

Word Formation

12.1 Root, base and affix

In order to understand the different processes of word formation in English, it is important to understand the concepts of **root**, **base** and **affix**. The root is that part of the word which carries the main or the principal meaning of the word. An affix is added to the root of a word. In the word *unhappy*, *happy* is the root because it carries the principal meaning and *un-* is the affix because it is added to the root *happy*. Some other examples are:

a. affix + root

il- + legible (illegible)

re- + play (replay)

dis- + honest (dishonest)

un- + able (unable)

anti- + tank (antitank)

b. root + affix

boy + -s (boys)

free + -dom (freedom)

walk + -ing (walking)

rain + -y (rainy)

teach + -er (teacher)

c. affix + root + affix

pre- + history + -ic (prehistoric)

anti- + nation + -al (antination)

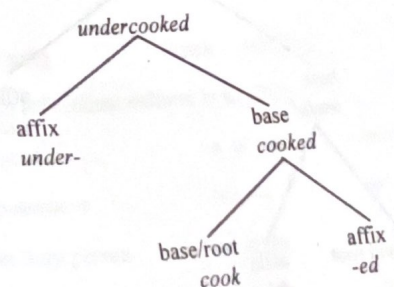
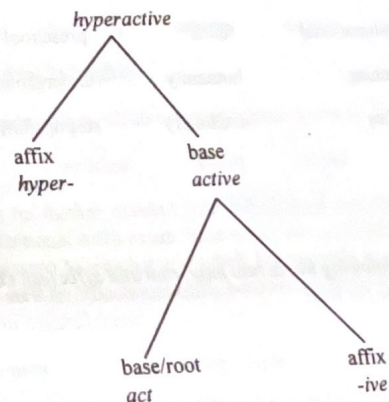
in- + able + -ity (inability)

hyper- + act + -ive (hyperactive)

under- + cook + -ed (undercooked)

Word Formation

The root can, usually, be used independently as a word, but an affix requires a root or a base to which it can be attached. The base is that part of a word, which may be a root or a root + an affix and to which we can attach affixes. For example, we can analyse the words *hyperactive* and *undercooked* as follows:



As the above analysis indicates, a root is also the base but a base may not necessarily be the root. A base can be a root or a root + affix (-es) to which other affix (es) can be attached.

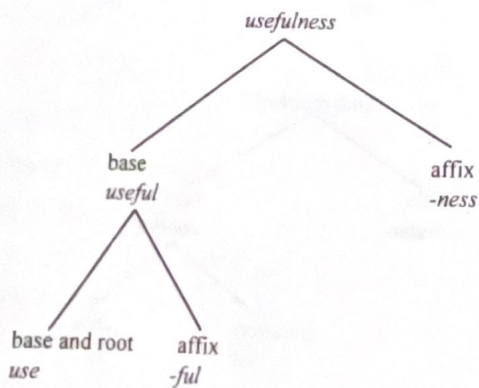
Exercise 1

Identify the root and affix(es) in the following words:

multinational	funds	preschool
teaching	humanity	underground
idolise	machinery	responsibility

Exercise 2

Analyse the following words into base, root and affix (es). One example has been done for you:



denationalisation	pre-professional	uncomfortable
functional	post-modernism	disagree
bimonthly	interdisciplinary	immoral

12.1.1 Affixes

Affixes are of three types: **prefixes, infixes and suffixes**. Prefixes are those affixes which occur before roots or bases. For example:

ante-room	irregular	subway	unable	postwar
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There are no infixes in English.

Suffixes are those affixes which occur after roots or bases:

truthful	national	ability	books	talking
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Suffixes can be further divided into **inflectional** and **derivational** suffixes. **Inflectional suffixes** are those which do not change the part of speech of the word to which it is attached. For example, the noun phrase suffix, -s or -es is an inflectional suffix because it is attached to a singular noun to form a plural noun.

pen - pens	dog - dogs
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Similarly, the present participle suffix -ing is also an inflectional suffix, as it does not change the part of the speech of a verb to which it is attached.

run - running	watch - watching
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There are eight inflectional suffixes in English:

1. noun plural	-s or -es	doors, boxes
2. noun possessive	's or -s'	girls', John's
3. present third person	-s or -es	walks, fries
4. present participle	-ing	walking, frying

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5. past tense	-d or -ed	forced, talked
6. past participle	-d or -ed	forced, talked
7. comparative	-er	higher, greater
8. superlative	-est	highest, greatest

All other suffixes are derivational suffixes. Derivational suffixes, usually, though not always, change the part of speech of the root or base to which it is attached:

adjective	noun	verb	noun	adjective	verb
happy	happiness	sing	singer	quick	quicken
true	truth	break	breakage	simple	simplify
able	ability	act	action	sad	sadden

Differences between English inflectional and derivational suffixes:

1. Inflectional suffixes are limited in number. Derivational suffixes, on the other hand are greater in number though they too can be listed.
2. An inflectional suffix is combined to a large number of roots but a derivational suffix is combined to a limited number of roots. For example, we can add -s or -es to a large number of singular nouns to form plural nouns:

book - books car - cars dish - dishes

However, in order to change an adjective into a noun we use different derivational suffixes with different words.

adjective	noun	derivational suffix used
true	truth	-th
free	freedom	-dom
able	ability	-ity

Word Formation

As mentioned earlier, an inflectional suffix does not change the part of speech, whereas a derivational suffix usually changes the part of speech of the root or base to which it is added.

