Some nouns frequently encountered in Old English prose.

This list is based (roughly) on the frequency analysis of Jember, Gregory K., and Fritz
Kemmler, *A basic vocabulary of Old English prose* (Tübingen 1981: Niemeyer).

Masculine a-stems

• male human beings

biscop 'bishop'	ġīsel (-sles) 'hostage'
cāsere 'emperor'	hlāford 'lord'
ċeorl 'free farmer, (ordinary) man'	lārēow 'teacher'
cniht 'boy, servant, retainer'	mǣġ (pl. māgas) 'kinsman, relative'
cyning 'king'	þeġn 'retainer, official'
dryhten (-tnes) 'lord, the Lord'	þēof 'thief'
ealdor (-dres) 'elder, leader, lord'	þēow 'slave, servant'
eorl[*] 'nobleman, earl'	wer 'man [i.e. adult male]'

• basic vocabulary

dæġ (pl. dagas) 'day'	hund 'dog'
fisc 'fish'	mete 'food'
fugol (-gles) 'bird'	morgen (-gnes) 'morning'
hām 'home'	munt 'mountain'
heofon 'sky, heaven'	stān 'stone'
hīred 'family'	weġ (pl. wegas) 'road, path, way'

• nouns of general meaning

dǣl 'part'	first 'period of time'
ende 'end, limit, boundary'	stede 'position, place'

• secular affairs

āþ 'oath'	here (herġes) 'army'
camp 'battle'	siġe 'victory'
ċēap 'trade, purchase'	tūn 'enclosure'
eard 'country'	weall 'wall'
ēþel 'native land'	

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[*] This was an archaic word in early OE, largely confined to poetry and replaced by
ealdormann in prose. But the English identified it (correctly) with the Old Norse term
jarl, which was what the Scandinavians who settled in England called their leaders.
When the Danelaw was reconquered, *eorl* was resuscitated as a translation of the ON
term and eventually was felt to be an appropriate designation for English nobles too.

• religion

fulwiht, fulluht 'baptism'	God 'God'
gāst 'spirit'	(but god '(pagan) god' is neut.)

• abstract nouns

cræft 'strength, skill'	lust 'desire'
dēaþ 'death'	sīþ 'journey'
dōm 'judgment'	þanc 'thought, favor, thanks'
eġe 'fear'	wæstm 'growth, increase, product'
fultum 'help'	

• common derivational types

-aþ / -oþ forms nouns indicating activities from verbs, e.g.:

fiscaþ 'fishing' (fiscian 'to fish')

huntaþ 'hunting' (huntian 'to hunt')

-dōm forms abstract nouns, e.g.:

cynedōm 'royal authority' (cyning)

þēowdōm 'servitude' (þēow)

wīsdōm 'wisdom' (wīs 'wise')

-ere forms nouns defining people by occupation (not necessarily agent nouns), e.g.:

bōcere 'scholar' (bōc)

cwellere 'murderer, executioner' (cwellan 'to kill')

fiscere 'fisherman' (fiscian 'to fish')

wrītere 'scribe' (wrītan 'to write')

-hād forms nouns indicating status, e.g.:

ċildhād 'childhood' (ċild)

cnihthād 'boyhood, youth, celibacy' (cniht)

-scipe forms abstract nouns, e.g.:

frēondscipe 'friendship' (frēond)

ġebēorscipe 'drinking party' (ġebēor 'drinker')

þēodscipe 'nation, population' (þēod)

weorþscipe 'respect, honor, dignity' (weorþ 'worthy, noble')

-ware (pl.) forms names of populations, e.g.:

burgware 'citizens' (burg)

Cantware 'Kentishmen' (Cent 'Kent')

ċeasterware 'citizens' (ċeaster)

There are also two more or less fossilized ways of forming nouns of this class from verbs.

