Prefix

Definition of Prefix

In semantics, a prefix is a single letter or a group of letters, which adds to the meaning of a word when placed at the beginning. It has been derived from the Latin word *praefixus*, which is a combination of two words *pre* means "before," and *fix* means "to fasten." Hence, *prefix* means "to place before."

A prefix is a bound [morpheme](#) that cannot stand alone, or in other words, it cannot stand as a word independently. Prefixing is a process of adding prefixes to other words to create appropriate diction for a piece of writing. Most common prefixes include a-, an-, anti-, auto-, co-, com-, con-, contra-, dis-, en-, extra-, hetero-, hyper, inter-, non-, pre-, pro-, sub-, tri-, un-, and uni-.

Everyday Use of Prefix

> Sara <u>disagreed</u> with Mark's philosophy.
> They have <u>mismanaged</u> the deal.
> The café is <u>unavailable</u>
> With determination and hard work, nothing is <u>impossible</u>.
> Has she planned to <u>renew</u> her subscription?

In these examples, dis-, mis-, un-, im and re- are examples of prefix.

Examples of Prefix in Literature

Example #1: *Pride and Prejudice* (by Jane Austen)

> "What can be the meaning of that emphatic exclamation?" cried he. "Do you consider the forms of introduction, and the stress that is laid on them, as nonsense? For you are a young lady of

deep reflection, I know, and read great books and make extracts ... Mr. Bingley was obliged to be in town the following day, and, consequently, <u>unable</u> to accept the honour of their invitation, etc. Mrs. Bennet was quite <u>disconcerted</u>. She could not imagine what business he could have in town so soon after his arrival in Hertfordshire; and she began to fear that he might be always flying about from one place to <u>another</u>, and never settled at Netherfield as he ought to be."

In this example, Jane Austen has used various prefixes as in the underlined words "unable," "disconcerted," and "another."

Example #2: *The Crucible* (by Arthur Miller)

"When one rises above the individual villainy <u>displayed</u>, one can only pity them all, just as we shall be pitied someday ... Long-held hatreds of neighbors could now be openly <u>expressed</u>, and vengeance taken, despite the Bible's charitable injunctions ... Susanna, craning around Parris to get a look at Betty: He bid me come and tell you, reverend sir, that he cannot <u>discover</u> no medicine for it in his books ... Parris, his eyes going wide: No – no. There be no <u>unnatural</u> cause here."

In this passage, Miller has employed four prefixes in the words "displayed," "expressed," "discover," and "unnatural." They are "dis-, ex-, dis- and un-."

Example #3: *Hedda Gabler* (by Henrik Ibsen)

"GEORGE TESMAN comes from the right into the inner room, humming to himself, and carrying an <u>unstrapped</u> empty portmanteau. He is a middle-sized, young-looking man of thirty-three, rather stout, with a round, open, cheerful face, fair hair and beard. He wears spectacles, and is somewhat carelessly dressed in <u>comfortable</u> indoor clothes... No no, I suppose not. A

Here three words "unstrapped," "comfortable," and "indispensable" show the use of prefixes. Without adding these prefixes, the words do not make sense and seem incomplete.

Example #4: *To the Lighthouse* (by Virginia Woolf)

> "There was a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, <u>invisibly</u>, beneath. This intrusion into a scene calculated to stir the most sublime reflections and lead to the most comfortable conclusions stayed their pacing. It was difficult blandly to overlook them; to abolish their significance in the landscape; to continue, as one walked by the sea, to marvel how beauty outside mirrored beauty within … [Mr. Carmichael brought out a volume of poems that spring, which had an <u>unexpected</u> success. The war, people said, had <u>revived</u> their interest in poetry.]

Woolf has used three prefixes in this example: in-, un- and re-". They have transformed the meanings of the words they are used with.

Function of Prefix

Prefixes either change the meaning of words or make completely new words. It is, in fact, a common way of forming new words with different meanings. Prefixes help readers understand different shades of meanings of words that they encounter for the first time. By separating prefixes from the base words or roots readers can understand how new words are formed and how they could be used in different ways in a text.

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