

Word families and word parts

In this unit you will:

- build your vocabulary by learning different members of word families
- look at common **prefixes** and **suffixes** which are used to form different words, e.g., *-al* as a suffix to form adjectives like *parental*, *economical*, or *-ion* as a suffix to form nouns like *restriction*
- look at some common word parts which will help you identify the meanings of unknown words, e.g., *-port-* as in *export*, *portable*, etc.

Introduction

Read these sentences and note the different forms of the word *reduce*.

Of all the ideas for improving education, few are as simple or attractive as reducing the number of pupils per teacher.

Study tip

Learning vocabulary linked to one topic helps memorization.

Class-size reduction has lately developed from a subject of primarily academic interest to a key political issue.

The most obvious drawback to class-size reduction is the huge cost.

The state of California, for example, has been spending more than \$1.5 billion annually over the past seven years to reduce class size to 20 or fewer for children in the four- to seven-year-old bracket.

Source: Ehrenberg, R. G., Brewer, D. J., Gamoran, A., & Willms, J. D. (2001, November). Does class size matter? *Scientific American*, 285(5), 78–85.

As you can see, two different forms of the word *reduce* are used here: the noun *reduction* and the verb *to reduce*. These words are part of the same **word family**. In these sentences, the different members of the word family are used to connect ideas within the text and make it cohesive. Knowing the different members of word families will give you another way of connecting ideas in your own written texts.

Look at another example of how different members of the same word family can be used to link together ideas and information in a text.

In this text, different members of the word family *child* are used: *child*, *childhood* and *children*.

As we showed earlier, attitudes towards **children** were changing, in the upper levels of society at least, by the seventeenth century, but **childhood**, as people think of it today, did not become clearly established for most of the population until the nineteenth century. Two key changes during this century were the restriction of **child** labour by the Factory Acts and the development of compulsory education, which was gradually lengthened until the school-leaving age reached 16 in 1972. These changes created a space for **childhood** between infancy and adulthood and kept **children** in the parental home for a longer period.



Source: Fulcher, J., & Scott, J. (1999). Sociology. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Look at some of the other words from this text and their family members.

Word in text	Other family members
changes (noun)	change (verb)
restriction (noun)	restrict (verb), restrictive (adj)
lengthen (verb)	long (adj), length (noun)
development (noun)	developmental (adj), developmentally (adverb), develop (verb)
parental (adj)	parent (noun)

Notice that some of the family members look very different from each other, for example, *long* and *lengthen*. In other word families, the form of the words is the same but the word class is different, for example, *change* is both a noun and a verb.

Task 1 Words that do not change form

- 1.1 Look at the verbs below and tick (✓) the ones which have the same form as the noun. If the noun has a different form, write it in the table.

Verb	Noun: same form or different?
change	✓
restrict	restriction
employ	
cause	
offer	
depend	
claim	
decrease	

Verb	Noun: same form or different?
respond	
influence	
suggest	
aim	
argue	
risk	
waste	

Task 2 Understanding word families through suffixes

In Unit 2 you looked at word classes. It is sometimes possible to recognize what class a word belongs to by looking at its ending, e.g., *-ion*, *-ate*, *-al*, *-our*, *-ive*, *-ize*, *-ly*, *-ence*, *-ity*, *-ness*.

Examples:

- *restriction*, *development* = nouns
- *developmental*, *parental* = adjectives
- *developmentally* = adverb

Note: Some suffixes provide meaning in addition to indicating word class. *Painful* and *painless* are both adjectives of the noun *pain*, but have different meanings.

2.1 Put the words in the box into the table below according to their word class.

~~activate~~ ~~appropriate~~ behaviour calculate development difference
~~economical~~ equality formation gradually realize social

Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives	Adverbs
	activate	appropriate	

2.2 Which word classes do the suffixes in the box suggest? Refer to Ex 2.1 and the Introduction to this unit and complete the table with suffixes which suggest word classes.