In one type the root of the verb is simply inflected as a masculine a-stem, e.g.:

  drinc 'drink' (drincan 'to drink')

  gang 'going' (gangan 'to go')

      begang 'course, extent, business' (begangan 'to traverse, practice, perform')

  rǣd 'advice, plan' (rǣdan 'to advise, consult')

  slǣp 'sleep' (slǣpan 'to sleep')

  wōp 'weeping, lamentation' (wēpan 'to weep')

In a variant of this type the root is in the o-grade, e.g.:

  sang 'song' (singan 'to sing')

In the other type the root is put in the zero grade and a suffix, originally accented *-í-, is

  added, triggering Verner's Law, palatalization, and i-umlaut, e.g.:

  bryċe 'breach' (brecan 'to break')

  cwide 'speech' (cweþan 'to say')

  cyme 'coming, approach' (cuman 'to come')

      tōcyme 'arrival' (tōcuman 'to arrive')

  hete 'hatred' (hatian 'to hate')

  scyte 'shot, stroke' (scēotan 'to shoot')

      onscyte 'attack, assaunt'

  sleġe 'stroke, slaughter' (slēan 'to strike, to slay')

Neuter a-stems

• human beings

bearn 'child, offspring'	wīf 'woman'
ċild 'child, infant'	

• basic vocabulary

ǣfen (-nnes) 'evening'	hūs 'house'
bān 'bone'	īeġland 'island'
blōd 'blood'	land 'land'
dēor 'animal'	līċ 'body'
fȳr 'fire'	trēow 'tree, wood'
ġēar 'year'	wæter 'water'
hēafod (-fdes) 'head'	word 'word'
hors 'horse'	

• nouns of general meaning

tācen (-cnes) 'sign'	þing 'thing, affair'

• secular affairs

ǣrende 'message'	mān 'crime'
cynn 'family, lineage, kind'	rīċe 'kingdom'
feoh (fēos) 'property'	riht 'right'
folc 'people'	scip 'ship'
ġeþēode 'language'	wæl 'carnage'
weorc 'work'	wīte 'punishment'
weorod 'troop'	

• religion

godspell 'gospel'

• abstract nouns

earfoþ 'trouble, hardship'	sōþ 'truth'
līf 'life'	weorþ 'worth, status'
mæġen 'strength, power'	wuldor (-dres) 'glory'
mōd 'mind, heart, spirit'	wundor (-dres) 'wonder, marvel'
sār 'pain, wound'	

• common derivational types

-en (-ennes) forms a few nouns from adjectives, notably:

fæsten 'stronghold' (fæst 'fixed, secure')

wēsten 'wilderness, desert' (wēste 'barren, desolate, deserted')

ġe- occasionally forms collectives, e.g.:

ġetimbru (pl.) 'buildings' (timber 'timber')

ġeweorc 'fortification, defensive works' (weorc)

There is also a more or less fossilized way of forming nouns of this class from verbs.

The root of the verb is inflected as a neuter a-stem; if the verb has no prefix, ġe- is usually added, e.g.:

andġiet 'understanding, intellect' (onġietan 'to understand')

anġinn 'beginning' (onġinnan 'to begin')

behāt 'promise' (behātan 'to promise')

ġefeoht 'fight, battle' (feohtan 'to fight')

ġelimp 'occurrence, accident' (ġelimpan 'to happen')

ġesceap 'shape, creation, creature' (scieppan 'to create')

ġeweald 'power' (wealdan 'to control, rule')

ġewinn 'struggle, strife, toil' (winnan 'to contend, fight, struggle')

Occasionally the root is in the zero grade:

bebod 'command' (bebēodan 'to command')

ġewrit 'document, writing' (wrītan 'to write')

At least two of these nouns are ja-stems, one because the verb is a class I weak verb, the other for obscure reasons:

andwyrde 'answer' (andwyrdan 'to answer')

(ġe)witt 'understanding, intelligence, knowledge' (witan 'to know')

Feminine ō-stems and i-stems

• human beings

cwēn (i) 'queen'   lēode (i, pl.) 'people'

• basic vocabulary

hȳd (i) 'skin'   wyrt (i) 'plant'

woruld 'world'

• nouns of general meaning

healf 'half'   stōw 'place'

hwīl 'while, period of time'   tīd (i) 'time'

• secular affairs

brycg 'bridge'   sprǣċ 'speech, language'

ċeaster (-tre) 'town'   strǣt 'paved road, street'

fierd (i) 'militia, army'   þēod 'tribe, nation, people'

scīr 'shire'

