

ENGLISH

Grammar: Prefixes and Suffixes



Prefixes and Suffixes

System of Affixation in English

In English, fixing a group of letters to a word to change its meaning, number, state or form is known as the **System of Affixation**.

| Base word | Affixation | Word |
|------------|------------------|---------------|
| determined | pre + determined | predetermined |
| play | play + er | player |
| weekly | bi + weekly | biweekly |
| follow | follow + ing | following |

There are two primary types of affixation:

- Prefix
- Suffix

Prefix

A prefix is a small group of letters which are affixed at the beginning of the word.

- **Subsidiary**
- **Nonviolence**
- **Intolerance**

They perform the following functions:

- Indicate presence or absence

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| amoral | without morals |
| injected | put into |
| congenital | present from birth |

- Indicate position

| | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| hypodermic | under the skin |
| circumnavigate | to sail around |
| antechamber | a chamber before another |
| Interstellar | between stars |

- Indicate qualities, size or number

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| thermometer | heat measuring instrument |
| macrocosm | big world or universe |
| polyglot | someone who speaks many languages |

- Indicates time, frequency or order

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| post dated | later than the stipulated date |
| redo | do again |
| primary | first |

Types of Prefixes

Negative Prefixes

| Prefix | Meaning | Usage |
|--------------|------------------|--|
| un- | not | uncomfortable, unbearable, unforgivable |
| in- | not | incomplete, indecisive, independent |
| dis- | opposite of | disinterested, disproportionate, displeasure |
| ir- | not | irresponsive, irresponsible, irrevocable |
| il- | not | illogical, illegitimate, illegible |
| im- | not | improbable, impossible, impenetrable |
| non- | not | nonviolent, nonchalant, non-invasive |
| mis- | wrong/wrongly | misinterpret, misunderstand, miscalculation |
| mis- | hate | misogynist, misogynist, misanthrope |
| mal- | bad/ badly | malfunction, malevolent, malediction, malnutrition |
| anti- | against | antination, antibacterial, antibiotics |
| de- | down, reduce | descend, decry, deject, demote, decline |
| a- | without, not | asocial, amorphous, abiotic, atrophy |
| dis- | apart, off, away | disband, disturb, disburse, dismiss |
| dys- | bad | dystopia, dysfunctional, dyslexia |

Prefixes of Size

| Prefix | Meaning | Usage |
|---------------|-------------|---|
| semi- | half | semicircle, semiconductor, semi-active, semicolon |
| equi- | equal | equidistant, equivalent, equisonant |
| micro- | small, tiny | microscope, microorganism, microcosm, micromanage |
| macro- | big | macroeconomics, macrocosm, macrolevel |
| mega- | big | megalomaniac, megapolis, megapixel |
| mini- | small | minimum, minicomputer, miniature |
| maxi- | big | maximum, maximal, maxim |
| hemi- | half | hemisphere |

Prefixes of Position or Location

| Prefix | Meaning | Usage |
|------------------------|-------------|---|
| inter- | between | interstellar, intermediate, interval, intervene |
| super- | over, above | superfluous, supersede, superintendent, supervisor |
| trans- | across | transfer, transport, transgress, transmit |
| ex- | out | exterior, external, extraneous, extract |
| in-/ im- | inside | internal, induce, imbibe, impregnate, influence |
| sub-, suc-, sus | under | subterranean, susceptible, submit, submarine |
| sur- | over | surface, surfeit, surrender, survive, surcharge |
| circum- | around | circumspect, circumnavigate, circumscribe, circumvent |
| peri- | around | perimeter, periscope, perimortem |
| per- | through | percolate, pervade, perfect, perforated, perceive |
| infra- | below | infrared, infravision, infrarealism |
| ab- | away | abduct, abstain, abjure, abdicate |
| contra- | against | contravene, contradict, contralto, contrast |
| de- | down | descend, decline, demote, decrease |
| dia- | across | diagonal, diaphanous, diachronical, diagnosis |
| hyper- | over | hypertrophy, hyperactivity, hyperbole, hypertension |
| hypo- | under | hypothermia, hypothyroid |
| ob- | against | obloquy, obnoxious, object, obfuscate |
| pro- | for | prologue, provide, protect, project, procreate |
| syn-, sym- | together | synthesis, syndicate, sympathy |
| ultra- | beyond | ultraviolet, ultramodern, ultra-royalist, ultrasonic |
| under- | under | underground, underachiever, underestimate |
| meta- | beyond | metastasis, metabolise, metamorphic, metaphysics |
| mid- | between | midterm, middle, midday |
| by- | near | bypass, bygone, by-product |
| epi- | upon | epidermis, epilogue, epitaph |
| post- | back | postern, posterior |

