WORD BUILDING

Affixes and roots

Adding affixes to existing words (the base or root) to form new words is common in English. Prefixes are added to the front of the base (*like* →*dislike*), whereas suffixes are added to the end of the base (*active* →*activate*). Prefixes usually do not change the class of the base word, but suffixes usually do change the class of the word.

The most common prefixes used to form new verbs in academic English are: *re-, dis-, over-, un-, mis-, out-*. The most common suffixes are: *-ise, -en, -ate, -(i)fy*. By far the most common affix in academic English is *-ise*.

Verbs (e.g. prefix + verb →verb)

Prefix	Meaning	Examples
re-	again or back	restructure, revisit, reappear, rebuild, refinance
dis-	reverses the meaning of the verb	disappear, disallow, disarm, disconnect, discontinue
over-	too much	overbook, oversleep, overwork
un-	reverses the meaning of the verb	unbend, uncouple, unfasten
mis-	badly or wrongly	mislead, misinform, misidentify
out-	more or better than others	outperform, outbid
be-	make or cause	befriend, belittle
co-	together	co-exist, co-operate, co-own
de-	do the opposite of	devalue, deselect
fore-	earlier, before	foreclose, foresee
inter-	between	interact, intermix, interface
pre-	before	pre-expose, prejudge, pretest
sub-	under/below	subcontract, subdivide
trans-	across, over	transform, transcribe, transplant
under-	not enough	underfund, undersell, undervalue, underdevelop

e.g. Suffix used to form verbs with the meaning "cause to be".

Suffix	Example
-ise	stabilise, characterise, symbolise, visualise, specialise
-ate	differentiate, liquidate, pollinate, duplicate, fabricate
-fy	classify, exemplify, simplify, justify
-en	awaken, fasten, shorten, moisten

Nouns

The most common prefixes used to form new nouns in academic English are: *co-* and *sub-*. The most common suffixes are: *-tion, -ity, -er, -ness, -ism, -ment, -ant, -ship, -age, -ery*. By far the most common noun affix in academic English is *-tion.*

e.g. prefix + noun →noun

Prefix	Meaning	Examples
anti-	against	anticlimax, antidote, antithesis
auto-	self	autobiography, automobile
bi-	two	bilingualism, biculturalism, bi-metalism
co-	joint	co-founder, co-owner, co-descendant
counter-	against	counter-argument, counter-example, counter-proposal
dis-	the converse of	discomfort, dislike
ex-	former	ex-chairman, ex-hunter
hyper-	extreme	hyperinflation, hypersurface
in-	the converse of	inattention, incoherence, incompatibility
in-	inside	inpatient,
inter-	between	interaction, inter-change, interference
kilo-	thousand	kilobyte
mal-	bad	malfunction, maltreatment, malnutrition

mega-	million	megabyte
mis-	wrong	misconduct, misdeed, mismanagement
mini-	small	mini-publication, mini-theory
mono-	one	monosyllable, monograph, monogamy
neo-	new	neo-colonialism, neo-impressionism
out-	separate	outbuilding,
poly-	many	polysyllable
pseudo-	false	pseudo-expert
re-	again	re-organisation, re-assessment, re-examination
semi-	half	semicircle, semi-darkness
sub-	below	subset, subdivision
super-	more than, above	superset, superimposition, superpowers
sur-	over and above	surtax
tele-	distant	telecommunications,
tri-	three	tripartism
ultra-	beyond	ultrasound
under-	below, too little	underpayment, under-development, undergraduate
vice-	deputy	vice-president

e.g. Suffix added to a verb (V), noun (N) or adjective (A) →noun

Suffix	Meaning	Examples
-tion *-sion*	action/instance of V-ing	alteration, demonstration expansion, inclusion, admission
-er	person who V-s something used for V-ing	advertiser, driver computer, silencer
-ment	action/instance of V-ing	development, punishment, unemployment
-ant *-ent*	person who V-s	assistant, consultant student
-age	action/result of V	breakage, wastage, package

