

Prefixes: creating new meanings

A

Preposition-based prefixes: different meanings

Over- may indicate (a) an excess of something, or (b) something that covers or dominates something, or (c) the crossing of some kind of barrier.

- (a) **EXCESS** That film was **overrated** in my view. [people said it was better than it really was]
It was a bad restaurant, with an **overpriced** menu. [too high prices]
- (b) **COVER** In this program, you can choose to **overwrite** the existing file or to save it as a new file. [cover/replace the old text with the new text]
Our garden is **overshadowed** by the block of flats next door. [the flats cast a shadow over our garden]
She always felt **overshadowed** by her older, more successful, sister.
[metaphorical use, felt less important than]
- (c) **CROSS** He **overstepped** the mark when he said that. [crossed a barrier into offensive/unacceptable behaviour]
Will you be staying **overnight**? [from one day to the next]

Under- may indicate (a) less than the desired amount, or (b) something below another thing or (c) some kind of negative behaviour.

- (a) **LESS** Don't **underestimate** the time it will take. [think it will be less than it really is]
The company is seriously **understaffed**. [lacking staff]
- (b) **BELOW** It's quite wet **underfoot**. Did it rain last night? [on the ground, beneath your feet]
The **underlying** question is a very difficult one. [the deeper question]
- (c) **NEGATIVE** I wish you would not **undermine** everything I do. [attack, weaken]
He did it in a very **underhand** way. [secretly and possibly dishonestly]

Up- can suggest a change of some kind, often positive.

- The airline **upgraded** me to business class. [changed my ticket to a better class]
- There has been an **upturn** in the economy. [sudden change for the better]

Cross- (from *across*) usually indicates a link between two separated things.

- Cross-border** cooperation has led to a number of arrests of drug smugglers.
[across the frontiers of two or more countries]
- Cross-cultural** misunderstandings often happen. [between people of different cultures]

B

Less frequent prefixes

Con-/com- often suggests mixing things together. It often occurs in verbs of communication.
converse commiserate condolences congeal contaminate

E- can give the idea of something coming out of something.

- They were **ejected** from the restaurant for bad behaviour. [formal: thrown out]
- The machine **emitted** a loud noise and then stopped working. [formal: gave out]

A(d)- often means adding something to something or that things are connected. Sometimes the 'd' is replaced by doubling the following consonant.

- The building is **adjacent to** / **adjoins** the hotel. [formal: is next to]
- She gave me an **annotated** edition of Shakespeare's works. [with notes added]

Pro- can often suggest pushing something forward or increasing it.

- promote proliferate procrastinate procreate**

Exercises

- 2.1** Decide which of the meanings of *over-* and *under-* are most obvious in the words in bold. Use the labels (a), (b) or (c), as in A opposite. Circle the correct letter. Use a dictionary if necessary.

- 1 I really think she **overstated** her case, and lost a lot of sympathy.
- 2 The plane's **undercarriage** failed to open and it crashed.
- 3 A detailed list of awards is given **overleaf**.
- 4 He has a very **overbearing** personality.
- 5 The project was **underfunded** from the outset.
- 6 During the cruise, a child fell **overboard** and drowned.

<input checked="" type="radio"/> a	b	c
a	b	<input checked="" type="radio"/> c
a	<input checked="" type="radio"/> b	c
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a	<input checked="" type="radio"/> b	c
a	b	<input checked="" type="radio"/> c

- 2.2** Rewrite these sentences using words from the opposite page.

EXAMPLE Cooperation across the frontier has been very good.

Cross-border cooperation has been very good.

- 1 The hotel gave me a luxury room instead of the ordinary one I'd booked.
- 2 Would you like to spend the night there or come back the same day?
- 3 The problem that lies under the surface is a very serious one.
- 4 Misunderstandings between cultures are, sadly, very frequent.
- 5 I think this hotel charges too much.
- 6 It's slippery walking just here. Be careful.
- 7 The company experienced a rise in popularity since it changed its name.
- 8 I felt that what she said was critical of my position and weakened it somewhat.
- 9 It would be a mistake to think Frances was less intelligent than she really is.

- 2.3** Which of these words may be used with the prefix *a(d)-* as in B opposite? Circle YES or NO. How is the prefixed word written? Use a dictionary if necessary.

EXAMPLE	fix	<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	NO	<u>affix</u>
1	locate	YES	NO
2	verse	YES	NO
3	state	YES	NO
4	mission	YES	NO
5	pertain	YES	NO
6	minister	YES	NO
7	drain	YES	NO

- 2.4** Write sentences to illustrate the meaning of these words. Use a dictionary if necessary.

1 promote 2 proliferate 3 procrastinate 4 procreation

- 2.5** What is the approximate meaning of the prefixes highlighted in the following words? Use a dictionary if necessary.