An inflectional suffix closes off a word whereas a derivational suffix doesn't. This implies that it is possible to add another suffix, either derivational or inflectional, after a derivational suffix. For example,

nation national nationalise nationalised

However, once -s is added to *nation* and we get *nations*, the word is closed off and no other suffix can be added.

Exercise 3

In the following pairs of words the word in the second column is formed by adding a derivational suffix. Indicate the part of speech of each word under both the columns.

play	playful
free	freedom
modern	modernise
harm	harmless
quick	quickly
hospital	hospitalise
conspire	conspiracy
inform	informant
ideal	idealism
care	careful
day	daily
arrange	arrangement

Exercise 4

Write down the word in column B according to the part of speech indicated in brackets of the corresponding word in Column A:

A		B	
response	(noun)	.....	(adj)
final	(adj)	.....	(v)
attest	(v)	.....	(n)
drive	(v)	.....	(n)
mouth	(n)	.....	(adj)
wide	(adj)	.....	(n)
fame	(n)	.....	(adj)
happy	(adj)	.....	(adv)
code	(n)	.....	(v)
legal	(adj)	.....	(v)

12.2 Simple, complex and compound words

12.2.1 Simple words

Simple words comprise either the **root** or the **root + an inflectional suffix**:

boy - boys walk - walking - walked
strong - stronger - strongest

12.2.2 Complex words

Complex words comprise the **root and one or more prefixes and/or one or more derivational suffixes**:

national nationalise nationalisation denationalisation

Prefixes usually denote some meaning to the root or base to which they are attached.

Negative prefixes:

un-	unhappy	uncomfortable
dis-	disagree	dishonest
in-	incapable	injustice
il-	illegible	illegal
im-	impossible	impatient
ir-	irregular	irrelevant

Prefixes denoting place:

inter-	(between)	international	interdepartmental
intra-	(within)	intranational	intradepartmental
mid-	(in the middle of)	midday	midway
sub-	(below)	subway	subterranean
fore-	(front)	forearm	forehead

Prefixes denoting degree or size:

mini-	(little)	minibus	miniauditorium
arch-	(supreme)	archduke	archbishop
super-	(more than)	supernatural	supermarket

Some other important prefixes:

mis-	(wrongly)	misjudge	misguide
un-	(opposite action)	undo	unpack
pre-	(before)	pre-university	pre-primary
post-	(after)	post-graduation	post-war

pro- (in favour of)	pro-Indian	pro-democracy
anti- (against)	anti-social	anti-war
under- (too little)	undernourished	underpaid
dis- (reverse)	displace	dislodge
ex- (former)	ex-director	expupil
re- (again)	replay	re-enter
bi- (two)	bilingual	bicycle
multi- (many)	multicultural	multinational

Derivational suffixes

1. Suffixes of concrete nouns

-er/-or: teacher, actor	-ee: trainee, employee
-ist: feminist, columnist	-ant/-ent: assistant, attendant

2. Suffixes of abstract nouns

-tion, -ion: action, examination	-ness: kindness, greatness
-ment: agreement, contentment	-dom: kingdom, freedom
-ity: mentality, stupidity	-ing: clothing, drawing
-ship: hardship, scholarship	

3. Verb derivational suffixes

-ise/-ize: privatise, nationalise	-en: widen, broaden
-ify: qualify, purify	

4. Adjective derivational suffixes

-able: capable, acceptable	-ic: dramatic, artistic
-ful: beautiful, careful	-less: meaningless, hopeless

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-ous: dangerous, voluminous	-y: healthy, funny
-ive: active, expensive	-al: musical, original

Exercise 5

a. Change the following words into concrete nouns:

own	drive	edit	build	train
produce	tour	novel	pay	add

b. Change the following words into abstract nouns:

invite	discuss	pay	develop
martyr	garden	arrange	responsible
feel	refuse		

c. Change the following words into verbs:

beauty	class	modern	popular	deep
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d. Change the following words into adjectives:

power	harm	effect	health	thirst
greed	nation	culture	fame	courage

12.2.3 Compound words

A compound word is **formed with more than one root but functions as a single word**. Usually, though not always, a compound word in English comprises two roots only.

greenroom	blackbird	footlight
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It is sometimes possible to have a compound word in which a derivational suffix is attached to either of the roots.

walking stick	washing machine
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We must distinguish between a compound word which is a single word and a phrase comprising two different words. One way could be to look

at the overall meaning of the compound. For example, *greenroom* as a compound word is not a *room* which is *green* but is a *room where stage actors get ready*. However, a *blue room*, as a noun phrase is a *room which is blue in colour*. Similarly, *blackbird* as a compound word is the name of a bird but a *black bird* as a phrase is a *bird which is black in colour*.

