

Old French and Early Modern French

Here are a few hints to help you in reading Old and Renaissance French.

Then	Now	Then	Now
z	s		
s	z		
t	d		
d	t		
i	j	Iupiter, ieu	Jupiter, je
u	v		
v	u		
vv, uu	w		
oy	oi	roy	roi
oy	ai	françoys	français
ei	oi	rei	roy
k	qu	ki	qui
c	qu	c'on	qu'on
u	l	ciaus	ciels
l	u	halt	haut
g	j	ge	je
os (+ cons.)	ô	hospital	hôpital
es (+ cons.)	ê	feste	fête
es (initial)	é	escrit	écrit
m (nasalizing)	n	criems	crains

Spellings are highly variable until the 17th century, but particularly before the invention of printing. Variations can even occur in a single text.

There were no accents in Old French. There were, however, a number of abbreviations, such as ~ for *n*. These are generally written out in the Old French texts you will see, but the twelfth century readers would have been familiar with the short forms.

In Renaissance French there are few accents and punctuation is still not what it is in modern French. On the other hand, Renaissance French is not very different from modern French in grammar, vocabulary (except for archaic words), and pronunciation.

In Old French subject pronouns are often left out of sentences if it is clear who the subject is. This occasionally happens in Renaissance French poetry.

Reading a text aloud can help you figure it out. While Old French's pronunciation was different from Modern French, Renaissance French should read as though it were spelled in the modern way.

If you know Latin, this is obviously a big help. If you suspect a word in a medieval text has given rise to a certain modern word, look up the modern word in a big dictionary. If you are right, you may well see the Old French word in the word's etymology. For example, what does the word "cuer" make you think of in the context, "Purement mon cuer vous envoi"¹? If you think "Coeur" then look up that word and you will probably find an Old French form that is identical or similar to "cuer."

¹ Jean Bodel, Congress quoted in Bettholot and Cornilliat, *Litterature...*, p.64.

Old French and Renaissance French

Worksheet

Use this page to list spelling differences you find in the text(s) indicated

Renaissance	Modern	Renaissance French: your example	Modern French : your example
z	s	_____	_____
s	z	_____	_____
t	d	_____	_____
d	t	_____	_____
i	j	_____	_____
u	v	_____	_____
v	u	_____	_____
vv, uu	w	_____	_____
oy	oi	_____	_____
oy	ai	_____	_____
ei	oi	_____	_____
k	qu	_____	_____
c	qu	_____	_____
u	l	_____	_____
l	u	_____	_____
g	j	_____	_____

os

ô

es

ê

es

é

m

n