~~-al~~ ~~-ate~~ ~~-ence~~ ~~-ion~~ ~~-ize~~ ~~-ity~~ ~~-ly~~ ~~-ment~~

Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives	Adverbs
-ion -ment			

Note: Suffixes can indicate that words belong to a particular word class, but they are *not* a guarantee of this. One word that illustrates this is *appropriate* in Ex 2.1. Although it is most commonly used as an adjective, meaning ‘suitable for a particular thing or cause’, *appropriate* can also be used as a verb, as in ‘to take possession of’. Other examples are the words *ritual* and *potential*. They both end in *-al*, but they are both used as nouns and adjectives.

Task 3

Understanding meaning through prefixes

In addition to suffixes at the end of words, which can indicate word class, we make use of prefixes at the beginning of words. These prefixes do not tell us about the class of words, but they can help us understand the meaning of words.

Example: *prerequisite, preconceive, prefix*

All the words above have the same prefix, *pre~*, which means 'before'.

We can remove a prefix from a word and it still remains a word. For example, the prefix *ir~* can be removed from these words: *irrelevant* (relevant), *irrational* (rational).

3.1 Use your dictionary to complete the table with words beginning with the prefixes given.

Prefixes	Example words
mono~	<i>monotone, monorail</i>
bi~	<i>bipolar, biannual</i>
re~	
inter~	
anti~	
geo~	
post~	
micro~	
semi~	
sub~	
thermo~	

3.2 Look at the meanings of the words in Ex 3.1. Then match the meanings below to the prefixes from the table above.

1. again, back

re~

2. after, later

post~

3. exactly half, not complete

semi~

4. connected with heat

thermo~

5. extremely small

micro~

6. between

inter~

7. under, a less important person or thing

sub~

8. connected with (the) Earth

geo~

9. against, opposed to

anti~

10. two, twice

bi~

11. one, singular

mono~

Task 4 Negative prefixes

Many words can be given a negative meaning by adding a prefix, for example, *convenient – inconvenient*; *agree – disagree*.

- 4.1 Check these words in your dictionary and see which of the following negative prefixes are used with them: *dis~, in~, un~, ir~, ab~, il~, im~.*

1. certainty uncertainty
2. satisfactory _____
3. efficient _____
4. likely _____
5. appearance _____
6. principled _____
7. normal _____
8. relevant _____
9. legal _____
10. moral _____
11. published _____

Note: In some cases, the prefixes *dis~, in~, un~, ir~, ab~, il~, im~* might create an opposite rather than a negative meaning. There are also some words beginning with these prefixes that do not have a negative or opposite meaning. For example: an *inbound* flight; to *implant* an artificial heart.

The prefix *in~* is not normally used with words beginning with *b, l, m, p* or *r*.

Task 5 Family members that look different from each other

When using a dictionary, you need to know how to locate the different words in a word family. The word under which a set of related words is located is called the **headword**. For example, when you look up *variation*, in some dictionaries you may find the word set: *varies, varying and varied*.

However, you won't find all family members in the same place in your dictionary. For example, you would have to look on a completely different page to find the following family members of *vary*: *variable, variation and variant*. If you want to find these family members, you would have to look at the stem of the word *var~*.

You can use this technique for many words, but sometimes words in the same word family can look very different from each other, e.g., *long (adj), length (n)*. In these cases, you need to learn the related words and their spelling.

Note: A headword in a dictionary may have more than one definition, but only one entry. These words are **polysemes**, i.e., the definitions are related rather than completely different.

