

Basic Middle English Word List for London Dialect*

Since there is no standardized spelling in the fourteenth century, be alert for words that look like one thing but mean another. Also watch for *metathesis* (inverted letters) such as spelling the word "Bird" as "Brid" or "whale" as "hwale." A final warning: quoting sources written in Middle English will annoy your computer's spell-check. Allow extra time for proofreading.

- al, al be, al be that:** although, even if
als, also: also, as
anon: at once, immediately
aventure: chance
bet: better
but, but if: unless
can, kan, conne, con, konne: to be able, to know, to know how; to learn, to understand.
cas, caas: case, situation, event; chance, accident; fate
certes: certainly
clepe(n): call, name, mention
conseil: council; to counsel or advise; secret(s), confidence(s)
corage: heart; spirit; courage; desire
curious: careful, diligent; skillful; eager; skillfully made
daunger: lordship, power, control; ungraciousness, disdain
degree: rank, status, social condition
del, deel: bit, part
deme, deeme: judge, decide; suppose (Mn. E. "deem")
do, doon: to do, cause
doon make: cause to be made
drede: doubt "*it is no drede*" (there is no doubt).
eek, eke: also
er, ere: before
estaat: state, condition; rank, standing
everich: every; each
eyen, eien, yen: eyes (see also "ye" for the singular)
falle: fall; befall, happen
fare: fare, go; act, behave
fayne: glad; as an adverb, gladly, willingly, eagerly
for: because (of); for; in order that
foul: disagreeable; evil; miserable
fre, free: noble, gracious, generous; free
fro: from (as in "to and fro")
gan, gan to: did (past tense aux. verb); began to
gentillesse: refined character, high breeding, nobility, courtesy
go, goon: to walk, to go
grace: a favor; grace; mercy, pardon; honor, distinction
gyse: guise; manner, way, fashion, custom
han: have (contracted form of Old and Middle English "*haven*")
hap: chance, luck; good fortune; occurrence (as in Mn. English "*happenstance*")
hatan: called, named; ordered; hated
hende: clever, noble, courteous (Mn. English "*handy*")
hente(n): to seize, grasp
highte: is called, is named; was called, was named
ilke: same
intil: unto; as far as
kinde: nature, race, stock, species, sort; natural disposition
koude: knew; knew how to; could
lat: let
leef, lief, leve: dear, beloved; pleasant, agreeable
lewed: ignorant, unlearned; coarse, rude; wicked
like(n), lyke(n): to like, enjoy (often in impers. constructions; e.g., *me liketh:* it pleases me).
list, lest: to please (often occurs in impers. constructions; e.g., "*me list,*" it pleases me)
lite, lyte: little
lust: pleasure; desire
maistry: domination, mastery
micel, michel, mickel: much, many
mo: more
moot, moote: may, must ought to [idiomatic phraes] *so moot I, also moot I, ever moot I:* as I hope also *so moote I thee:* as I hope to prosper
most, moste: must; most
mowe: may (pres. plural of *mowen*)
namely: especially
nas: was not (contraction of *ne was.*)

nat: not
ne: not, nor
nerē: were not (contraction of *ne were*)
niste: knew not (contraction of *ne wiste*)
noīde: would not (contraction of *ne wolde*)
not, noot: knows not (contraction of *ne woot*)
nyce: ignorant, foolish, weak; wanton; precise, scrupulous
nys, nis: is not (contraction of *ne is*)
nyste: knew not, did not know (contraction of *ne wiste*)
paraventure: perhaps
povre: poor (like French *pauvre*)
quit, quite: (infinitive) to reciprocate, repay; (past part.) repaid
quod: said
rede, reede: advice, counsel; to advise, to counsel. (Cf. Old English *raed*)
sen, syn: since
sely: blessed, innocent; good; kind; happy; poor; wretched; hapless (Cf. Mn. Irish *seelie*, Mn. English *silly*)
sentence: opinion, sentiments; moral meaning, significance
siker: certain, sure, true, noble (distantly related to Mn. English "secure" and "sacred")
sikerly: certainly, surely, truly
sit: sits (contraction of *sitteth*)
sith, sithen: since (not to be confused with Darth Vader's domain)
solas: comfort, solace; amusement, entertainment; pleasure
solempne: formal; solemn, serious; ceremonious; festive; merry
sore, soore: bitterly, sorely
sooth, sothe: truth (Mn. English "Soothsayer")
soothfastnesse: truth; truthfulness
stint, stente, stynthe: cease, stop; restrain
sterte: jump, leap, spring, move suddenly (like Mn. English "start" and "startle")
swich: such
thee, theen: to prosper (infinitive)
ther, there: there; where
thilke: the same (contraction of "*the ilke*")
tho: then
trowe(n): to believe
unnethe: scarcely, hardly; with difficulty
verray: true (Cf. Mn. French "*Vrai*" and Mn. English "very")
war: aware; wary; prudent
wende(n): to go, pass, walk (infinitive).
wende: thought, supposed (past tense Old English *wenan*, cf. Mn. English "ween")
whilom: once, once upon a time; formerly
wight: a person; a creature
wiste: knew
wol: will
wood: mad, crazy; madly
woot: knows (from "wit")
wyse: wise; way, manner
y-: as a verb prefix, it indicates the past participle.
yaf: gave
ye, ey, yghe: eye
yep: new; keen; fresh (primarily Northumbrian)
yif: if; give
ywis: certainly, surely

*This handout is a composite taken from materials and suggestions provided to me by Professors Martha Bayless and Jim Boren at the University of Oregon English Department and by Professor Shearle Furnish of West Texas A& M University. The list is based primarily on the London dialect, with some minor additions from Northumbrian vocabulary. It is most useful for London writers like Chaucer, but it is less useful for poets like William Langland or the Pearl Poet.