Prefixes and Suffixes

What do you do when you find a new word in English? Before you reach for your dictionary, do you try to figure out what it means? Long words are often made from shorter words that you know, combined with a few letters at the beginning (a prefix), or a few letters at the end (a suffix).

Prefixes generally change the meaning of a word, and suffixes change its part of speech (whether it is a noun, a verb, an adjective, or an adverb). Below you can find a list of prefixes and suffixes with their meanings and use.

Prefixes

- **a-** not; without: *atypical, amoral*
- **aero-** connected with air or aircraft: *aerodynamic*
- **agro-, agri-** connected with farming: *agro-industry*
- **all-** 1 completely: *an all-inclusive price*  
  2 in the highest degree: *all-important, all-powerful*
- **ambi-** referring to both of two: *ambivalent*
- **ante-** before; in front of: *antedate*
- **anthropo-** connected with human beings: *anthropology*
- **anti-** against: *antiwar*
- **arch-** main; most important or most extreme: *archbishop*
- **astro-** connected with the stars or outer space: *astrophysics*
- **audio-** connected with hearing or sound: *audio-visual*
- **auto-** 1 about or by yourself: *autobiography* (= the story of the writer’s own life)  
  2 by itself, without a person to operate it: *automatic*
- **be-** 1 to make or treat someone or something as: *They befriended him,*  
  2 wearing or covered with: *bejeweled*
- **bi-** two; twice; double: *bilingual, bicentennial*
- **biblio-** connected with books: *bibliography*
- **bio-** connected with living things or human life: *biodegradable*
- **by-** 1 less important: a byproduct  
  2 near: *a bystander*
- **cardio-** connected with the heart: *cardiology*
- **centi-** hundred; hundredth: *centipede, centimeter* (= one hundredth of a meter)
- **chrono-** connected with time: *chronology*
- **circum-** around: *circumnavigate* (= sail around)
- **co-** together with: *copilot, coexist*
- **con-** with; together: *concurrent*  
  (= happening together)
- **contra-** against; opposite: *contradict* (= say the opposite)
- **counter-** against; opposite: *counterterrorism, counterproductive* (= producing the opposite of the desired effect)
- **cross-** involving movement or action from one thing to another or between two things: *cross-fertilize*
- **crypto-** hidden; secret: *a cryptogram* (= a text written in code)
- **cyber-** connected with electronic communication, especially the Internet: *cybercafé*
- **de-** 1 the opposite of: *decompress*  
  2 taking something away: *decaffeinated coffee*
- **deca-** ten; having ten: *decathlon*
- **deci-** one tenth: *deciliter*
- ** demi-** half; partly: *demigod*
- **demo-** connected with people or population: *democracy*
- **di-** used in chemistry to refer to substances that contain two atoms of the type mentioned: *dioxide*
- **dis-** not; the opposite of: *discontinue, disarmament*
- **e-** connected with the use of electronic communication, especially the Internet, for sending information, doing business, etc.: *e-commerce*
- **eco-** connected with the environment: *eco-friendly*
- **electro-** connected with electricity: *electromagnetism*
- **em-, em-** 1 to put into the thing or condition mentioned: *endanger, empower*  
  2 to cause to be: *enlarge, embolden*
- **equi-** equal; equally: *equidistant*
- **Euro-** connected with Europe or the European Union: *Euro-elections*
- **ever-** always; continuously: *the ever-growing problem of pollution*
Prefixes and Suffixes