-al	action/result of V	denial, proposal, refusal, dismissal
-ence -ance	action/result of V	preference, dependence, interference attendance, acceptance, endurance
-ery/-ry	action/instance of V-ing place of V-ing	bribery, robbery, misery refinery, bakery

Suffix	Meaning	Examples
-er	person concerned with N	astronomer, geographer
-ism	doctrine of N	Marxism, Maoism, Thatcherism
-ship	state of being N	friendship, citizenship, leadership
-age	collection of N	baggage, plumage

Suffix	Meaning	Examples
-ity	state or quality of being A	ability, similarity, responsibility, curiosity
-ness	state or quality of being A	darkness, preparedness, consciousness
-cy	state or quality of being A	urgency, efficiency, frequency

Adjectives

Many adjectives are formed from a base of a different class with a suffix (e.g. *-less, -ous*). Adjectives can also be formed from other adjectives, especially by the negative prefixes (*un-, in- and non-*).

The most common suffixes are *-al, -ent, -ive, -ous, -ful, -less.*

e.g. Suffix added to verbs or nouns →adjective

Suffix	Example
-al	central, political, national, optional, professional
-ent	different, dependent, excellent
-ive	attractive, effective, imaginative, repetitive
-ous	continuous, dangerous, famous
-ful	beautiful, peaceful, careful
-less	endless, homeless, careless, thoughtless
-able	drinkable, countable, avoidable,

e.g. negative + adjective →adjective

Prefix	Examples
un-	unfortunate, uncomfortable, unjust
im-/in-/ir-/il-	immature, impatient, improbable, inconvenient, irreplaceable, illegal
non-	non-fiction, non-political, non-neutral
dis-	disloyal, dissimilar, dishonest

Mixed

e.g. base with both prefix and suffix

Adjectives: uncomfortable, unavoidable, unimaginative, inactive, semi-circular

Nouns: disappointment, misinformation, reformulation

Word formation

Formal written English uses nouns more than verbs. For example, judgement rather than judge, development rather than develop, admiration rather than admire.

There appeared to be evidence of differential *treatment* of children.

This is reflected in our *admiration* for people who have made something of their lives, sometimes against great odds, and in our somewhat disappointed *judgment* of those who merely drift through life.

All airfields in the country would be nationalised, and the government would continue with the *development* of new aircraft as recommended by the Brabazon Committee.

Associated with nominalisation is the occurrence of prepositional phrases, introduced by *of*:

judgment *of* those

treatment *of* children
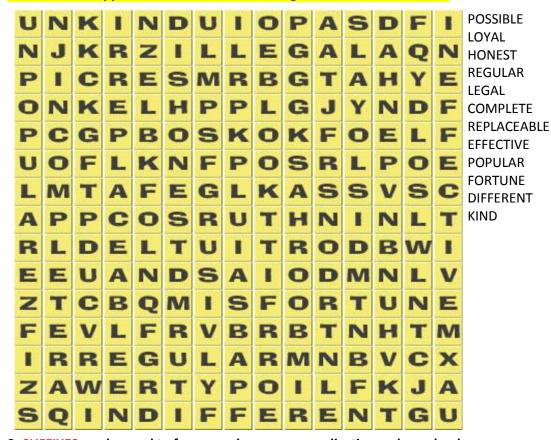
development *of* new aircraft

-tion is the most common suffix used in this way. For example: *alteration, resignation.*

However others are: *-ity* ability, similarity, complexity; *-ness* blindness, darkness, preparedness; *-ment* development, encouragement; *-ship* friendship; *-age* mileage; *-ery* robbery, bribery; *-al* arrival; *-ance* assistance, resemblance.

EXERCISES

1. PREFIXES like DIS/IN/IM/IR/UN/IL/MIS are used to give an opposite/negative meaning to a word.

Task: Find the opposites of the words on the right and write them down.

