Prefixes and Suffixes

Prefix: An affix placed before a word.
Suffix: An affix placed at the end of a word

Prefixes and suffixes are super useful for customizing the meanings of words, but what are they? A prefix is a group of letters (or an *affix*) that's added to the beginning of a word, and a suffix is an affix that's added to the end of a word. Prefixes modify the meaning of a word. They can make a word negative, show repetition, or indicate opinion. Some suffixes add to or change a word's meaning. Others can signal the word's part of speech or indicate verb tense.

Some Common Prefixes

Some of the most common prefixes in the English language are *dis-*, *in-*, and *un-*, which make words negative. For instance, adding the prefix *un-* to the word *kind* creates the word *unkind*, meaning *not kind*.

Another common prefix, *re-*, indicates repetition. For example, adding *re-* to the word *build* means "to build again."

Other prefixes can indicate position: *Sub*(meaning *under* or *below*) is found in common words like *subway* and *submarine*. *Supra-* (which means *above*) often appears in medical terminology, such as *supraclavicular nerves*, which lie on top of veins and bones.

Rules for Adding Prefixes

When you add a prefix to a word, you shouldn't change the spelling of the original word or the prefix. The words *disappear* (a combination of *dis-* and *appear*), *unhappy*, and *undo* all illustrate this guideline. Follow this rule even if the spelling results in double consonants, such as in the words *misspell*, *irredeemable* and *cooperation*.

You should use a hyphen when joining a prefix to a proper noun, as in *pro-American*. There should always be a hyphen after the prefix *self-* (as in *self-esteem*), and after the prefix *ex-* when it means *former* (as in *ex-husband*). Hyphens can also prevent misreading, mispronunciation, or confusion with other words. For example, you should hyphenate *re-cover* (to *cover again*) to avoid confusing it with *recover* (to *regain or repair*).

Some Common Suffixes

Some common suffixes are *-ed*, *-ing*, and *-ly*. The suffix *-ed* changes verbs to the past tense. In the sentence "Sandy shovel**ed** the snow," the *-ed* suffix creates the past tense of the verb to *shovel*. The *-ing* suffix makes the verb take place in the present, as in the following sentence: "Sandy is shovel**ing** the snow."

The suffix *-ly* is commonly added onto adjectives to form *adverbs* (words that describe verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs). Examples of adverbs with the *-ly* suffix include *joyfully*, *quickly*, and *loudly*. The suffixes *-s* and *-es* make words plural, as in *foxes*, *lamps*, and *chairs*.

Rules for Adding Suffixes

When you add a suffix to a word, the original word usually keeps its original spelling. However, there are some exceptions to this rule: If the original word is one syllable and ends with a single consonant, double the last letter. For example, *tip* becomes *tipping* or *tipped*, and *run* becomes *running*. If the word

ends in multiple consonants, as in the word *bank*, last letter doesn't get doubled.