The second way to distinguish a noun phrase and a compound word is to contrast their stress patterns. A noun phrase has the primary stress on the second element whereas a compound word has the primary stress on the first element.

Noun phrase	Compound word
black 'bird	'blackbird
small 'room	'greenroom

Compound nouns: There are different types of compound nouns:

1. *noun + noun*

earthquake handbag teacup letterbox handshake

2. *adjective + noun*

blackboard heavyweight darkroom greenhouse

3. *present participle as verbal noun + noun*

dining room frying pan swimming pool
drawing room printing ink

4. *verb + noun*

drawbridge grindstone pickpocket
killjoy scarecrow

5. *pronoun + noun*

he-goat she-goat he-man

Compound adjectives:

1. *noun + adjective*

homesick taxfree foolproof
colourblind watertight

2. *adjective + adjective*

reddish-brown dark blue Anglo-French
Indo-American deaf-mute socioeconomic

3. *noun + present participle functioning as adjective*

lifegiving Hindi-speaking heart-breaking

4. *noun + past participle functioning as adjective*

handmade typewritten
frostbitten citybred

5. *adjective + present participle functioning as adjective*

goodlooking far-reaching well-meaning

6. *adjective + past participle functioning as adjective*

widespread loudmouthed
drycleaned freshbaked

Compound verbs:

underestimate overreact overact overdo

Exercise 6

Identify the following words as simple, complex or compound words:

homeless	talking	breakage	wider
flowers	brotherhood	steamengine	fireproof
incapable	highsounding	dissatisfied	stardom
Sino-Pak	honest	living room	window pane
coffee time	minicab	rebuild	usefulness

Exercise 7

Analyse the following compound words into the two base forms and then identify each one of them:

heartbeat	pushbutton	franking machine
chairman	seasick	rockhard
brick-red	recordbreaking	long-awaited

12.3 Other processes of word formation

12.3.1 Clipping

Clipping is the process of shortening a word by cutting the beginning, the end or sometimes even the middle of a word. Such a form is called a clipped word.

ad	from advertisement	(the beginning of the word is retained but the end is clipped off)
phone	from telephone	(the end of the word is retained but the beginning is clipped off)
flu	from influenza	(the middle of the word is retained but the beginning and the end are clipped off)

Some other examples are:

lab	laboratory	plane	aeroplane
prof	professor	gas	gasoline
fridge	refrigerator		

Exercise 8

Write down the words from which the following have been derived:

photo	memo
fax	demo
rail	exam
intercom	mike

12.3.2 Acronymy

Acronymy is the process by which a word is formed using the initial letters of a succession of words. In some acronyms, each letter is pronounced separately.

IAS	Indian Administrative Service
NDA	National Defence Academy
VIP	Very Important Person

Some acronyms on the other hand, are pronounced and sometimes spelled as single words:

SAARC	(South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation)
NATO	(North Atlantic Treaty Organisation)
RADAR	(Radio Detecting and Ranging)

Exercise 9

Expand these acronyms:

UNDP	PC	laser	PS	CBI
Aids	WHO	TV	scuba	PCS

12.3.3 Blending

Blending is a process of word formation which combines parts of two words. Usually the first part of one word is combined with the last part of another word to form a blend:

brunch is formed from two words *breakfast* and *lunch* by blending **br-** of breakfast and **-unch** of lunch.

The blend carries the meanings of both the original words from which it has been derived.

Some other blends are:

transistor: transfer + resistor

paratroops: parachute + troops

camcorder: camera + recorder

Exercise 10

Write down the words from which these have been formed:

smog	newscast
telecast	travelogue
moped	interpol
motel	telex
heliport	handycam

12.1 Back-formation

is the reverse of the common method of forming a related word by adding a derivational suffix. In back-formation, historically, a noun exists with a derivational suffix like **-er/ -or/ -ar/ or -ing** and the suffix is dropped to form the verb. For example, nouns like *beggar* and *television* existed in the English language before the verbs *edit*, *beg* and *televise*.

Some other words formed through back-formation are:

babysit	brainwash
twindle	sightsee
sleepwalk	lipread

12.1.5 Reduplication

Reduplicatives may be treated as compound words, in which two or more elements are closely related in form:

zig-zag hocus-pocus teeny-weeny

As illustrated above, in some case the medial vowels differ and in some cases the initial consonants differ. Other examples of reduplication are:

walkie-talkie	ding-dong	hanky-panky	wishy-washy
flip-flop	ping-pong	tip-top	

12.1.6 Antonomasia

Antonomasia is a process of word formation when a word is derived from a proper name. For example, the word *sandwich* is derived from the Earl of Sandwich. Similarly *hamburger* is derived from Hamburg in Germany.

Other examples are:

sideburns	boycott	denim	cashmere	caesarean
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