



Prefixes, Suffixes, and Common Word Roots

A FAMILIARITY WITH COMMON prefixes, suffixes, and word roots can dramatically improve your ability to determine the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary words. The tables below list common prefixes, suffixes, and word roots; their meanings; an example of a word with that prefix, suffix, or word root; the meaning of that word; and a sentence that demonstrates the meaning of that word. Refer to this section often to refresh your memory and improve your vocabulary.

► Prefixes

Prefixes are syllables added to the beginning of words to change or add to their meaning. This table lists some of the most common prefixes in the English language. They are grouped together by similar meanings.

Prefix	Meaning	Example	Definition	Sentence
uni-	one	unify (v)	to form into a single unit, to unite	The new leader was able to unite the three factions into one strong political party.
mono-	one	monologue (n)	a long speech by one person or performer	I was very moved by the monologue in Scene III.
bi-	two	bisect (v)	to divide into two equal parts	If you bisect a square, you will get two rectangles of equal size.
duo-	two	duality (n)	having two sides or parts	The novel explores the duality of good and evil in humans.
tri-	three	triangle (n)	a figure having three angles	In an isosceles triangle , two of the three angles are the same size.
quadri-	four	quadruped (n)	an animal with four feet	Some quadrupeds evolved into bipeds.
tetra-	four	tetralogy (n)	series of four related artistic works, such as plays, operas, novels, etc.	“Time Zone” was the fourth and final work in Classman’s tetralogy .
quint-	five	quintuplets (n)	five offspring born at one time	Each quintuplet weighed less than four pounds at birth.
pent-	five	pentameter (n)	a line of verse (poetry) with five metrical feet	Most of Shakespeare’s sonnets are written in iambic pentameter .
multi-	many	multifaceted (adj)	having many sides	This is a multifaceted issue, and we must examine each side carefully.
poly-	many	polyglot (n)	one who speaks or understands several languages	It’s no wonder he’s a polyglot ; he’s lived in eight different countries.
omni-	all	omniscient (adj)	knowing all	My teacher must be omniscient ; she always knows when I’m not paying attention.
micro-	small	microcosm (n)	little or miniature world; something representing something else on a very small scale	Some people say that Brooklyn Heights, the Brooklyn district across the river from the Wall Street area, is a microcosm of Manhattan.
mini-	small	minority (n)	small group within a larger group	John voted for Bridget, but he was in the minority ; most people voted for Elaine.
macro-	large	macrocosm (n)	the large scale world or universe; any great whole	Any change to the microcosm will eventually affect the macrocosm .

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Prefix	Meaning	Example	Definition	Sentence
ante-	before	antechamber (n)	a smaller room leading into a larger or main room	The panel of jurors waited in the antechamber before entering the court room.
pre-	before	precede (v)	to come before in time or order	The appetizers preceded the main course.
post-	after	postscript (n)	message added after the close of a letter	His postscript was almost as long as his letter!
inter-	between	intervene (v)	to come between	Romeo, trying to make peace, intervened in the fight between Tybalt and Mercutio.
inter-	together	interact (v)	to act upon or influence each other	The psychologist took notes as she watched the children interact .
intra-	within	intravenous (adj)	within or into a vein	She could not eat and had to be fed intravenously for three days.
intro-	into, within	introvert (n)	a person whose attention is largely directed inward, toward himself or herself; a shy or withdrawn person	Unlike his flamboyant sister, quiet Zeke was a real introvert .
in-	in, into	induct (v)	to bring in (to a group)	She was inducted into the honor society.
ex-	out, from	expel (v)	to drive out or away	The rebels expelled the invaders.
circum-	around	circumscribe (v)	to draw a line around; to mark the limits of	She carefully circumscribed the space that would become her office.
sub-	under	subvert (v)	to bring about the destruction of, overthrow; to undermine	His attempt to subvert my authority will cost him his job.
super-	above, over	supervisor (n)	one who watches over	Alex accepted the promotion to supervisor and was comfortable with the duties and responsibilities of the office.
con-	with, together	consensus (n)	general agreement	After hours of debate, the group finally reached a consensus and selected a candidate.
non-	not	nonstop (adj, adv)	without a stop	With energy typical of the very young, the puppy ran nonstop through the house.
in-	not	invariable (adj)	not changing	The weather here is invariable —always sunny and warm.
un-	not, against	unmindful (adj)	not conscious or aware of; forgetful	For better or worse, he is unmindful of office politics.
contra-	against	contradict (v)	to state that (what is said) is untrue; to state the opposite of, be opposed to	I know we don't have to agree on everything, but she contradicts everything I say.