ex- former: ex-wife
eextra- 1 outside; beyond: extraterrestrial
(= from somewhere beyond the earth)
2 very; more than usual: extrathin
fore- 1 before; in advance: foreword (= at the beginning of a book) 2 in front of:
foreground (= the front part of a picture)
geo- of the earth: geoscience
hemo- connected with blood: hemophilia
hepta- seven; having seven: heptathlon
(= an athletics competition that consists of seven different events)
hetero- other; different: heterogeneous
hexa- six; having six: hexagonal
homo- the same: homogeneous
hydr(o)- 1 connected with water:
hydroelectricity 2 connected with or mixed with hydrogen: hydroxide
hyper- more than normal; too much:
hypersensitive
hypo- under; below normal: hypodermic (= under the skin)
ill- badly or wrongly: You would be ill-advised to drive until you have fully recovered.
in-, il-, im-, ir- not; the opposite of: incorrect, illegal, impatient, irregular
info- connected with information: an infomercial (= a TV commercial that gives information about a subject)
intra- below a particular limit: infrared
inter- between; from one to another:
interaction
intra- inside; within: intravenous
iso- equal: isotope
kilo- thousand: kilogram
macro- large; on a large scale:
macroeconomics
mal- bad or badly; not correct or correctly:
malnutrition
many- having a lot of the thing mentioned: a many-sided shape
mega- 1 very large or great: a megastore 2 one million: a megawatt
meta- 1 connected with a change of position or state: metamorphosis
2 higher; beyond: metaphysics
micro- small; on a small scale: microchip
mid- in the middle of: midafternoon
milli- thousandth: millisecond
mini- very small: miniskirt
mis- bad or wrong; badly or wrongly:
misbehavior, misunderstand
mono- one; single: monolingual (= using one language), monorail
multi- many; more than one: multicolored, a multimillionaire
nano- (especially in units of measurement)
one billionth (= one of one thousand million equal parts of something): a nanosecond
near- almost: a near-perfect performance
neo- new; in a later form: neoclassical
neuro- connected with the nerves:
neuroscience
non- not: nonbiodegradable, nontoxic
nona- nine; having nine: nonagenarian (= a person who is between 90 and 99 years old)
octa-, octo- eight; having eight: octagon (= a shape with eight sides), octogenarian
off- not on; away from: offstage
omni- of all things; in all ways or places:
omnivore
ortho- correct; standard: orthography
osteo- connected with bones: osteopath
out- 1 greater, better, further, longer, etc.: outdo, outrun 2 outside; away from:
outpatient
over- 1 more than normal; too much: overeat 2 completely: overjoyed
3 upper; outer; extra: overcoat, overtime 4 over; above: overhang
paleo- connected with ancient times:
paleontology
pan- including all of something; connected with the whole of something: pan-African
para- 1 beyond: paranormal 2 similar to but not official or not fully qualified: a paramedic
patho- connected with disease: pathology
ped- connected with children: pediatrics
penta- five; having five: pentagon, pentathlon (= a competition involving five different sports)
petro- 1 connected with rocks: petrology 2 connected with petroleum: petrochemical
philo-, phil- liking: philanthropist
phono- connected with sound or sounds:
phonetic, phonology
photo- 1 connected with light: photosynthesis 2 connected with photography:
photocopier
physio- 1 connected with nature 2 connected with physiology (= the way in which living things function, and the scientific study of this)
poly- many: polygamy (= having more than one wife or husband at the same time)
Prefixes and Suffixes

post- after: postwar
pre- before: prepay, preview
pro- in favor of; supporting: pro-democracy
proto- original; from which others develop: prototype
pseudo- not genuine; false or pretended: pseudonym
psycho- connected with the mind: psychology
quad-, quadri- four; having four: quadruple (= multiply by four), quadrilateral
quasi- 1 that appears to be something but is not really so: a quasi-scientific explanation 2 partly; almost: a quasi-official body
radio- 1 connected with radio waves or the activity of sending out radio or television programs (= broadcasting): a radio-controlled car 2 connected with radioactivity (= powerful and very dangerous rays that are produced when atoms are broken up): radiographer
re- again: rewrite, reappearance
retro- back or backwards: retrospective
self- of, to, or by yourself or itself: self-control
semi- half: semicircle, semifinal
septa- seven; having seven
socio- connected with society or the study of society: socio-economic
step- related as a result of one parent marrying again: stepmother
sub- 1 below; less than: subzero 2 under: subway 3 making a smaller part of something: subdivide
super- 1 extremely; more or better than normal: superhuman 2 above; over: superstructure, superimpose
techno- connected with technology: technophobe (= a person who is afraid of technology)
tele- 1 over a long distance; far: telepathy, telescopic 2 connected with television: telemarketing
theo- connected with God or a god: theology
thermo- connected with heat: thermonuclear
trans- 1 across; beyond: transatlantic 2 into another place or state: transplant
tri- three; having three: triangle
ultra- extremely; beyond a certain limit: ultramodern
un- not; the opposite of: unable, unlock
under- 1 below: underground 2 lower in age, level, or position: underage 3 not enough: undercooked food
uni- one; having one: uniform, unilaterally
up- higher; upwards; towards the top of something: upturned

