Affixation

**In** [**English grammar**](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-english-grammar-1690579) **and morphology, affixation is the process of adding a morpheme—or affix—to a word to create either a different form of that word or a new word with a different meaning; affixation is the most common way of making new words in English.**

The two primary kinds of affixation are prefixation, the addition of a prefix, and suffixation, the addition of a suffix, while clusters of affixes can be used to form [complex words](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-complex-word-1689889). A large majority of new words in the English language today are either a result of blending—mashing two words or partial words together to form a new one—or affixation.

**Uses of Affixes**

An affix is a word element of English grammar used to alter the meaning or form of a word and comes in the form of either a prefix or a suffix. Prefixes include examples like "un-," "self-," and "re-," while suffixes come in the form of ending elements like "-hood," "-ing," or "-ed."

While prefixes typically maintain the [word class](https://www.thoughtco.com/word-class-grammar-1692608) (such as noun, verb, or adjective) of the word it's modifying, [suffixes oftentimes change the form entirely](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-an-inflectional-morpheme-1691064), as is the case with "exploration" compared to "explore" or "highlighter" compared to "highlight."

**What Are Affixes, Prefixes, and Suffixes in English Grammar?**

In [English grammar](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-english-grammar-1690579) and [morphology](https://www.thoughtco.com/morphology-words-term-1691407), a prefix is a [letter](https://www.thoughtco.com/letter-alphabet-term-1691224) or group of letters attached to the beginning of a [word](https://www.thoughtco.com/word-english-language-1692612) that partly indicates its meaning, including examples such as "anti-" to mean against, "co-" to mean with, "mis-" to mean wrong or bad, and "trans-" to mean across.

The most [common prefixes](https://www.thoughtco.com/identifying-prefixes-suffixes-and-root-words-1688945) in English are those that express [negation](https://www.thoughtco.com/negation-in-grammar-1691424), like "a-" in the word asexual, "in-" in the word incapable, and "un-" in the word unhappy —these negations immediately alter the meaning of the words the are added to, but some prefixes merely change the form.

Interestingly enough, the word prefix itself contains the prefix "pre-," which means before, and the [root word](https://www.thoughtco.com/root-words-definition-1692068) fix, which means to fasten or place; thus the word itself means "to place before." Letter groups attached to the ends of words, conversely, are called [suffixes](https://www.thoughtco.com/suffix-grammar-1692159), while both belong to the larger group of morphemes known as [affixes](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-affix-grammar-1689071).

Prefixes are [bound morphemes](https://www.thoughtco.com/bound-morpheme-words-and-word-parts-1689177), which means they can't stand alone. Generally, if a group of letters is a prefix, it can't also be a word. However, prefixation, or the process of adding a prefix to a word, is a common way of [forming new words](https://www.thoughtco.com/word-formation-1692501) in English.

In [English grammar](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-english-grammar-1690579) and [morphology](https://www.thoughtco.com/morphology-words-term-1691407), an affix is a word element that can be attached to a [base](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-base-word-forms-1689161) or [root](https://www.thoughtco.com/root-words-definition-1692068) to form a new [word](https://www.thoughtco.com/word-english-language-1692612) or new form of the word, usually occurring as either a prefix or [suffix](https://www.thoughtco.com/suffix-grammar-1692159). Put simply, an affix is a group of letters that are generally added to the beginning or the end of a root word that can change the word's meaning.

As their names would entail, [prefixes](https://www.thoughtco.com/prefix-grammar-1691661) like pre-, re-, and trans- are attached to the beginnings of words such as predict, reactivate, and transaction, while [suffixes like -ism, -ate, and -ish](https://www.thoughtco.com/common-suffixes-in-english-1692725) are attached to the ends of words such as socialism, eradicate, and childish. In rare cases, an affix may be added to the middle of a word and is therefore called an [infix](https://www.thoughtco.com/infix-words-and-grammar-1691167), which occurs in such words as cupsful and passersby, where the additional "-s-" affix pluralizes the words cupful and passerby, thus changing their form.

**What Is a Prefix?**

**A prefix is a**[**letter**](https://www.thoughtco.com/letter-alphabet-term-1691224)**or group of letters attached to the beginning of a**[**word**](https://www.thoughtco.com/word-english-language-1692612)**that partly indicates its meaning, including such as examples as "anti-" to mean against, "co-" to mean with, "mis-" to mean wrong or bad, and "trans-" to mean across.**

The most common prefixes in English are those that express [negation](https://www.thoughtco.com/negation-in-grammar-1691424) like "a-" in the word asexual, "in-" in the word incapable, and "un-" in the word unhappy. These negations immediately alter the meaning of the words they are added to, but some prefixes merely change the form. The word *prefix* itself contains the prefix *pre-*, which means before, and the [root word](https://www.thoughtco.com/root-words-definition-1692068) *fix*, which means to fasten or place. Thus, the word itself means "to place before."

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**What Is a Suffix?**

A suffix is a letter or group of letters added to the end of a word or [root](https://www.thoughtco.com/root-words-definition-1692068)—its [base](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-base-word-forms-1689161) form—serving to form a new word or functioning as an [inflectional](https://www.thoughtco.com/inflection-grammar-term-1691168) ending. The word *suffix* comes from the Latin, "to fasten underneath."

There are two primary types of suffixes in English:

* [Derivational](https://www.thoughtco.com/derivation-words-term-1690438), such as the addition of "-ly" to an adjective to form an [adverb](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-adverb-1689070), indicating what type of word it is.
* Inflectional, such as the addition of "-s" to a [noun](https://www.thoughtco.com/noun-in-grammar-1691442) to form a [plural](https://www.thoughtco.com/plural-grammar-1691638) telling something about the word's grammatical behavior.

**Difference Between Affixes and Compound Words**

Affixes are [bound morphemes](https://www.thoughtco.com/bound-morpheme-words-and-word-parts-1689177), which means that they can't stand alone. If a group of letters is an affix, it usually can't also be a word. However, Michael Quinion's 2002 book, "Ologies and Isms: Word Beginnings and Endings," explains the importance of these affixes to the English language and its ever-evolving usage.

Although quite similar to [compounds](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-compound-noun-1689892)—which combine two words with separate meanings to form a new word with a new meaning—affixes must be attached to other words in order to have meaning in and of themselves, says Quinion.

Still, affixes can often be stacked together in clusters to create [complex words](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-complex-word-1689889) much more easily than compounds can, as David Crystal explains in his 2006 book, "How Language Works." He uses the example of *nation*, which can become *national* as well as *nationalize*, *nationalization*, or *denationalization*.

**Source**

*Crystal, David. "How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die." 10/16/07 edition, Avery, November 1, 2007.*

*Quinion, Michael. "Ologies and Isms: A Dictionary of Word Beginnings and Endings." Oxford Quick Reference, Oxford University Press, November 17, 2005.*

https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-affixation-words-1688976

https://www.thoughtco.com/prefix-grammar-1691661