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anti-	against, opposite	antipode (n)	exact or direct opposite	North is the antipode of south.
counter-	against, opposing	counter-productive (adj)	working against production	Complaining is counterproductive .
dis-	not, away, opposite of	dispel (v)	to drive away; not having order	To dispel rumors that I was quitting, I scheduled a series of meetings for the next three months.
		disorderly (adj)	messy, untidy, uncontrolled or unruly	Two people were hurt when the disorderly crowd took control of the protest.
mis-	wrong, ill	misuse (v)	to use wrongly	She misused her authority when she reassigned Charlie to a new team.
mal-	bad, wrong, ill	maltreat (v)	to treat badly or wrongly	After the dog saved his life, he swore he would never maltreat another animal.
		malaise (n)	feeling of discomfort or illness	The malaise many women feel during the first few months of pregnancy is called “morning sickness.”
pseudo-	false, fake	pseudonym (n)	false or fake name	Mark Twain is a pseudonym for Samuel Clemens.
auto-	by oneself or by itself	automaton (n)	a robot; a person who seems to act mechanically and without thinking	The workers on the assembly line looked like automatons .
co-	together with; jointly	cohesive (adj)	having a tendency to bond or stick together; united	Though they came from different backgrounds and had many different interests, they have formed a remarkably cohesive team.

► Suffixes

Suffixes are syllables added to the ends of words to change or add to their meaning. This table lists some of the most common suffixes in the English language. They are grouped together by similar meanings.

Suffix	Meaning	Example	Definition	Sentence
-en	to cause to become	broaden (v)	to make more broad, widen	Traveling around the world will broaden your understanding of other cultures.
-ate	to cause to be	resuscitate (v)	to bring or come back to life or consciousness; to revive	Thanks to a generous gift from an alumnus, we were able to resuscitate the study-abroad program.

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-ify/-fy	to make or cause to be	electrify (v)	to charge with electricity	The singer electrified the audience with her performance.
-ize	to make, to give	alphabetize (v)	to put in alphabetical order	Please alphabetize these files for me.
-al	capable of, suitable for	practical (adj)	suitable for use; involving activity as distinct from study or theory	He has years of practical , on-the-job experience.
-ial	pertaining to	commercial (adj)	of or engaged in commerce	Commercial vehicles must have special license plates.
-ic	pertaining to	aristocratic (adj)	of or pertaining to the aristocracy	Though he was never rich or powerful, he has very aristocratic manners.
-ly	resembling, having the qualities of	tenderly (adv)	done with tenderness; gently, delicately, lovingly	He held the newborn baby tenderly in his arms.
-ly	in the manner of	boldly (adv)	in a bold manner	Despite his fear, he stepped boldly onto the stage.
-ful	full of	meaningful (adj)	significant, full of meaning	When Robert walked into the room with Annette, she cast a meaningful glance to me.
-ous/-ose	full of	humorous (adj)	full of humor, funny	His humorous speech received laughter and applause from the audience.
-ive	having the quality of	descriptive (adj)	giving a description	The letter was so descriptive that I could picture every place he had been.
-less	lacking, free of	painless (adj)	without pain, not causing pain	The doctor assured me that it is a painless procedure.
-ish	having the quality of	childish (adj)	like a child; unsuitable for a grown person	He didn't get the job because of his childish behavior during the interview.
-ance/ -ence	quality or state of	tolerance (n)	willingness or ability to tolerate a person or thing	He has a high level of tolerance for rudeness.
-acy	quality or state of	indeterminacy (n)	state or quality of being undetermined (without defined limits) or vague	The indeterminacy of his statement made it impossible to tell which side he favored.
-tion	act, state or condition of	completion (n)	the act of completing; the state of being completed or finished	The second siren signaled the completion of the fire drill.
-or/-er	one who does or performs the action of	narrator (n)	one who tells the story, gives an account of	A first-person narrator is usually not objective.

