

Guide to Using the *Middle English Dictionary*

Here are some useful tips for using the *Middle English Dictionary*:

1. Words change their forms based on their grammatical functions. For instance, if you are trying to find a definition of "girls" or "ran", you need to look up the words using the headword forms "girl" and "run". In Middle English, this can be trickier. If you or your high school English teacher was a slacker when it comes to grammar, it is time to put some effort into it. Start by identifying the [part of speech](#) of the word based on context. Then make changes to reconstruct the headword. This may mean removing plural or comparative suffixes, or changing verbs to the infinitive form. Remember that in Middle English the infinitive ends in *-en*.
2. In some cases, the spellings of words have been normalised to create the dictionary headwords. Here are some common normalisations.
 - "þ" is changed to "th".
 - "ȝ" is changed to "y" or "gh".
 - In very rare cases, original "þ" and "ȝ" are kept, and they can be searched for by typing "T" and "Y" in the search bar.
 - "w" after a vowel is changed to "u".
3. Remember that in the Middle Ages, spelling varied with the individual scribe. This means that even making the adjustments above may not get you a hit for the headword. So make sure to pull down the dropdown menu to search "Headword and forms". This will search all the different spellings of the word recorded in the *MED* quotations. The *MED* has over 130 recorded spellings for the word "through"!
4. This is really the same point as point 3. In some dialects, spellings differ substantially from Modern English: e.g. Northern "quen" where Southern scribes might write "when", which is easier to recognise.
5. Beware of homographs: words with different meanings but the same (or similar) spelling. For instance, "þe" can be "the" or "thee"; "to" can be "to" or "toe"; "of" can be "of" or "off".
6. Yrs ago a stdy revld tht we cn rcgnize wrds wth letrs missing. Try searching using wildcard symbols. Here are the instructions on the *MED* search pages. (If you didn't read them before starting to use the dictionary, you should probably avoid buying furniture at Ikea.)

* means zero or more of any character

? means one of any character

[] means any one of the characters in brackets

Here are some sample searches:

Search Term	Goal	Results
tak	Search for "tak" as a complete form	tak
*tak	Search for "tak" at the end of a word	psitak, stak, tak, thistel-tak
tak*	Search for "tak" at the beginning of a word	tak, takel, t ^ā ken, taket, etc.
t[aeiou]k	Search for "tak", "tek", "tik", "tok", "tuk", as complete forms	tak, tik, tuk
t*aunce	Search for "t" followed by <i>zero or more</i> of any character before "aunce", as complete forms	temperaunce, traunce, tresauce, etc.
tr?m	Search for "tr" followed by any one character before an "m", as complete forms	trim, trum
t???m	Search for "t" followed by any by any three characters before an "m", as complete forms	tharm, them, thrum

Got other tips for using the *MED*? Let me know, and I will add them to this document.