Prefixes of time and sequence

| Prefix | Meaning | Usage |
|---------------|---------|---|
| pre- | before | prevent, prepare, predict, premonition, prelude |
| ante- | before | antediluvian, antebellum |
| prime- | first | primary, primordial, prima donna, primate, primeval |
| post- | after | posterity, posthumous, postlude, post marital |
| retro- | before | retrogression, retroflex, retrospect |
| pro- | before | progenitor, proceed, prologue, prophecy, prophylactic |
| re- | again | recur, recount, rethink |
| fore- | before | foretell, forestall, foresight |
| after- | after | after-effects, afterthought |
| chron- | time | chronology, chronicle |

Prefixes of numbers and amount

| Prefix | Meaning | Usage |
|---------------------|----------|--|
| mono- | one | monotheism, monologue, monochromatic, monarch |
| uni- | one | universe, unitary, union, unanimous, unity |
| bi- | two | bicentennial, biannual, bicycle, bigamous, bipolar |
| du-, di- | two | duo, dual, dicotyledon, dichromatic |
| tri- | three | trident, tricolour, triumvirate, trifacta, trilogy, tripod |
| quad- | four | quadruple, quadruplets, quadrilateral, |
| tetra- | four | tetrapods, tetrameter, |
| penta- | five | pentagram, pentacle, pentagon |
| quint- | five | quintuplets, quintal |
| hex- | six | hexagon, hexadecimal, hexameter |
| sex- | six | sextuplets, sextet |
| sept- | seven | septuagenarian, septuplets |
| hept- | seven | heptagonal, heptathlon |
| octa- | eight | octagon, October, octopus, octuplets |
| nov- | nine | novena, November |
| dec- | ten | decade, decimal, decathlon |
| hendeca- | eleven | hendecacolic, hendecagonal |
| dodeca- | twelve | dodecahedron, dodecaphony |
| triskaideka- | thirteen | triskaidekaphobia |
| cent- | hundred | century, century, centipede |
| hector- | thousand | hector, hectogram |
| kilo- | thousand | kilogram |
| mega- | million | megaton, megahertz |
| giga- | billion | gigabyte |
| multi- | many | multimillionaire, multipurpose |
| poly- | many | polynomial, polygon, polymath |

Miscellaneous Prefixes

| Prefix | Meaning | Usage |
|------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| alb- | white | albino, albinism |
| ambi- | both | ambidextrous, ambivalent, ambiguous |
| amphi- | both | amphibian, amphitheatre |
| bio- | life | biology, biohazard, biosphere |
| auto- | self | automated, autonomous, autocrat |
| co-, com-, con- | together, joint | co-dependent, companion, congregation |
| en-, em- | make, become | engender, empower, endanger |
| eu- | good | euthanasia, eulogy, euphemism |
| cario- | heart | cardiovascular, cardiogram |
| hydr- | water | hydrogen, hydraulic, hydrophobia |
| ig- | bad | ignominy, ignoble, ignorant |
| bene- | good | benevolent, benediction, benign |
| bon- | good | bon voyage, bonhomie, bonafide |
| homo- | same | homonym, homophone, homeopathy |
| pan- | all | panacea, pan Asiatic, panorama |
| pseudo- | fake | pseudonym |
| neo-, nov- | new | neologism, novelty |
| amo-, ami- | love | amorous, amicable, amiable |
| aqua- | water | aqueduct, aquatic |

Suffix

A suffix is a group of letters which are fixed to the end of a root word or a base word.

They perform the following functions:

- Change the part of speech of the word

| | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| meaning (n) | meaningful (adj) |
| beautiful (adj) | beautifully (adv) |
| subject (n) | subjecting (v) |

- Indicate whether the number is singular or plural

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| girl (singular noun) | girls (plural noun) |
| stratum (singular noun) | strata (plural noun) |
| lifts (singular verb) | lift (plural verb) |

- Indicate the tense of the verb

| | |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| hopped (past) | hopping (continuous) |
| steal (past) | stolen (past participle) |

- Indicate the gender of a noun

| | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| host (masculine) | hostess (feminine) |
| steward (masculine) | stewardess (feminine) |
| executor (masculine) | executrix (feminine) |

