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Humanities › English

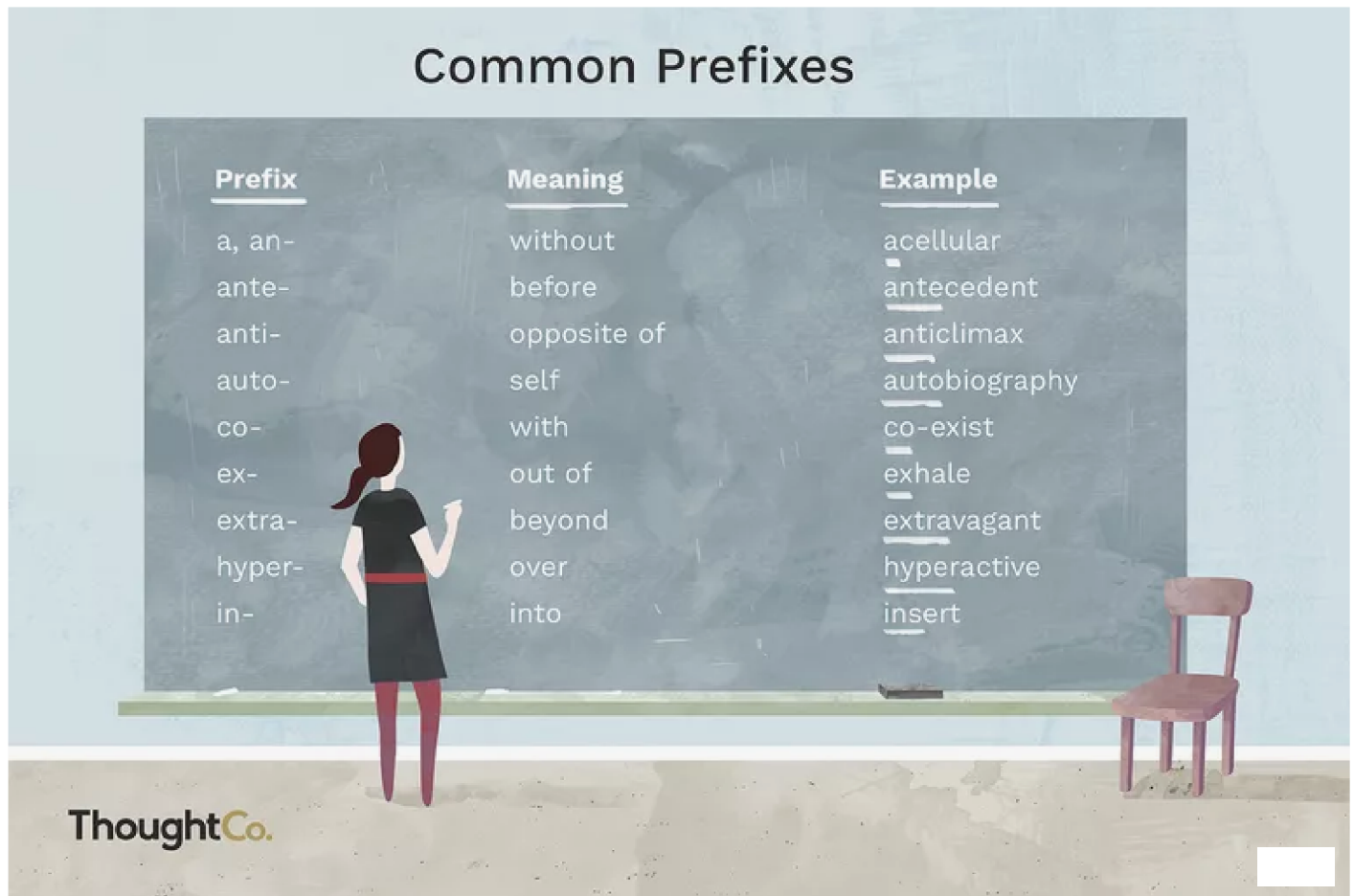# 35 Common Prefixes in English

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Illustration by Melissa Ling. ThoughtCo

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*If you were a prefix, you could change the same word in different ways.You could make a cycle a **uni**cycle, a **bi**cycle, or a **tri**cycle.*

(Marcie Aboff and Sara Gray, "If You Were a Prefix." Picture Window Books, 2008)

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A prefix is a letter or a group of letters attached to the beginning of a word (or word root) that partly indicates its meaning. For example, the word *prefix* itself begins with the prefix *pre-*, which generally means "before" or "in front of." (By contrast, a letter or group of letters

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Still, we do need to be careful. The same prefix may be spelled in more than one way (*pre-* and *pro-*, for instance), and some prefixes (such as *in-*) have more than one meaning (in this case, "not" or "without" versus "in" or "into"). Even so, being able to recognize prefixes can help us build our vocabularies.

To Hyphenate or Not?

Rules vary as to when a word should have a hyphen separating it from its prefix. Go by the dictionary if you are unsure. If you are writing a paper for a class and a particular style guide

Common Prefixes

Prefix	Meaning	Examples
a-, an-	without, lack of, not	amoral, acellular, abyss, achromatic, anhydrous
ante-	before, earlier, in front of	antecedent, antedate, antemeridian, anterior
anti-	against, opposite of	anticlimax. antiaircraft, antiseptic, antibody
auto-	self, same	autopilot, autobiography, automobile, autofocus
circum-	around, about	circumvent, circumnavigate, circumscribe
co-	with, together	co-pilot, co-worker, co-exist, co-author
com-, con-	together, with	companion, commingle, contact, concentrate
contra-, contro-	against, opposite	contradict, contrast, contrary, controversy
de-	down, off, away from	devalue, deactivate, debug, degrade, deduce
dis-	not, apart, away	disappear, disagreeable, disbar, dissect
en-	put into, cover with	enclose, entangle, enslave, encase
ex-	out of, from, former	extract, exhale, excavate, ex-president
extra-	beyond, outside, more than	extracurricular, extramarital, extravagant
hetero-	different, other	heterosexual, heterodox, heterogeneous
homo-, homeo-	same, alike	homonym, homophone, homeostasis, homosexual
hyper-	over, more, beyond	hyperactive, hypersensitive, hypercritical

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intra-, intro-	within, inside	intravenous, intragalactic, introvert
macro-	large, prominent	macroeconomics, macrostructure, macrocosm
micro-	very small	microscope, microcosm, microbe
mono-	one, single, alone	monocle, monologue, monogamy, monotony
		nonentity, nonaggressive, nonessential, nonfiction
		omniscient, omnivorous, omniscient, omnidirectional
		postmortem, posterior, postscript, postoperative
		precede, predict, project, prologue
		submarine, subsidiary, substandard
		symmetry, symposium, synchronize, synapse
		telecommunications, telemedicine, television, telephone
		transmit, transaction, translation, transfer
		tricycle, trimester, triangle, triathlon
		unfinished, unskilled, ungraceful, unfriendly
		unicorn, unicellular, unicycle, unilateral
	higher/better	upbeat, updo, upgrade, upload, uphill, upstage, upscale, up-tempo

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The Function of the Prefix

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Don't Confuse the Hyphen With the Dash

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A List of 26 Common Suffixes in English

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