

## Why did Harold Godwinson lose the Battle of Hastings?

**William lands in England**    **William crowned king of England**    **Battle of Hastings**  
**Harold marches to meet William**    **Three claims but only one throne**    **Harold's difficult position**  
**Harold Godwinson attacks Harold Hardrada**    **William's plans for invasion**

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In 1066 the English King Edward the Confessor died. He had no son to follow him as king, so the Witan (a council of the most important men in the country) made Harold Godwinson king of England. Soon, however, Harold Godwinson was facing real problems. Within weeks he was in the difficult position of having two enemies to fight at the same time.

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William, Duke of Normandy, felt that he had a better claim to the throne than Harold. He prepared an army to invade England. At the same time, Harold Hardrada of Norway also got an army ready to invade England.

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William's success was that he was a good general and had much experience of war. His men were well armed and trained. He made sure they had good supplies of food, clothes and all the other equipment necessary for the invasion. William's plans for invasion were delayed by bad weather. For several weeks, the wind would not blow in the right direction for him to land his army in England.

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While William was waiting for the wind to change, Harold Hardrada landed his army in the North of England, near York. Harold Godwinson marched his army all the way up to the north to fight him. Harold Godwinson took Hardrada's army by surprise and defeated it. Harold Hardrada was killed.

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It was unfortunate for Harold Godwinson that his two enemies came from opposite ends of England. This was because as Harold celebrated his victory, the wind changed direction. William landed his army in the south of England, 300 miles away. Perhaps a wiser leader than Harold Godwinson might have rested his troops, after their long march and hard battle, but not Harold Godwinson.

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Harold marched back down south to meet William. As a leader, he was brave and impatient, rather than cunning and wise. He could have stopped in London to gather more troops and supplies, but he did not. Instead, he marched right down to Hastings, on the south coast, to fight William. This meant that many of his troops were exhausted by these long marches, and not in a good condition for fighting.

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At the Battle of Hastings, Harold and his men fought bravely. However, Harold made some mistakes as a general. Although his troops were in a strong position on top of Senlac Hill, they were too spread out for Harold to control them effectively. William was able to trick some of Harold's troops away from their strong position by getting his troops to pretend to run away. When part of Harold's forces ran after them, they were cut down. It was the turning point. This split in Harold's army enabled William to win the battle. Harold fought to the end, but was eventually killed.

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William built a castle at Dover, and brought in extra troops to replace his losses in the battle. When he felt strong enough he marched on London. Then he was crowned King of England on Christmas Day 1066.