Types of Suffixes

Noun Suffixes

| Suffix | Usage | Example |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| -al | state | refusal, betrayal, perusal |
| -ance, -ence, -ancy, -ency | quality or state | militancy, performance |
| -tion | condition | condition, relation |
| -ice | condition | malice, novice, justice |
| -er/-or | doer | painter, trainer, actor |
| -graph | record | telegraph, phonograph, polygraph |
| -ism | belief | Hinduism, communism, fascism |
| -ist | doer | pacifist, pianist, altruist |
| -ian | someone who does | Gandhian, guardian, politician |
| -ing | name of an activity | reading, gardening, sleeping |
| -ity | state | continuity, annuity, |
| -logy | the study | geology, neurology |
| -ship | state of | friendship, kinship, sportsmanship |
| -sion, -tion | process of | expansion, determination, connection |
| -ory | place | dormitory, reformatory, laboratory |
| -orium, -arium | place | sanitarium, aquarium, crematorium |
| -mania | madness | monomania, bibliomania, egomania |
| -phobia | fear | hydrophobia, cynophobia, mysophobia |
| -ure | state | composure, exposure, leisure |
| -ment | state | abandonment, refinement, entertainment |
| -ness | state | happiness, completeness, fullness |

Suffixes of Verbs

| Suffix | Usage | Example |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| -able | to make | enable, disable |
| -ate | Latin origin verbs | recreate, abate, mediate |
| -ed | simple past or participle form | killed, toyed, booked |
| -en | verbs formed from adjectives | broken, frozen, sunken |
| -er | actions that have repetitive quality | blabber, snicker, mutter |
| -fy | do | magnify, specify, rectify |
| -ing | action in continuation | hearing, yearning, making |
| -ise | to make/do | revolutionise, apologise, despise |
| -ish | become or do | flourish, banish, demolish |
| -nt | to do | prevent, augment, content |
| -s, -es | simple present tense form | criticises, runs, laughs |

Suffixes of Adjectives

| Suffix | Meaning | Usage |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| -able, -ible | having the quality of | flexible, available, eatable |
| -al | related to | ventral, global, musical |
| -ant | doing | dependent, buoyant, resilient |
| -ic | having the quality | terrific, generic, specific |
| -esque | like, having the quality | statuesque, picturesque |
| -er, -est | comparative and superlative qualities | fatter, tallest |
| -ose | full of | verbose, grandiose |
| -ful | full of | beautiful, boastful, grateful |
| -ing | participle form of adjective | interesting, frustrating, sleeping |
| -istic | having the quality | realistic, artistic, surrealistic |
| -ive | having the nature of | pensive, aggressive, massive |
| -ous, -ious | full of | gaseous, spacious, gracious |

Suffixes of Adverbs

| Suffix | Meaning | Usage |
|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| -ably | with a quality | comfortably, admirably, disagreeably |
| -ibly | with a quality | audibly, horribly, negligibly |
| -s | shows time or place | backwards, always, forwards |
| -wise | shows manner or position | clockwise, otherwise, lengthwise |

Root Words and Base Words

- The root word and the base words are the parts which contain the primary meaning of the word.
- Prefixes and suffixes are added to root and base words to create new words and ideas.

Root Word

- A root word cannot stand on its own as an independent word.
- It needs the addition of the prefix or the suffix for the completion of its meaning.
- For example, let us consider the words **amphibian**, **regeneration** and **subtraction**.

| | | |
|---------------|-------------|------------|
| amphi- | -bi- | -an |
| prefix | root | suffix |

| | | |
|------------|------------------|-------------|
| re- | -generat- | -ion |
| prefix | root | suffix |

| | | |
|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| sub- | -tract- | -ion |
| prefix | root | suffix |

- In the above cases, the roots **-bi-**, **-generat-** and **-tract-** cannot stand alone as individual words.
- They are therefore known as root words.

Base Word

- A base word, unlike a root word, can stand on its own like an independent word.
- It does not need the addition of the prefix or suffix in order to function as a stand-alone word.
- For example, let us consider the words **redone**, **nonviolent** and **unmoved**.

| | |
|------------|-------------|
| re- | done |
| prefix | base word |

| | |
|-------------|----------------|
| non- | violent |
| prefix | base word |

| | |
|------------|--------------|
| un- | moved |
| prefix | base word |

- In the above examples, done, violent and moved can function as independent words.