5.1 Match words from the left column with family members from the right column.

- | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. long (____) | <input type="checkbox"/> | a. poverty (____) |
| 2. need (____) | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. obedience (____) |
| 3. obey (____) | <input type="checkbox"/> | c. lend (____) |
| 4. poor (____) | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. necessary (____) |
| 5. loan (____) | <input type="checkbox"/> | e. length (____) |
| 6. space (____) | <input type="checkbox"/> | f. description (____) |
| 7. describe (____) | <input type="checkbox"/> | g. spatial (____) |

5.2 Now write the word class next to each word in Ex 5.1: *n, v, adj.*

Task 6 Complete word families

6.1 Complete the word family table below with the words in the box. There may be some columns where there are two entries. You may know some other words to complete the light green cells.

competition	decide	permit	economy
complicated	absence	certainty	competitively
original	competitive	complication	originate
decisive	permissible	economically	decisively
economize	origin	certainly	

Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives	Adverbs
	compete		
decision			
permission, permit			
		economic, economical	
			originally
	complicate		
		absent	
		certain	

6.2 Complete the following sentences using a member of the word family given in brackets.

1. Economists often argue that competition is good for the consumer. (compete)
2. It is an absolute _____ that the ruling party will win the forthcoming election. (certain)
3. In the manager's _____, the assistant manager is in charge of the company. (absent)
4. Most people believe that high fuel prices are _____ damaging. (economy)
5. Photocopies of this certificate are not sufficient. The _____ documents need to be brought in. (origin)
6. The _____ to make 20 per cent of the workforce redundant was not taken lightly. (decide)
7. Photocopies may not be made without the _____ of the author. (permit)
8. The construction of the new road has been delayed as a result of legal _____. (complicate)



Task 7

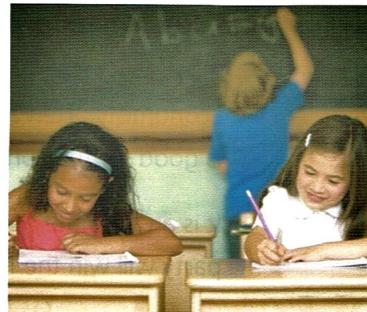
Cohesion: using nouns and verbs to connect ideas

7.1 In the following pairs of sentences you will need two forms of the same word. Use different forms of the words in this box to complete the sentences below.

different explain difficult argue believe develop

1. Supporters of Darwin's theories believe that human life evolved gradually over millions of years. This belief is strongly opposed by creationists.
2. The secretary explained the registration process in some detail. However, the explanation was rather complicated and several people failed to understand.
3. People react in different ways to dangerous situations. These differences cannot simply be attributed to psychological factors.
4. There is a strong belief that there is a link between violent computer games and violent behaviour. The manufacturers of such games argue that their products do not influence people's behaviour, however.

5. Some elderly people find pre-packaged foods _____ to open. The main _____ is that some of the materials used in packaging are quite tough.
6. Many studies have recorded how young children's language skills _____. The _____ of second-language skills in children is also of great interest to researchers.



Task 8 Word parts

In earlier tasks in this unit, we have seen that suffixes can give us information about *word classes* and that prefixes can give us some information about the *meaning* of words.

We can also find some **non-detachable word parts** which occur in a number of different words and which have related meanings. For example, the word part (or **root**) *phon(e)*, which means 'sound', is found in a number of different words whose meaning is connected to sound.

Examples: *telephone, phonetics, microphone*, etc.

Note: Non-detachable word parts cannot be separated from the word and still leave a complete word. For example, if you separate *mem~* from *memory*, what is left, *~ory*, is not a word. Contrast this with a prefix (see pages 24 and 25).

8.1 Look at the groups of words below and underline any common word parts.

1. memory, memorial, remember, commemorate
2. centenary, percentage, century
3. transport, portable, import, export
4. biology, psychology, geology
5. television, telephone, telescope
6. visual, vision, visible
7. prospect, respect, perspective, spectator
8. photograph, telephoto, photosynthesis

Study tip

You will often find instances where word parts do not convey the meaning that they are usually connected to. For example, in *member*, *mem~* is not connected with 'keeping something in mind'.

8.2 Use your dictionary to check the meaning of the words in Ex 8.1. Then match the word parts to their meanings.

- | | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|-------|
| 1. keep in mind | <u>mem</u> _____ | 5. watch, look at | _____ |
| 2. light | _____ | 6. one hundred | _____ |
| 3. far away | _____ | 7. see | _____ |
| 4. carry, move | _____ | 8. study of | _____ |