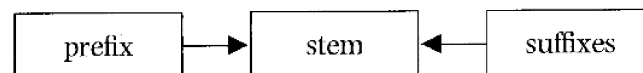# Language focus B

Word formation: prefixes

When you are reading, you will come across unfamiliar words. It is often possible to guess the meanings of these words if you understand the way words in English are generally formed.

```
┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐
│  prefix  ├─────▶│   stem   │◀─────┤ suffixes │
└──────────┘      └──────────┘      └──────────┘
```

An English word can be divided into three parts: a prefix, a stem, and a suffix. *Pre*-means 'before'. A prefix, therefore, is what comes before the stem. Consider, as an example, the prefix *de-* (meaning 'reduce' or 'reverse') in a word like **de**magnetize (meaning 'to deprive of magnetism'). A suffix is what is attached to the end of the stem. Consider, as an example, the suffix *-er* (meaning 'someone who') in programm**er** ('a person who programs').

Suffixes change the word from one part of speech to another. For example, *-ly* added to the adjective *quick* gives the adverb *quickly*. Prefixes, on the other hand, usually change the meaning of the word. For example, *un-* changes a word to the negative. **Un**magnetizable means 'not capable of being magnetized'.

Let us now consider some prefixes, their usual meanings, and how they change the meanings of English words.

Prefixes

Negative and positive	Size	Location	Time and order	Number
un-	semi-	inter-	pre-	mono-
non-	mini-	super-	ante-	bi-
in-	micro-	trans-	fore-	hex-
dis-		ex-	post-	oct-
re-		extra-		multi-
		peri-		

Study these tables. Try to find additional examples, using your dictionary if necessary.

1 Negative and positive prefixes:

	Prefix	Meaning	Examples
Negative	un- in- im- il- ir-	not	unmagnetized incomplete impossible illegal irregular, irrelevant
	non-	not connected with	non-programmable,
	mis- mal-	bad, wrong	misdirect malfunction
	dis-	opposite feeling opposite action	disagree disconnect
	anti- de- under-	against reduce, reverse too little	antiglare demagnetize, decode underestimate
Positive	re- over-	do again too much	reorganize overload

2 Prefixes of size:

Prefix	Meaning	Examples
semi-	half, partly	semiconductor
equi-	equal	equidistant
mini-	small	minicomputer
micro-	very small	microcomputer
macro- mega-	large, great	macroeconomics megabyte

3 Prefixes of location:

Prefix	Meaning	Examples
inter-	between, among	interface, interactive
super-	over	supersonic
trans-	across	transmit, transfer
ex-	out	exclude, extrinsic
extra-	beyond	extraordinary
sub-	under	subschema
infra-	below	infra-red
peri-	around	peripheral

4   **Prefixes of time and order:**

Prefix	Meaning	Examples
ante- pre-	before	antecedent prefix
prime-	first	primary, primitive
post-	after	postdated
retro-	backward	retroactive

5   **Prefixes of numbers:**

Prefix	Meaning	Examples
semi-	half	semicircle
mono-	one	monochromatic
bi-	two	binary
tri-	three	triangle
quad-	four	quadruple
penta-	five	pentagon
hex-	six	hexadecimal
sept(em)-	seven	September
oct-	eight	octal
dec-	ten	decimal
multi-	many	multiplexor

6   **Other prefixes:**

Prefix	Meaning	Examples
pro-	before, in advance forward	program progress
auto-	self	automatic
co- con-	together, with	co-ordinate connect

Exercise 2

Read the following sentences and circle the prefixes. For each word that has a prefix, try to decide what the prefix means. Refer back to the table if you need help.

1   Floppy disks are inexpensive and reuseable.
2   If a printer malfunctions, you should check the interface cable.
3   The multiplexor was not working because someone had disconnected it by mistake.
4   Improper installation of the antiglare shield will make it impossible to read what is on the screen.
5   After you transfer text using the 'cut and paste' feature, you may have to reformat the text you have inserted.
6   You can maximize your chances of finding a job if you are bilingual or even trilingual.

26

7 Peripheral devices can be either input devices (such as keyboards) or output devices (such as printers).

8 Your pay rise is retroactive to the beginning of June and you will receive a bi-annual bonus.

9 The octal and hexadecimal systems are number systems used as a form of shorthand in reading groups of four binary digits.

10 As the results are irregular, the program will have to be rewritten.

Exercise 3

Fill in the gaps with the correct prefix from the following list.

auto	de	dec	inter
maxi	mega	micro	mini
mono	multi	semi	sub

1 Most people prefer a colour screen to a _____chrome screen.

2 _____script is a character or symbol written below and to the right of a number or letter, often used in science.

3 A _____byte equals approximately one million bytes.

4 Once you finish your program, you will have to test it and _____bug it to remove all the mistakes.

5 The introduction of _____conductor technology revolutionized the computer industry.

6 If a computer system has two or more central processors which are under common control, it is called a _____processor system.

7 The _____imal system is a number system with a base of 10.

8 When the user and the computer are in active communication on a graphics system, we refer to this as _____active graphics.

27