

AFFIXES

Spelling

ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC SUPPORT



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PURPOSE

Affixes can help:

- Reduce the number of words in a sentence
- Break down long words to make spelling easier
- Break down unfamiliar words to make them easier to understand



AFFIXES

Affixes are series of letters added to the beginning or end of a root word to change its meaning.

A **root word** is the base part of a word that may be written as it is or with one or more affixes attached to it.

In the word *unlikeable*, **like** is the root word and *un-*, and *-able* are affixes.

There are two types of affixes—prefixes and suffixes.

PREFIXES:

Prefixes are affixes that are attached to the **beginning** of a word. Prefixes can change a word's meaning in a number of ways. For example, they can create a word with an opposite meaning than the root word or intensify it.

Unhappy

(The prefix *un-* is attached to the root word *happy* to give it an opposite meaning, i.e., not happy)

Hyperactive

(The prefix *hyper-* is attached to the root word *active* to intensify its meaning, i.e., extremely active)

COMMON PREFIXES

Below are some common prefixes and their meanings.

Prefix	Meaning	Examples
<i>a</i>	without, not	<i>Amoral, atypical</i>
<i>anti-</i>	against/opposed to	<i>Antioxidant, anti-Communist, antiwar</i>
<i>auto-</i>	self	<i>autobiography, autopilot, automatic</i>
<i>co-</i> , <i>com-</i> , <i>con-</i>	with	<i>co-author, compatriot, contact</i>
<i>de-</i>	reverse or change	<i>de-activate, devalue, deprioritize</i>
<i>dis-</i>	reverse or remove	<i>disagree, disapprove, discredit</i>
<i>ex-</i>	out of, former	<i>extricate, extract, ex-wife, ex-Prime Minister</i>
<i>extra-</i> , <i>extro</i>	beyond	<i>extraordinary, extraterrestrial, extrovert</i>
<i>hyper-</i>	extreme	<i>hyperextend, hyperdrive</i>
<i>il-</i> , <i>im-</i> , <i>in-</i> , <i>ir-</i>	not	<i>illegal, impossible, insecure, irregular</i>

Prefix	Meaning	Examples
<i>inter-</i>	between	<i>international, interdisciplinary</i>
<i>intra-, intro</i>	inside	<i>intravenous, introvert, introspective</i>
<i>mis-</i>	incorrectly, badly	<i>mislead, misspelt, misinterpret, mistake</i>
<i>non-</i>	not	<i>non-smoking, nonstandard, non-negotiable</i>
<i>over-</i>	too much	<i>overcharge, overrate, overdo</i>
<i>post-</i>	after	<i>postwar, postoperative, postgraduate</i>
<i>pre-</i>	before	<i>prehistoric, pre-emptive, premodern</i>
<i>pro-</i>	in favour of	<i>prodemocracy, prochoice</i>
<i>re-</i>	again	<i>reconsider, redo, rewrite, re-enter, re-evaluate, recycle</i>
<i>sub-</i>	under, below	<i>submarine, sub-zero, substandard, subpar</i>
<i>super-</i>	above, beyond	<i>superhuman, supernatural, superstar</i>
<i>trans-</i>	across	<i>transatlantic, transfer, transfusion</i>
<i>un-</i>	remove, reverse, not	<i>undo, unpack, unlucky, unappreciative</i>

SUFFIXES:

Suffixes are affixes that are attached to the **end** of a word. Suffixes are most often used to modify a word by changing the class it belongs to.

Hopeful

(The suffix *-ful* modifies the noun *hope*, making it an adjective meaning “having hope”).

SUFFIX SPELLINGS:

Adding a suffix to a word can change the spelling of its root. Below are some common types of spelling changes:

1. -ful:

The suffix *-ful* changes the spelling of a root word ending in *-y* to an *i*

Beauty → Beautiful

Plenty → Plentiful

2. -ness:

The suffix *-ness* also changes the spelling of a root word ending in *-y* to an *i*

Happy → Happiness

Ugly → Ugliness

3. -ity:

The suffix *-ity* changes the spelling of a root word ending in *-le* to *-il*

Responsible → Responsibility

Able → Ability

4. -ion:

The suffix *-ion* changes the spelling of a root word ending in *-t* to *-ss*

Permit → Permission

Submit → Submission

COMMON SUFFIXES

Below are some common suffixes and their meanings.

Suffix	Meaning	Examples
-able, -ible	can be done	<i>manageable, edible</i>
-ed	past-tense verbs (weak verbs)	<i>walked, smiled</i>
-en	made of	<i>golden, wooden</i>
-en	to give a quality	<i>harden, weaken</i>
-er	comparative	<i>smaller, prettier</i>
-er, -or	one who	<i>manager, painter, actor, director</i>
-ese, -ian, ish	of a place	<i>Chinese, British, Canadian</i>
-est	Superlative (the most)	<i>largest, ugliest</i>
-ful	full of	<i>respectful, thoughtful, useful</i>
-ic	having characteristics of	<i>mathematic, futuristic</i>

-ing	verb form (present participle and gerund)	<i>reading, running</i>
-tion, -ation, -ition	act or process	<i>attention, education, attrition</i>
-ish	having the quality of	<i>childish, outlandish</i>
-ive, -ative, -itive	adjective form of a noun	<i>massive, creative, competitive</i>
-less	without	<i>limitless, careless</i>
-ly	adverb ending	<i>quickly, really</i>
-ness	state of, condition of	<i>kindness, openness</i>
-ous, -eous, -ious	possessing the qualities of	<i>enormous, righteous, cautious</i>
-s, -es	plural	<i>socks, houses, boxes</i>
-wise	in the manner of	<i>clockwise, lengthwise</i>
-y	characterized by	<i>wordy, sweaty, lucky</i>

HYPHENATION:

Some prefixes are attached to their root words with a hyphen. A hyphen is needed to attach a prefix to a proper noun and to facilitate spelling when a prefix is added to a word starting with a vowel.

Post-Cold-War

Ex-president

Re-examine

Suffixes are *never* attached with a hyphen.

Note: For more information on when hyphens should be used, see the “HYPHENS VS. DASHES” handout.



Sources:

(MLA 8th Edition)

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