

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	antinational, 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, triffida, 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- prefix	-bi- root	-an suffix
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re- prefix	-generat- root	-ion suffix
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sub- prefix	-tract- root	-ion suffix
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- 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, oligarch, 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.