

100 most frequent Middle English words

al, al be that: although
als, also: as, also
anon: at once
artow: art thou, thou art
as: as, as if, like
atte: at, at the
aventure: chance
axe: ask
ay: always
been: are
bet: better
beth: are; (imperative) be
brenne: burn
but, but if: unless
can, kan: know, be able
canstow: can you, you can
cas: happening, chance
certes: surely, certainly
clepe (n): call
clerk: scholar
coy: quiet
ech: each
echo (o) n: each one
eek, eke: also
er, or: before; formerly
everich: every; every one
fay, fey: faith
forthy: therefore
fro: from
gan, gonne: began
han: have
hastow: have you, you have
hem: them
here: her
hight: named, called
him lest (list): he wants
hir (e): her, their
ich: I
ilke: same
kan: know, know how to; can
konne: learn; know how to; can
koude: knew; knew how to; could
kynde: nature
lasse: less
le (e) ve: dear
lite: little
maistow, maystow: may you, you may
make: mate, husband, make
mo: more
moot (e) (n): may, must, ought to; so (also, ever) moot I: as I hope to

morewe: morrow, morning
mowe: may
muche (1): much, many (a)
nam: am not
namo, namoore, no more
nas: was not
nat: not
nathelees: nevertheless
ne: not, nor
nere: were not
nolde: would not
nones, nonys: occasion
noon: none, no
noot: know not
nyce: foolish
nys: is not
o, oo, on, oon, that oon: one
of: of; off
pardee: (lit. "by God"), a common oath; certainly
prime, pryme: 9 A.M.
quod: said
rathe: early, soon
rede: advise; interpret; read
seistow: you say
sely: innocent, simple
seyde: said
seye: say
shaltow: you shall
sikerly: certainly, surely, truly
sith: since; then
somdel: somewhat
sooth, soothfastnesse, sothe: truth
swich: such
syn: since
than (ne): then, than
thilke: this, that, at that
tho: those; then
tweye: two
unnethe (s): scarcely
verray: true, veritable
wene, -eth: think, thinks
whylom: once, once upon a time, formerly
wight: person, thing
yaf: gave
ycleped: named
ye (n): eye (s)
yeve, -en, -est, -eth: give, given
ynogh: enough
ywis: surely, certainly

Knight's Tale, I and II

asterte: escape
brydel, bridil: bridle, reins
chere, cheer(e), chiere: face, facial expression
despit(e), dispit: disdain, scorn
gentil(e): noble, well-born
hente(n): seize, grasp
lystes: jousting or tilting fields; enclosed grounds for formal combat
maugre(e), malgre: despite, in spite of
mottelee: multi-colored; patchwork
parfit: perfect; complete
pyne: pain, harm, misery, suffering
socour(e), sokour: succor, help
sote, soot(e): sweet-smelling
sterve(n): die
steven(e): voice, sound
trew(e): true, faithful
weylaway, wailaway, etc.: alas!
waymentyng(e): lamentation
wepne, wepen(e): weapon(s)
wood(e), wod(e): mad, crazy

The Miller's Tale

Know the c and e words, above, in addition to the vocabulary below

cherl: common man, peasant, ruffian
cokewold: cuckold
daungerous: standoffish, aloof, fastidious
deerne: secret
joly, jolyf: merry, cheerful, lusty, amorous
kultour: plough blade
leman, lemman: loved one, paramour, slut
lever(e): preferable, dearer (from "leef" or "life," dear, beloved)
pryvete(e): privacy, secrecy; secret; private affairs; private (sexual) parts
quite(n): repay; pay back (with a vengeance)
rewe(n): have mercy on; feel pity for
sely: happy, innocent, wretched, insignificant, ignorant
sola(a)s: comfort, pleasure, solace
swynke(n): work
unnethe, unneeth, unethe: hardly, scarcely, with difficulty
whether, wether: A male sheep, a ram, a castrated ram

The Reeve's Tale

Know the f and g words, above, in addition to the vocabulary below

grucche: complain (cf. "grouch")
smoterlich: besmirched, sullied (in reputation)

camus nose, kamus nose: pug nose
capul: horse
cake: loaf of bread
ilhayl: bad luck
warderere: look out behind!
herberwe: lodging
ese: refreshment, food
yexeth: belches
fnorteth: snorts
rowtyng: snoring
pyled: bald
poke: bag
throthe-bolle: Adam's apple

The Wife of Bath's Prologue

In addition to the vocabulary words below, know the high frequency h and i words

abroche: open
the Apostle: St. Paul
auctoritee, autorite: written authority; an authoritative passage
bishrewe: curse
chaffre, chaffare: merchandise, wares, trade
chepe: buy
costage: expense
engendrure: the act of procreation
geste, geeste: story, history
glose(n): interpret, explain (a text); flatter, deceive
gossib, gossyb, godsib: close friend
hende: courteous, handy, close at hand
kyndely: naturally
maydenhede: virginity
mete(n): dream (mette=a dream)
pleyne, playne: lament, complain
purveyance, purveaunce, purveiaunce: foresight
shende: destroy
soveraynetee, sovereignte: mastery, sovereignty
wexe(n), waxe(n): grow, increase

The Nun's Priest's Prologue and Tale

In addition to the vocabulary words below, know the high frequency p, q, and r words

avantour: boaster
biknew(e): makes, knows, confesses
catel: property, possessions
chuk: cluck
gargat: throat
keen, kyne: cows
losengeour: flatterer
pyned: tortured

recche: interpret, care, be concerned for (“reckon”)
steven(e): voice
sweven(e): dream
woned: dwelled

The Second Nun’s Prologue and Tale

Please also know the high frequency words up to and including the t’s

passioun: suffering
herye(n): praise
honestee: chastity
thewes: morals
unwemmed: undefiled
clennesse: purity (clene = pure)
corones: crowns
reneye: renounce
quyken: give life to
lotynge: in hiding

The Canon Yeoman’s Prologue and Tale

slit: “slideth”; slides, slips away
quelle: kill
sublymed: purified
elvysshe: mysterious
multiplicaccioun: transmutation
mollificacioun: softening
induracioun: hardening
Elixer: substance believed to transmute base metals to gold; the “Philosopher’s Stone”
bitymes: soon, quickly
hals: neck
mortifye: harden, make nonvolatile
byjaped: tricked

The Manciple’s Prologue and Tale

At this point in the semester, you should know and have internalized the 100 most common words in Middle English. Know the following, as well.

fleen: fleas
queen: whore
hevynesse: drowsiness
ganeth: yawns
fneseth: sneezes
pose: head cold
volage: flighty, foolish
Cokkow: cuckoo (a reference to the cuckold)
montance: value

rakel: rash
unavysed: recklessly
wantrust: distrust