- 1 abdicate abscond abduct
- 2 ablaze afloat adrift
- 3 extraterrestrial extraneous extracurricular
- 4 interrelated interdepartmental Internet
- 5 intravenous intradepartmental intranet

Suffixes: productive suffixes and word classes

A Productive suffixes

Some suffixes are **productive** [used to create new words]. You therefore need to understand their meaning if you are reading contemporary English. You might also feel adventurous enough to try **coining** [creating] some words of your own! The meaning of the example words below is clear from the meanings of the root and the suffix. (In the word **washable**, **wash** is the root and **able** is the suffix.)

-able can be used productively, whereas **-ible** never is. It combines with verbs to form adjectives. Note that **-able** means 'can be': a **washable** jacket is one that can be washed. **disposable** nappies, **predictable** results, **avoidable** problems, a **manageable** situation

-conscious combines with nouns to form adjectives that describe people who consider one aspect of their lives especially important: **health-conscious** person, **class-conscious** society, **safety-conscious** company, **time-conscious** workforce

-esque combines with the names of famous people to form adjectives that describe something or someone similar in style: **Picasso-esque** paintings

-free combines with nouns describing something undesirable to form adjectives to describe nouns without that undesirable aspect: **stress-free** life, **tax-free** shop, **additive-free** food

-rich combines with nouns (often chemical or organic substances) to form adjectives to describe nouns with a lot of that substance: **fibre-rich** diet, **calcium-rich** foods

-led combines with nouns and nationality adjectives to form adjectives describing things that are controlled or influenced by the original noun or nationality: **community-led** initiative, **student-led** protest, **worker-led** uprising

-minded combines with adjectives or nouns to form new adjectives describing people with particular characters, opinions or attitudes: **like-minded** friends [with similar interests], **career-minded** young women, **money-minded** managers

-proof combines with nouns to form adjectives describing things that can resist the damage or difficulty caused by that noun: **ovenproof** dish, **waterproof** jacket, **soundproof** room, **idiot-proof** instructions

-related combines with nouns to form adjectives to describe one thing as connected with another: **stress-related** absence from work, **age-related** earnings, **tobacco-related** illness

-ridden combines with nouns to form adjectives describing people or things with a lot of that noun: **guilt-ridden** person, **crime-ridden** city. Note that if a person is **bedridden**, they have to stay in bed because they are ill.

-worthy combines with nouns to form adjectives that describe people or things that merit whatever the original noun refers to: **newsworthy** incident [worth reporting in the news], **praiseworthy** action/pupil [deserving praise]

B Different word classes

-ly is not only an adverb ending, it also forms quite a few adjectives: **lively** children [full of energy], **costly** holiday [expensive], **leisurely** walk [relaxed], **miserly** man [mean with money]

-ant is most familiar as an adjective ending (**relevant** information, **distant** hills) but it can also make nouns from verbs to describe a person: an **applicant** for a job, an insurance **claimant**, a police **informant**, a quiz **contestant**, an **occupant** of a house

-en makes adjectives from nouns (**woollen** jumper, **golden** hair) but it also makes verbs from adjectives: **to moisten** your lips, **to sweeten** tea, a situation **worsens**, a face **reddens**

Exercises

3.1 Complete the table below with your own examples.

suffix	new example in phrase	suffix	new example in phrase
-able	a debatable issue	-minded	
-conscious		-proof	
-free		-related	
-rich		-ridden	
-led		-worthy	

3.2 Match each adjective on the left with the two nouns it best collocates with in the box.

EXAMPLE student-led rebellion, demonstration

- additive-free
- avoidable
- disposable
- guilt-ridden
- high-minded
- newsworthy
- oil-rich
- ovenproof
- soundproof
- stress-related

knives and forks income drinks mistake

room

rebellion delay foods criminal

expression story illness

dish country glove booth speech

principles problems demonstration personality

economy

3.3 Which of the suffixes in A opposite could combine with the words in the box below to make new words? Note that there is more than one possibility for each word.

age dust Byron sugar work

3.4 Rewrite the sentences using the suffix given in brackets.

EXAMPLE The weather can't be predicted. (-able) The weather is unpredictable.

