

23 Words that look like opposites, but aren't

Activity A

So what does it mean?

The prefixes 'un', 'in' and 'dis' are commonly used with adjectives to make opposites. However, there are a number of examples where adding one of these prefixes does not make the opposite adjective. Look at the following pairs of adjectives.

- One pair actually have the same meaning. Identify this pair and write a definition for these words.
- For the other pairs, what is the difference in meaning? Write a definition for each adjective.
- If b) in each case is **not** the opposite, can you think of a word that is? Check all of your answers in the dictionary.

Write definitions for these adjectives:

- 1 a) **different**
b) **indifferent**
- 2 a) **flammable**
b) **inflammable**
- 3 a) **famous**
b) **infamous**

Activity B

Here are some more pairs of adjectives that look like opposites, but aren't.

interested / disinterested	savoury / unsavoury
sensible / insensible	valuable / invaluable

Read the example sentences below and work out the meaning of each adjective from the context. Then check in the dictionary.

- 1 I am sure I can trust what my solicitor says because she is **disinterested**. My friends can't provide the same kind of objective advice.
- 2 As an actor he has played some **unsavoury** characters including blackmailers and thieves.
- 3 They were lying **insensible** on the floor.
- 4 The evidence that you supplied to the police was **invaluable** in the capture of the murderer.