Suffixes

-able, -ible, -ble (to make adjectives) possible to: acceptable, noticeable, divisible (= possible to divide), irresistible (= that you cannot resist)
-age (to make nouns) a process or state: storage, shortage
-al (to make adjectives) connected with: experimental, environmental
-anence, -ancy, -ency (to make nouns) an action, process, or state: appearance, existence, pregnancy, efficiency
-ant, -ent (to make nouns) a person who does something: assistant, student
-ation (to make nouns) a state or an action: examination, organization
-ble ➔ -able
-centric (to make adjectives) concerned with or interested in the thing mentioned: egocentric
-cracy (to make nouns) the government or rule of: democracy
-ectomy (to make nouns) a medical operation in which part of the body is removed: appendectomy (= removal of the appendix)
-ed (to make adjectives) having a particular state or quality: bored, patterned
-ee (to make nouns) a person to whom something is done: employee (= sb who is employed), trainee (= sb who is being trained)
en- (to make verbs) to give something a particular quality: shorten, blacken, loosen, lengthen
-ence, -ency ➔ -ance
-ent ➔ -ant
-er (to make nouns) a person who does something: rider, painter, banker, driver, teacher
-ese (to make adjectives) from a place: Japanese, Chinese, Viennese
-ess (to make nouns) a woman who does something as a job: waitress, actress
-fold (to make adjectives and adverbs) multiplied by; having the number of parts mentioned: to increase tenfold
-free (to make adjectives) without the thing mentioned: fat-free, tax-free

-ful (to make adjectives) having a particular quality: helpful, useful, beautiful

-graphy (to make nouns) 1 a type of art or science: geography 2 a method of producing images: radiography 3 a form of writing or drawing: biography

-hood (to make nouns) 1 a state, often during a particular period of time: childhood, motherhood 2 a group with something in common: sisterhood, neighborhood

-ial (to make adjectives) typical of: dictatorial

-ian (to make nouns) a person who does something as a job or hobby: historian, comedian

-ible ➔ -ABLE

-ic 1 (to make adjectives and nouns) connected with: economic, Arabic 2 (to make adjectives) that performs the action mentioned: horrific

-ics (to make nouns) the science, art, or activity of: physics, athletics

-ical (to make adjectives from nouns ending in -y or -ics) connected with: economical, mathematical, physical

-ide (to make nouns) (in chemistry) a compound of: chloride

-ify (to make verbs) to produce a state or quality: beautify, simplify, purify

-ing (to make adjectives) producing a particular state or effect: interesting

-ion (to make nouns) a state or process: action, connection, exhibition

-ish (to make adjectives) 1 describing nationality or language: English, Polish 2 fairly, kind of: longish, brownish

-ist (to make nouns) 1 a person who has studied something or does something as a job: artist, scientist 2 a person who believes in something or belongs to a particular group: capitalist, pacifist

-ite (to make nouns and adjectives) a person who follows or supports; following: Trotskyite

-ity (to make nouns) the quality or state of: purity

-ive (to make adjectives) having a particular quality: attractive, effective

-ize (to make verbs) producing a particular state: magnetize, standardize

-legged (to make adjectives) having the number or type of legs mentioned: three-legged, long-legged

-less (to make adjectives) not having something: hopeless

-like (to make adjectives) similar to: childlike

-looking (to make adjectives) having the appearance mentioned: odd-looking, good-looking

-ly (to make adverbs) in a particular way: badly, beautifully

-ment (to make nouns) a state, action, or quality: development, arrangement, excitement

-most (to make adjectives) the furthest: southernmost, topmost (= the farthest up/ the nearest to the top)

-ness (to make nouns) a state or quality: kindness, happiness

-oid (to make adjectives and nouns) similar to: humanoid

-ology (to make nouns) the study of a subject: biology, zoology

-or (to make nouns) a person who does something, often as a job: actor, conductor

-ory 1 (to make adjectives) that does: explanatory 2 (to make nouns) a place for: observatory

-ous (to make adjectives) having a particular quality: dangerous, religious

-phile 1 (to make adjectives) liking a particular thing: Francophile 2 (to make nouns) a person who likes a particular thing: bibliophile

-philia (to make nouns) love of something

-phobe (to make nouns) a person who dislikes a particular thing or particular people: technophobe

-phobia (to make nouns) a fear of the thing mentioned: claustrophobia

-proof (to make adjectives) able to protect against the thing mentioned: soundproof

-ship (to make nouns) showing status: friendship, membership, citizenship

-ward, -wards (to make adverbs) in a particular direction: backward, upwards

-ways (to make adjectives and adverbs) in the direction of: lengthways

-wise (to make adjectives and adverbs) 1 in the manner or direction of: clockwise 2 concerning: Things aren’t too good businesswise.

-y (to make adjectives) having the quality of the thing mentioned: rainy, fatty, thirsty