- Poisonous mushrooms can be easily identified. (-able)
- He thinks so much about his career that he has no time for his family. (-minded)
- The new phone boxes are supposed to be indestructible by vandals. (-proof)
- During the Civil War, the country was totally overcome by terror. (-ridden)
- The soil on that farm contains a lot of nutrients. (-rich)
- The bank decided that he did not have enough income to allow him credit. (-worthy)

3.5 Using a suffix from A make up words with the following meanings.

- operating in the style of the current President of the USA
- food for vegetarians must be this
- connected with class
- containing a lot of vitamins
- can be dry-cleaned
- very aware of people's clothes
- initiated by the government

3.6 Are the following words adverbs, adjectives or verbs? Check in your dictionary.



- dampen
- friendly
- dearly
- silken
- roughen
- masterly
- kindly
- darken

Word-building and word-blending

Many literary or academic words in English are formed using ancient Greek and Latin prefixes and roots. Many English speakers are not aware of the meanings of the word parts listed here, but knowing them can help you to understand and remember new words.

A Common well-established word parts

<i>word part*</i>	<i>meaning</i>	<i>example</i>
auto-	self	an autonomous country [self-ruling]
bio-	life, living things	biodegradable packaging [able to decay naturally]
cyber-	relating to computers and robots	a cybercafé [café where customers can use computers with the Internet]
de-	opposite action	to decolonise a country [remove colonists from]
-graph-, -gram	writing	a monograph [long article or short book on a subject that the writer has studied for a long time]
-gress-	step, walk, go	a congress [a conference, i.e. a meeting where people come together]
-ics	an area of study or knowledge	obstetrics [the study of childbirth]
-phon-	sound	phonetics [the study of human speech]
-ology	study	criminology [the study of crime]
pre- (opposite = post-)	before	prepaid postage [paid for in advance]
retro-	back, backwards	retroactive law [taking effect from a date in the past]
techno-	relating to advanced machines	technophobia [fear of using technological machines such as computers]
tele-	over a distance	telepathic experience [feeling something from a distance]

* The dash (-) in this column indicates whether the word part is usually found at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of a word.

Although these word parts above will help you to understand words, you cannot use them as freely to form new words as the productive prefixes and suffixes in Unit 2 and Unit 3.

B Blends

An interesting, if much less common, way of forming words is by combining two well-established words, e.g. **brunch** = a meal that is a combination of breakfast and lunch.

heliport: a place where helicopters can land and take off (helicopter + airport)

smog: polluted fog (smoke + fog)

motel: a roadside hotel for people travelling by car (motor + hotel)

Chunnel: tunnel linking Britain and France (Channel + tunnel)

guesstimate: an approximate calculation (guess + estimate; verb – to guesstimate)

docusoap: TV series about real people using hidden cameras (documentary + soap opera)

breathalyser: a device to find out how much alcohol a person has drunk (breath + analyse)

Exercises

4.1 Using information from the table in A, explain the basic meanings of these words.

EXAMPLE biography = writing about a life

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1 telegram | 5 to retrogress |
| 2 telephone | 6 graphology |
| 3 autobiography | 7 to destabilise |
| 4 phonology | 8 autograph |

4.2 Can you think of five more words using only those word parts listed in A and any other basic endings like *-ist* or *-ical*?

4.3 Look at the following prefixes. Use your dictionary to find two new words beginning with these prefixes and write them in your vocabulary notebook.



Choose only words that use the prefixes studied in this unit. *Postman*, for example, clearly has not been formed using the prefix *post-*.

- | | | | |
|----------|---------|--------|--------|
| 1 cyber | 3 retro | 5 auto | 7 post |
| 2 techno | 4 tele | 6 pre | 8 phon |

4.4 Rewrite these sentences, replacing the underlined words with a word that includes the word part given. Use a dictionary if necessary.



EXAMPLE I had to put off my trip to Japan. (POST)

I had to postpone my trip to Japan.

- 1 She asked the star for his signature on the back of her table napkin. (GRAPH)
- 2 She took a degree in the science of crime at Stockholm University. (OLOGY)
- 3 The novel is largely based on the writer's own life. (BIO)
- 4 It's an exhibition looking back at the painter's life and work. (RETRO)
- 5 He believes you can cure yourself by telling yourself you are cured. (AUTO)
- 6 Working at home and keeping in contact with the office by phone, fax and modem is becoming increasingly common. (TELE)
- 7 Some areas are now deliberately trying to become less industrial. (DE)
- 8 Crime committed through the Internet is a growing cause for concern. (CYBER)

4.5 Rewrite these sentences, replacing the underlined word with an explanatory phrase.

EXAMPLE Most of the time planes fly on autopilot.

Most of the time planes fly automatically, controlled by a computer rather than the pilot.

- 1 The firm makes job applicants do a graphology test.
- 2 Johnny loves his cyberpet.
- 3 Matt's a techno-wizard!
- 4 He's giving a paper at a pre-conference event in Spain.
- 5 Is it OK if I post-date this cheque?

4.6 What words have been combined to make these blends? What do you think they mean?

- | | | |
|---------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1 infomercial | 3 cybrary | 5 swimathon |
| 2 edutainment | 4 vegeburger | 6 funtastic |