

## *Speaking Elizabethan - An Introduction*

**To Start::** The most easily identified differences between modern English and Elizabethan are the use of the formal and informal forms of address, verb conjugation, and the number of words used to communicate. While in the modern era we often use the fewest possible words to express ourselves, in the Elizabethan era they did the opposite: the more words the better!

### **YOU and THEE**

You is the formal version of you. It is used when addressing anyone above you in station. This is a class based society and everyone has their place. So, outside of standing in a line to identify who is above or below whom, here are some basic guidelines.

God

Queen

Nobility

Gentry

Middle classes that are not gentry such as yeomen and their families; or if in a city guild members

Everyone else.

For example, use “you” for your employer; your parent, or toward anyone you wish to impress. Use “thee” for someone who works for you, your child, or toward whom you feel like being insulting. With one very big exception. God is called thee and thou. A person’s relationship with God was considered *extremely* intimate.

### **Thee and Thou -**

Object vs. Subject. Oh, no, GRAMMAR. Okay, it’s easier than that.

I love thee. What is happening here? Someone is loving someone else. So, “thee” is used as it is the “object” being loved.

Thou lovest me. Now what is going on? Someone is still loving someone else. However, since the person being spoken of is doing the loving, they are the subject. IE, whoever is doing something, doing whatever the verb is, will be “thou”, the subject.

Thou walkest fast. Thou sittest with me. Thou art my own true love. And I still love thee...

### **Which takes us to verbs and their conjugation:**

I walk

He/She/It walketh

You (formal) walk

You (plural) walk

We walk

They walk

Thou (You informal) walkest

Ye (plural informal) walk (going out of style at this time but still around)

So, did you notice there are only two places where the conjugation is different than how we speak today? He/she/it has an ending using “eth”. The informal you uses “est”.

Some more examples

He goeth; thou goest

He singeth, thou singest

He danceth; Thou Dancest

He runneth; Thou runnest.

Are there exceptions? Of course. And the “to be” is the big one. Just memorize it -

I am	Let's not forget “to have”	I have
He/she/it is		<b>He/she/it hath</b>
You are		You have
<b>Thou art</b>		<b>Thou hast</b>
We are		We have
They are		They have

Some verbs, like to have, leave out the “e” in the endings where a vowel would precede it.

Possessives:

These follow the pattern of the “you”. That is, formal and informal.

Formal is easy. Your pig. Your house. Your horse. Your apple. That cart is yours.

Informal is also easy: Thy pig. Thy house. Thy cottage. Thine apple. That cart is thine.

My/and mine is close modern usage. My pig. That pig is mine. My apple, or the older version, mine apple.

The use of mine and thine prior to a word beginning with a vowel was still in use, but going out of style.

## **Beginning Phrases (or, what do I say now?)**

### **How to say hello (Greetings):**

Good Morrow, Good Day, Good Den  
Good Day, God save you  
Well met, How now, Save you

### **Forms of Address: General**

Sir (Knights only)  
Madam, Master, Mistress  
Goodman, Goodwife, Goody  
Mother, Father, Gaffer, Gammer  
Lad, lass, young master, little lady, etc.  
Girl, boy, maid, wench

### **Praise/Comparisons**

Fair as a summers day  
As thick as porridge  
Green as grass, blue as the sky,  
bright as the sun, etc

### **How to say goodbye:**

Fare well, Fare thee well  
Good Even, Good E'en  
Good speed, Fare you well, Adieu

### **Forms of Address: Nobles**

Your Majesty - a king or queen only  
Your Grace (Queen, princes or bishops)  
My Lord, My Lady, Noble sir, Noble Lady  
Lord (Title)  
Sir (First Name)

### **Oaths**

God's teeth; God's blood; God's death  
By Hercules, By Zeus, By Minerva  
'Sblood, 'Swounds (Short for  
“God's Blood”, “God's Wounds”)

## Words/Expressions to start with:

For Yes: Aye, Yea (“Yes” is correct but avoid it to sound *more* Elizabethan)

For No: No, Nay

For Okay: Good, Well enow, good enow (enow means enough)

For Please: If it please you/thee  
An it please you  
I pray you/thee  
Prithee (short for I pray thee)  
Pray

For Thanks: My thanks,  
Many thanks  
God grant you mercy  
Grant you mercy  
Gramercy ( short for grant you mercy)

For Really: In sooth  
Forsooth  
Verily  
Truly  
Surely  
Indeed  
Mary  
In good sooth

Note: In very sooth is code for “This is real”

For Excuse Me: I cry you mercy  
I pray your pardon  
Pray forgive me  
Pray pardon me

For Oh No: God-a-mercy  
Fie! Or Fie Me!  
Alas  
Lackaday  
Out upon it

For I think: I trow  
I think me  
Methinks

For Maybe: Mayhap  
Belike

Peradventure  
Perchance

For Doubt: Go to!  
Is’t so (short for is it so?)  
Even so?  
In sooth?

For Wow: Marry!  
Well!  
In faith! ( or I’ faith)  
I’sooth!

## More Words:

Ale-Knight - habitual drunkard

An - if

Anon - soon

Aught - anything

Backfriend - a false friend

Clumperton - a fool/clown

Cony - rabbit

Cony catcher - a con man

Cousin - any relative, sometimes a real cousin

Cupshotten - drunk

Dry - insipid or dull

E're - before

Fray - fight

Gossip - a good friend

Hie - hurry

Kinsman - relative

Lavendar - a washerwoman

Lenten - scanty, or meager

Mark - pay attention

Nought - nothing

Popinjay - a fop or flashy dresser

Princox - a saucy, pert boy

Privy - toilet/bathroom

Rudesbay - a rude, insolent person

Shrew - an ill-tempered person

Simpkin - a simpleton

Tarry - wait

Troth - truth

Wherefore - why

Whither - where

## A few proverbs and expressions:

A friend is never known till a man have need.

A wonder lasts but nine days

Bachelors boast of how they will teach their wives

Be the day never so long, at last they ring the evensong.

Every cock is proud on his own dunghill.

Great boast and small roast make unsavory mouths.

Be not busy or bold with your biggers or betters.

What the eye sees not, the heart rues not.

When the fox preaches, beware the geese.

Frenzy, heresy and jealousy are seldom cured.

More haste less speed.

He that will not when he may, when he would he shall have nay.

Soon ripe, soon rotten.

A few resources:

<http://www.stgeorgenorth.org/resources>

<http://www.etymonline.com/> - excellent online source for the meanings and sources of words

<http://www.william-shakespeare.info/william-shakespeare-dictionary-t.htm>

The complete works of Shakespeare, revised edition. Edited by Hardin Craig, David Bevington, University of Chicago. USBN 0-673-07691-1. Scott, Foresman and Company, Glenview, Illinois

<http://www.pronouncingshakespeare.com/>

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