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Suffix	Meaning	Example	Definition	Sentence
-atrium/ -orium	place for	arboretum (n)	a garden devoted primarily to trees and shrubs	They built a deck with an arboretum for their bonsai tree collection.
-ary	place for, pertaining to	sanctuary (n)	a sacred place, refuge	With three noisy roommates, Ellen frequently sought the quiet sanctuary of the library.
-cide	kill	pesticide (n)	substance for killing insects	This pesticide is also dangerous for humans.
-ism	quality, state or condition of; doctrine of	optimism (n)	belief that things will turn out for the best; tendency to take a hopeful view of things	Her optimism makes people want to be around her.
-ity	quality or state of	morality (n)	state or quality of being moral	He argued that the basic morality of civilized societies hasn't changed much over the centuries.
-itis	inflammation of	tonsillitis (n)	inflammation and infection of the tonsils	Her tonsillitis was so severe that doctors had to remove her tonsils immediately.
-ment	act or condition of	judgment (n)	ability to judge or make decisions wisely; act of judging	He exercised good judgment during the meeting and did not challenge his supervisor.
-ology	the study of	zoology (n)	the scientific study of animal life	Because of her strong interest in zoology , she took an unpaid summer job at the zoo.

► Common Latin Word Roots

Many words in the English language have their origins in Latin. The table below shows the original Latin words that have been used to create various English words. The Latin words serve as roots, providing the core meaning of the words. Prefixes, suffixes, and other alterations give each word its distinct meaning. The word roots are listed in alphabetical order.

Root	Meaning	Example	Definition	Sentence
amare	to love	amorous (adj)	readily showing or feeling love	She told him to stop his amorous advances as she was already engaged.
audire	to hear	audience (n)	assembled group of listeners or spectators; people within hearing	The audience listened intently to the riveting speaker.
bellum	war	antebellum (adj)	before the war	In American history, antebellum refers to the period before the Civil War.

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capere	to take	captivate (v)	to capture the fancy of	The story captivated me from the beginning; I couldn't put the book down.
dicere	to say, speak	dictate (v)	to state or order; to say what needs to be written down	She began to dictate her notes into the microphone.
duco	to lead	conduct (v)	to lead or guide (thorough)	He conducted a detailed tour of the building.
equus	equal	equilibrium (n)	a state of balance	I have finally achieved equilibrium between work and leisure.
facere	to make or do	manufacture (v)	to make or produce	The clothes are manufactured here in this factory.
lucere	to light	lucid (adj)	very clear	No one could possibly have mis-understood such a lucid explanation.
manus	hand	manicure (n)	cosmetic treatment of the fingernails	A manicure is not only important hygiene, but clean and neat nails also tell a great deal about a person.
medius	middle	median (n)	middle point; middle in a set of numbers	The median household income in this wealthy neighborhood is \$89,000.
mittere	to send	transmit (v)	to send across	The message was transmitted over the intercom.
omnis	all, every	omnipresent (adj)	present everywhere	That top-40 song is omnipresent ; everywhere I go, I hear it playing.
plicare	to fold	application (n)	putting one thing on another; making a formal request	His loan application was denied because of his poor credit history.
ponere/ positum	to place	position (n)	the place a person or thing occupies	Although he is only 22, he holds a very powerful position in the company.
protare	to carry	transport (v)	to carry across	The goods will be transported by boat.
quarere	to ask, question	inquiry (n)	act of inquiry, investigation, or questioning	The inquiry lasted several months but yielded no new information.
scribere	to write	scribe (n)	person who makes copies of writings	The scribe had developed thick calluses on his fingers from years of writing.
sentire	to feel	sentiment (n)	personal experience; one's own feeling	After reading the collection of letters, it was easy to tell the sentiments of the writer.