• religion

rōd 'cross'   synn 'sin'

sāwol (-wle) 'soul'   wucu 'week'

• abstract nouns

ār 'honor, respect'   scamu 'shame'

ǣ 'law'   sibb 'kinship, peace'

lār 'teaching, doctrine'   trēow 'fidelity'

lufu 'love'   wēn (i) 'hope'

nīed (i) 'need, distress'   wyrd (i) 'fate'

rest 'rest'

• common derivational types

-ness forms abstract nouns (and is already the most productive such suffix), e.g.:

endebyrdness 'order' (endebyrdan 'to arrange')

forġiefness 'forgiveness, permission' (forġiefan 'to grant, forgive')

ġecȳþness 'testimony' (ġecȳþan 'to make known')

ġelēaffulness 'faith' (ġelēaffull 'believing, orthodox'; ġelēafa 'belief')

gōdness 'goodness' (gōd 'good')

These (and the following types too) can develop concrete meanings, e.g.:

elþēodiġness 'foreign country' (el- 'other'; þēod; -iġ, adj. suffix)

-þ(u) likewise forms abstract nouns (with i-umlaut of the root), e.g.:

cȳþþ(u) 'kinship, acquaintance' (cūþ 'known')

fȳlþ(u) 'filth' (fūl 'foul, unclean, rotten')

iermþ(u) 'poverty, misery' (earm 'poor')

mǣġþ(u) 'kindred, clan' (mǣġ)

(ġe)sǣlþ(u) 'happiness, prosperity' (sǣl, same mng.)

(ġe)trēowþ(u) 'fidelity' (trēow, same mng.; trēowe 'faithful')

þīefþ(u) 'theft' (þēof 'thief')

A similar, less common formation normally has an overt nom. sg. endings but lacks the
dental fricative, e.g. in:

(ġe)fyrhtu 'fear' ((ġe)fyrht 'afraid')

hǣlu 'health' (hāl 'healthy')

ieldu 'age' (eald 'old')

-ung forms verbal abstracts, mostly from class II weak verbs, e.g.:

endung 'termination, end' (endian 'to end, finish')

leornung 'learning, study' (leornian 'to learn, study')

scēawung 'examination, inspection, show' (scēawian 'to look, examine, exhibit')

tācnung 'indication, signification' (tācnian 'to indicate, signify')

þeġnung 'service' (þeġnian 'to serve')

wunung 'dwelling, habitation' (wunian 'to dwell, inhabit')

-ing likewise forms verbal abstracts, mostly from class I weak verbs; cf. e.g.:

ielding 'delay' (ieldan 'to delay')

rǣding 'passage of scripture' (rǣdan 'to read')

There are a few abstract nouns with a fossilized s-suffix, notably:

bliss 'happiness' (blīþe 'happy')

milts 'mercy' (milde 'gentle')

There is a rhyming pair of abstracts in -uþ:

duguþ 'power, excellence, benefit; body of retainers, nobility' (dugan 'to be of
use, to avail')

ġeoguþ 'youth; young people' (ġeong 'young')

A large number of verbal abstracts were formed with the PIE suffix *-tí-, which in PGmc.
remained *-ti- after obstruents but otherwise became *-di- (by Grimm's and Ver-
ner's Laws); many survive as fossils in OE (with i-umlaut), e.g.:

æht (i) 'property, possession' (āgan 'to possess')

dǣd (i) 'deed' (dōn 'to do')

ġebyrd (i) 'birth' (beran 'to bear')

ġemynd (i) 'memory, thought, mind' (munan 'to remember')

ġesiht (i) 'sight' (sēon 'to see')

ġewyrht (i) 'work, deed, service' (wyrċan 'to make, work')

spēd (i) 'success' (spōwan 'to succeed')

The nouns tīd and nīed (listed above) are members of this class made to verbs that do not survive.

