prepare

- There will **not** be a translation assignment. Thus rather than train your translation skills, concentrate on matters of scansion, formal features, and metrical theory.
- You will **not** have to memorize translations of excerpts discussed in class; however, you may benefit from studying scansion, ornamental alliteration, paronomasia, and other formal features in these passages so as to be prepared for questions on these matters.
- Practise the identification of the lifts in a (verse or) line using the [flashcards website](#).
- Practise the identification of Sievers types using the [flashcards website](#), the class translation excerpts that I have marked up for scansion, and [CLASP](#) or the [Electronic Beowulf](#) website.
- Practise the identification of **formal features** (paronomasia, internal rhyme, crossed alliteration, transverse alliteration, linking alliteration, single/double alliteration, hypermetric verse) by studying the textbook, course videos, and any examples adduced in class. You may also want to practise hunting down additional specimens in the rest of the [corpus](#).
- Study **concepts** with the help of the textbook, [videos](#), [lists of concepts](#), and secondary readings (Harleman Stewart for kennings; Masters Hollowell for two-stress rhythmical prose; Griffith for alliterative rank). Of these sources, the scholarly articles are the least important, as you will only have to know their general drift in addition to the concepts just mentioned. Come prepared to define concepts but also to apply your knowledge of them either in response to a passage printed or when asked e.g. what criteria are relevant to the dating of Old English poetry.