Root	Meaning	Example	Definition	Sentence
specere	to look at	spectacle (n)	striking or impressive sight	The debate was quite a spectacle ; the candidates made accusations about each other that were unexpected and slightly unprofessional.
spirare	to breathe	respiration (n)	the act of breathing	His respiration was steady, but he remained unconscious.
tendere	to stretch	extend (v)	to make longer, stretch out	Please extend the deadline by two weeks so we can complete the project properly.
verbum	word	verbatim (adj)	word for word	The student failed because she had copied an article verbatim instead of writing her own essay.

► Common Greek Word Roots

Many English words have their origins in the ancient Greek language. The table below shows the Greek words that have been used to create various English words. The Greek words serve as roots, providing the core meaning of the words. Prefixes, suffixes, and other alterations give each word its distinct meaning. The word roots are listed in alphabetical order.

Root	Meaning	Example	Definition	Sentence
bios	life	biology (n)	the science of living organisms	He is majoring in biology and plans to go to medical school.
chronos	time	chronological (adj)	arranged in the order in which things occurred	The story is confusing because she did not put the events in chronological order.
derma	skin	dermatology (n)	branch of medical science dealing with the skin and its diseases	She has decided to study dermatology because she wants to find a cure for skin cancer.
gamos	marriage, union	polygamy (n)	the practice or custom of having more than one spouse or mate at a time	Polygamy is illegal in the United States.
genos	race, sex, kind	genocide (n)	the deliberate extermination of one race of people	The recent genocide in Bosnia has created a crisis in orphaned children.
geo	earth	geography (n)	the study of the Earth's surface; the surface or topographical features of a place	The geography of this region made it difficult for the different tribes to interact.
graphein	to write	calligraphy (n)	beautiful or elegant handwriting	She used calligraphy to address her wedding invitations.

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Root	Meaning	Example	Definition	Sentence
krates	member of a group	democrat (n)	one who believes in or advocates democracy as a principle of government	I have always been a democrat , but I refuse to join the Democratic Party.
kryptos	hidden, secret	cryptic (adj)	concealing meaning, puzzling	He left such a cryptic message on my answering machine that I don't know what he wanted.
metron	to measure	metronome (n)	device with a pendulum that beats at a determined rate to measure time/rhythm	She used a metronome to help her keep the proper pace as she played the song.
morphe	form	polymorphous (adj)	having many forms	Most mythologies have a polymorphous figure, a "shape shifter" who can be both animal and human.
pathos	suffering, feeling	pathetic (adj)	arousing feelings of pity or sadness	Willy Loman is a complex character who is both pathetic and heroic.
philos	loving	xenophile (n)	a person who is attracted to foreign peoples, cultures, or customs	Alex is a xenophile ; I doubt he'll ever come back to the States.
phobos	fear	xenophobe (n)	person who fears or hates foreigners or strange cultures or customs	Don't expect Len to go on the trip; he's a xenophobe .
photos	light	photobiotic (adj)	living or thriving only in the presence of light	Plants are photobiotic and will die without light.
podos	foot	podiatrist (n)	an expert in diagnosis and treatment of ailments of the human foot	The podiatrist saw that the ingrown toenail had become infected.
psuedein	to deceive	pseudonym (n)	false name	George Eliot is a pseudonym for Mary Ann Evans.
pyr	fire	pyromaniac (n)	one who has a compulsion to set things on fire	The warehouse fire was not an accident; it was set by a pyromaniac .
soma	body	psychosomatic (adj)	of or involving both the mind and body	In a psychosomatic illness, physical symptoms are caused by emotional distress.
tele	distant	telescope (n)	optical instrument for making distant objects appear larger and nearer when viewed through the lens	While Galileo did not invent the telescope , he was the first to use it to study the planets and stars.
therme	heat	thermos (n)	insulated jug or bottle that keeps liquids hot or cold	The thermos kept my coffee hot all afternoon.