Common Root Words

| Root Word | Meaning | Usage |
|-----------------|--------------------|--|
| -acr-, -ac- | sharp, tip, bitter | acropolis, acronym, acrid, acerbic, acid, acne, acme |
| -ami-, -amo- | love, friendship | amity, amicable, amiable, amorous, paramour, enamoured |
| -anim- | life, mind | animate, animal, unanimous, equanimous, pusillanimous |
| -anthrop- | man, mankind | anthropology, misanthrope, anthropomorphic |
| -agog- | lead | demagoguery, pedagogy, synagogue |
| -alt- | high | altitude, altar, altiloquent |
| -alter- | other | alter ego, alternative |
| -apt-, -ept- | ability | aptitude, apt, adept, inept |
| -arch- | rule | monarch, oligarchy, autarchy, anarchy |
| -avi- | fly, bird | avian, aviation |
| -bell- | war, fight | rebel, bellicose, belligerent |
| -burs- | purse, money | reimburse, disburse, bursary |
| -cap-, -cept- | seize | capture, intercept |
| -cap- | head | capital, decapitate |
| -carn- | flesh | carnal, carnage, carnivorous |
| -cede-, -cess- | go | incessant, accede, recede |
| -cide- | kill | suicide, homicide, regicide, parricide, insecticide, pesticide |
| -clin-, -cliv- | slope | incline, recline, acclivity, declivity |
| -corp- | body | corpuscles, corporation, incorporation |
| -crat-, -cracy- | ruler | democrat, bureaucrat, theocracy |
| -cred- | belief | credibility, credit, credulous |
| -culp- | fault, guilt | culpable, culprit |
| -dic- | speak | dictation, dictator, dictionary |
| -doc- | teach | document, doctrine |
| -dol- | sadness | dolour, condolence, doleful |
| -duc- | lead | abduct, induct, ductile |
| -ego- | self | egocentric, egoist, egomaniac |
| -equ- | equal | equal, equality, equity |
| -fac-, -fic- | to do | factory, factory, fiction, manufacture |
| -fal- | false | fallacy, fallible, false |
| -fid-, -fed- | faith | fidelity, confederation, infidel |
| -flu-, -flux- | flow | fluvial, fluent, influx |
| -fort- | luck | fortuity, fortune |
| -fort- | strength | fort, fortitude, fortify |
| -gen- | birth | generation, genre, generate, genome, genetic |
| -grad- | step | gradual, grade |
| -graph- | write | graphic, graphology, biography |
| -grat- | please | grateful, gratitude |
| -grav-, -griev- | serious, sad | grave, grieve, aggravate |
| -greg- | crowd | gregarious, congregation, segregation |
| -gress- | go | progress, ingress, egress, congress |

| Root Word | Meaning | Usage |
|---------------------------|-------------------|--|
| -helio-, -heli- | sun | helium, heliocentric |
| -hol- | whole | holistic, holocaust |
| -ject-, -jet- | throw | jettison, eject, inject |
| -journ- | day | journal, journey, adjourn |
| -jud-, -jur- | law | judge, judicial, jury, abjure |
| -loc-, -loq- | speak | elocution, colloquial, loquacious |
| -log-, -logy- | study, word, sign | biology, zoology, neologism, logo |
| -luc- | light | translucent, lucid, pellucid |
| -man- | hand | manual, manufacture, manuscript |
| -magn- | large | magnanimous, magnificent, magnum |
| -mit-, -mis- | let, allow | admit, permission, intermittent |
| -med-, -mid- | middle | medieval, Mediterranean, middle, midday |
| -nom-, -nym- | name | anonymous, pseudonym |
| -nox-, -noc- | night, harmful | equinox, nocturnal, noxious, obnoxious, innocuous |
| -path- | feel | sympathy, empathy, antipathy |
| -phil- | love | philosopher, bibliophile |
| -photo- | light | photograph, photosynthesis |
| -scribe-, -script- | write | script, scribe, scribble, scripture |
| -sent-, -sense- | feel | sentimental, sensational, sensible |
| -soph- | wisdom | sophisticated, philosophy |
| -terr- | land | territory, territorial, terrestrial, terrain, terracotta |
| -vis-, -vid- | sight | visual, video |
| -vac- | empty | vacuum, vacation, vacant |
| -vol- | fly | volatile, volley |
| -zoo- | animal | zoology, zoophile, zoo |

How to Use the Affixation System

- Thorough knowledge of the English affixation system helps us in guessing the meaning of the word purely by the means of its **Prefix-Root-Suffix** structure.
- Because of the limitations of our memory, it is not easy to mug up a large number of words at a time.
- We may find it difficult to associate the meaning of the word with its structure.

| Word | Meaning |
|-------------|------------------------|
| innocuous | harmless |
| unanimous | together in agreement |
| translucent | allowing light to pass |

- With the knowledge of the affixation system, we can guess the meaning of the given word.

| Prefix | Root | Suffix | Meaning |
|------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| in- (not) | noc- (harmful) | -uous (having the quality of) | not harmful |
| uni- (one) | -anim- (war) | -ous (belonging to) | with a single mind (unitedly) |
| trans- (talk) | luc (light) | -ent (quality of) | light passing across |

In this manner, we can guess the meanings of the words solely by the virtue of their roots.

Thus, in order to have a rich vocabulary, students should learn the **Prefix-Root-Suffix** method. It is an interesting way to expand your vocabulary with a little effort. Students who are well-versed with the affixation system find it easier to tackle difficult words and are more confident about their word usage. It will definitely give you an edge over the others when it comes to vocabulary.