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## The 'top 100' most commonly misunderstood words in Chaucer

Look over this 'top 100' when you read a Chaucer poem and you will usually avoid the most common mistakes and misunderstandings (there are, in fact, slightly more than 100 words listed). Notice that in many cases there are variant spellings ('c' and 'k' or 'i' and 'y' are more or less interchangeable; many verb forms occur both with and without the final 'n'), and there is usually more than one meaning to choose from, depending on the context.

**agayn, agaynes, ayein** against, towards, in return

**anoon** straightaway, immediately

**areden** (*past aredde, aradde*) to advise, explain

**arn** are

**auctoritee** authority, authoritative text, judgement

**avyes** advice; **avyesen** to consider, reflect, understand

**ay** always, all the time

**ben** to be

**bet** better

**bidden** (*past bad*) to command, order, ask

**biden, byden** (*past bood*) to wait, delay

**biheten, bihoten** (*past bihighte*) to promise

**bihoven** (*past bihoof*) to be necessary

**brouken** to enjoy, profit by

**can, connen, cunnen** (*past coude*) to know how to

**cas, caas** affair, chance; **per cas, par cas** by chance

**catel** goods, property

**clepen** to call, name

**crafty** skilful, clever

**curteisye** generosity, nobility (stronger than ‘courtesy’)

**daunger** disdain, stand-offishness (not ‘danger’)

**descryven** to describe

**dise** discomfort, displeasure (rarely ‘disease’)

**douten** to fear, doubt

**ech, ich, ych** each (but **ich** can also mean ‘I’)

**eek, eke** also, furthermore

**eft** afterwards, again

**ensample, ensauple** example, warning, model, pattern,  
moral tale

**entente** intention, meaning, desire

**er, or** earlier, before

**eschewen** to escape, avoid

**everich** every

**faren** (*past ferde*) to travel, behave, happen

**fayn, feyn** glad(ly), eager(ly)

**fer** far; **ferre(r)** farther; **ferreste** farthest

**for** for, because of, in spite of

**fre** noble, generous (rarely ‘free’)

**ful** very; **ful wel** very much

**gentil, gentillesse** noble, nobility (of rank or character)

**ginnen** (*past gan, gon*) to begin; also a general auxiliary (e.g.

**she gan wepe** she did weep)

**glosen** to comment, interpret, deceive

**goon** (*past yede*) to go

**habit** dress, mood (rarely ‘habit’)

**hap** chance occurrence; **happy** fortunate

**hastow** you have

**haten, heten, hoten** to promise, command, be called

**henten** to seize, obtain, attack

**here, hire** her, their (depending on context)

**heigh, hey, hy** high, noble

**hit** it

**hool** whole, perfect, healthy

**ich** I (but **ich** can also mean 'each')

**ilke, thilke** same, the same, that very

**ilik, yliche** like, alike, similar(ly)

**iwis, ywis** indeed, certainly

**kerven** (*past karf*) to cut, carve

**leten, laten** (*past leet*) to allow (do not confuse with the next word in this list, which looks similar but means the opposite)

**letten** (*past lette*) to prevent, desist

**lever(e)** rather; **him was levere** he would rather

**lewed** uneducated, coarse

**listeth, lesteth, lusteth** it is pleading, desirable to

**looth** displeasing, undesirable to

**merye, murye, myrie** merry, pleasant

**mete** (*past mette*) to meet; to dream

**moot** must, may

**mowen** to be able, to be allowed

**nadde** had not

**neigh, ney** near; **nerre** nearer; **nexte** nearest

**nerre** was not (but can also mean 'near', 'nearer')

**niste** did not know

**nyce** ignorant, foolish, meticulous (not 'nice')

**o, oo, on, oon** one, the same one

**or** before

**paraunter, paraventure** perhaps, by chance

**preef** proof, test, experience; **preven** to prove, test, experience

**privee, privy** secret, private, intimate

**queynte** skilful, cunning, elaborate

**quyten** (*past quitte*) to reward, pay back, set free

**reden** (*past redde, radde*) to read, advise, explain (occasionally **areden**)

**resoun** argument, speech

**reuthe, rewthe, routhe** pity, a pitiful happening

**reven** (*past rafte, refte*) to take away, rob

**seistow** you say (singular)

**sely** happy, innocent (not 'silly')

**siker(ly), seker(ly)** sure(ly)

**sooth, soothly** true, truth, truly

**sote, swote, swete,** sweet

**soveraynetee, sovereyntee** power, sovereignty

**speden** (*past spedde*) to carry out, succeed

**sin, syn, sithen** since

**swich** such

**thider** thither

**thilke** the same, that very

**tho** those, then

**treuthe, trouthe** fidelity, a promise, truth

**waxen, wexen** (*past wax, wex, wox*) to grow

**wenden** (*past wente*) to go, depart (do not confuse it with  
the next word in this list)

**wenen** (*past wende*) to suppose, imagine, expect

**whider** whither

**whilom** once upon a time, formerly

**witen, weten** (*present woot; past wiste*) to know, find out

**wonen** (*past woned*) to dwell, stay, be used to

**yede** went (past tense of **goon**)

**yeven, yiven** (*past yaf*) to give

**yif** if

**yliche** like, alike, similar(ly)

**ynogh, ynowe** enough, plenty

**yvel(e)** evil