**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 the 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, its 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 what ever 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:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal</th>
<th>Informal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I walk</td>
<td>We walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He/She/It walketh</td>
<td>They walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You (formal) walk</td>
<td>Thou (You informal) walkest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You (plural) walk</td>
<td>Ye (plural informal) walk (going out of style at this time but still around)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 danceth; Thou Dancest
He singeth, thou singest
He runneth; Thou runnest.
Are there exceptions? Of course. And the “to be” is the big one. Just memorize it -

I am
He/she/it is
You are
Thou art
We are
They are

Let’s not forget “to have”
I have
He/she/it hath
You have
Thou hast
We have
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 “yous”. That is, formal and informal.


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

**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)

**Praise/Comparisons**

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

**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
http://www.pronouncingshakespeare.com/

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