The best way to explore “[w]ord roots in English, their history and development, meanings and combinations, usage and variations” is to get our research hands dirty in the annals of our language. This multi-part assignment will get you familiar with the resources available and bring you closer to the material through the close study of a small set of words across time.

The Words

You will need to pick 5–6 words with some coherent semantic or functional relationship. They could all be members of one of the categories listed below. They could be sets of pairs or triples (e.g., chair-seat or bed-couch-sofa). Avoid words which entered the language after 1800.

- government
- law
- war
- religion
- medicine
- clothing
- household furniture
- technology
- cooking implements
- eating terms

Your final choice of words is due October 17th.

The Tasks

One-Page Study

For this assignment, you will actually need to choose a seventh word to do a practice study on.

Part A: Find out the following etymological information about your word:

1. the etymological source (e.g. ON, OF, or Russian)
2. the form and meaning in the source language
3. the earliest written record (with spelling) in English
4. the earliest meaning and semantic history up to 1800
5. the primary meaning in CME
Part B: Take all your data from Part (A) and analyze one of the following for your word since its first use in English:

1. the meaning
2. the spelling (and associated phonological shifts)
3. the grammatical function

A good starting point for your research will be our friend the Oxford English Dictionary. Without further permission from me, the OED is the only online reference you can use. Other sources available at UB include: The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology; Anglo-Saxon dictionaries by Bosworth-Toller or Hall; Middle English dictionaries by Stratmann or Kurath and Kuhn; Le Robert: Dictionnaire Historique de la Langue Français; and the Oxford Latin Dictionary. Look in the reference section under PE200s (for the Englishes), PC2600s (for the French), and PA2300s (for the Latin).

Your study is due **October 24th**.

**Outline and Final Paper**

The first stage of research for your final paper is identical to Part (A) for the one-page study. This time, you’ll get to do it on all six words. Next, I’ll want you to do all three analyses in Part (B) on your words (to the extent that they apply).

Part C: Finally, the paper should be more than the sum of its parts. Look at all six of your words and try to group them according to similar reactions or changes uncovered in Parts (A) and (B). What sort of speculative conclusions can you draw from the data? External historical events could be quite crucial in this section.

A good outline will show that you’ve made progress towards your final paper. Completing Part (A) for all of your words or doing all the parts for several words are two possible steps in the right direction. I will want to see this on **October 31st**.

The final paper should be in my office at 10:00 AM on **November 19th**.

Don’t forget to include a “Works Cited” page.

**In-Class Presentation**

We will spend the week(s) after Thanksgiving on your presentation. Prepare to summarize your paper in a 7–10 minute talk for the rest of the class. You will probably want to focus on the special historical circumstances affecting your words and also their meaning changes across time. How does your study inform us about greater changes in English vocabulary and usage?