

Early Modern English describes the form of the language used between the **late fifteenth century**, when printing arrived in England, and the **eighteenth century**, when new kinds of English began to emerge outside the British Isles.

How do we know about Early Modern English?

Printing meant that books were easier to get hold of than in Old English and Middle English times, and more people knew how to read and write. Therefore Early Modern English comes down to us in many thousands of printed books, pamphlets and manuscripts. The first English dictionaries and grammar books of English appeared during the Early Modern English period; the most important is Dr Johnson's of 1755. What Early Modern English sounded like can be worked out by comparing it with other languages and with later forms of English, and by studying rhymes. Furthermore, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, scholars began to write books on how English was pronounced.

What did people write in Early Modern English?

During this period, English was used for every purpose for which the language is used today: for letters, recipes and documents, for religious and political discussions, and for literature. During the Reformation knowing how to read and write was made a religious duty, and the *Authorised Version of the Bible* (or *King James Version*), published in 1611, was very influential. Drama also became popular, especially at the beginning of the seventeenth century; William Shakespeare (1564-1616) wrote in Early Modern English.



What does Early Modern English look like?

Here are some lines from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, as printed in 1623. There are some small differences from Present-Day English spelling, such as the use of 'u' where we would use 'v', and the doubling of final letters, for example *euill* 'evil'.

Antony — **Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears:
I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him:
The euill that men do, liues after them,
The good is oft interred with their bones,
So let it be with Cæsar. The Noble Brutus;
Hath told you Cæsar was Ambitious:
If it were so, it was a greeuous Fault,
And greeuously hath Cæsar answer'd it.**