There are also quite a few fossilized ō-stem verbal abstracts with no overt suffix; the root is usually in the o-grade, e.g.:

andswaru 'answer' (swerian 'to swear', orig. *'to speak solemnly')

cwalu 'violent death, murder' (cwellan 'to kill')

lāf 'remnant, remainder' (belīfan 'to be left over')

racu 'narrative, explanation' (reċċan 'to tell, explain')

rād 'mounted journey, expedition' (rīdan 'to ride')

stalu 'theft' (stelan 'to steal')

talu 'count, account' (tellan 'to count, tell')

þearf 'need' (þurfan 'to need')

The noun scamu (listed above) seems to be a member of this class made to a verb that does not survive.

However, the commonest ō-stem abstract of all has an e-grade root:

ġiefu 'gift' (ġiefan 'to give')

Masculine n-stems

• male human beings

frēa 'lord'	hunta 'hunter'
ġerēfa 'reeve'	wītega 'prophet'

Note also þēowa, a byform of þēow.

• basic vocabulary

līchama 'body'	nama 'name'
mōna 'moon'	steorra 'star'

• nouns of general meaning

fruma 'beginning, origin'	tīma 'time'
intinga 'matter, business, cause'	

• secular affairs

    ġetruma 'troop'   plega 'exercise, sport, battle'

• religion

    ġelēafa 'belief'   willa 'will'

• abstract nouns

    ēaca 'addition, increase'   wela 'prosperity'

• common derivational types

Agent nouns of this class are frequently made from verbs; the zero grade of a strong verb
root is usually used if available. Note the following:

    ǣrendraca 'messenger' (reċċan 'to tell')

    boda 'messenger' (bēodan 'to announce')

    cuma 'stranger, guest' (cuman 'to come')

    dēma 'judge' (dēman 'to judge')

    ġefēra 'companion' (fēran 'to travel')

    heretoga 'general, commander' (tēon 'to lead')

    scaþa 'criminal, fiend' (sceþþan 'to harm')

    wita 'wise man, counsellor' (witan 'to know')

        ġewita 'witness'

Nouns of this class are also derived from other nominals (sometimes with i-umlaut), e.g.:

    cempa 'warrior' (camp; but note that both members of this derivational set were

        borrowed from Latin intact: PWGmc. *kamp ← *campus* 'battlefield',

        *kampijō ← *campiō*)

    flīema 'fugitive, exile, outlaw' (flēam 'flight')

    ġefylsta 'helper' (fylst 'help')

    þearfa 'poor man, beggar' (þearf)

    wǣdla 'poor man, beggar' (wǣdl 'poverty')

    wyrhta 'craftsman' (ġewyrht 'work')

Feminine n-stems

• female human beings

    cwene 'woman'   hlǣfdiġe 'lady'

    fǣmne 'unmarried woman, virgin'

• basic vocabulary

    eorþe 'earth'   sunne 'sun'

    heorte 'heart'   tunge 'tongue'

    molde 'soil, earth'

Note also heofone, a byform of heofon.

• religion

 ælmesse 'alms'   ċiriċe 'church'

• other nouns

 hǣte 'heat'   wīse 'way, manner, affair, condition'

Neuter n-stems

 ēage 'eye'   ēare 'ear'

Masculine u-stems

 feld 'field'   winter 'winter'

 sunu 'son'   wudu 'woods, forest'

Feminine u-stems

 duru 'door'   hand 'hand'

Masculine consonant stems

• human beings

 brōþor 'brother'   frēond 'friend'

 fæder 'father'   mann 'human being, man'

 fēond 'enemy'

• basic vocabulary

 fōt 'foot'   tōþ 'tooth'

 mōnaþ 'month'

• common derivational type

-end, originally the masc. present participial suffix, makes agent nouns, e.g.:

 hǣlend 'savior' (hǣlan 'to heal, save')

 wealdend 'ruler' (wealdan 'to rule')

 A considerable number of these occur only in poetry, e.g. hettend 'enemy' (hettan
  'to hate'), wīġend 'warrior' (wīgan 'to fight').

Feminine consonant stems

• female human beings

 dohtor 'daughter'   sweostor 'sister'

 mōdor 'mother'

• other nouns

  bōc 'book'   ēa 'river, stream'

  burg 'fortified town'   niht 'night'

Other nouns

  ealu 'ale' (neut.), g&dsg. ealoþ

  sǣ 'sea' (masc. a-stem / fem. ō-stem)