U	N	K	I	N	D	U	I	O	P	A	S	D	F	I	POSSIBLE
N	J	K	R	Z	I	L	L	E	G	A	L	A	Q	N	LOYAL
P	I	C	R	E	S	M	R	B	G	T	A	H	Y	E	HONEST
O	N	K	E	L	H	P	P	L	G	J	Y	N	D	F	REGULAR
P	C	G	P	B	O	S	K	O	K	F	O	E	L	F	LEGAL
U	O	F	L	K	N	F	P	O	S	R	L	P	O	E	COMPLETE
L	M	T	A	F	E	G	L	K	A	S	S	V	S	C	REPLACEABLE
A	P	P	C	O	S	R	U	T	H	N	I	N	L	T	EFFECTIVE
R	L	D	E	L	T	U	I	T	R	O	D	B	W	I	POPULAR
E	E	U	A	N	D	S	A	I	O	D	M	N	L	V	FORTUNE
Z	T	C	B	Q	M	I	S	F	O	R	T	U	N	E	DIFFERENT
F	E	V	L	F	R	V	B	R	B	T	N	H	T	M	KIND
I	R	R	E	G	U	L	A	R	M	N	B	V	C	X	
Z	A	W	E	R	T	Y	P	O	I	L	F	K	J	A	
S	Q	I	N	D	I	F	F	E	R	E	N	T	G	U	

2. SUFFIXES can be used to form a verb, a noun, an adjective and an adverb.

EXAMPLES

dark (adjective) + ness = darkness (noun)
strength (noun) + en = strengthen (verb)
probable (adjective) + (l)y = probably (adverb)
glory (noun) + ous = glorious (adjective)

Task: Link the verbs with their correct suffix to form NOUNS and write them down. Follow the example and be c

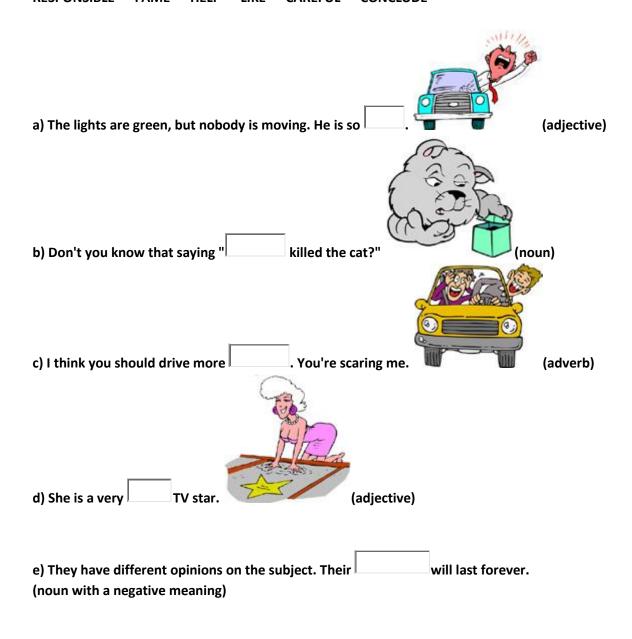| a) IMAGINE	1. -ance	g	assistance
b) WEAK	2. -ity		
c) TEACH	3. -ation		
d) INFECT	4. -sion		
e) DECIDE	5. -ence		
f) ARGUE	6. -er		
g) ASSIST	7. -al		
h) SECURE	8. -ance		
i) REFUSE	9. -ment		
j) OCCUR	10. - ion		

3. PREFIXES and SUFFIXES

Add a PREFIX and/or SUFFIX to the words below and put them in the correct sentence.
PROBABLE   COMMUNICATE   AGREE   CURIOUS   ANGER   HEALTH
RESPONSIBLE   FAME   HELP   LIKE   CAREFUL   CONCLUDE

a) The lights are green, but nobody is moving. He is so ⬚ .   (adjective)

b) Don't you know that saying " ⬚ killed the cat?"   (noun)

c) I think you should drive more ⬚ . You're scaring me.   (adverb)

d) She is a very ⬚ TV star.   (adjective)

e) They have different opinions on the subject. Their ⬚ will last forever.
(noun with a negative meaning)

f) Brian is always late for work. He is so _____. (adjective with a negative meaning)

g) This Maths problem is very difficult. Mary didn't come to any _____. (noun)

h) He can't see the banana peel. He will _____ slip and fall. (adverb)

i) You shouldn't eat so much junk food. It's very _____. (adjective with a negative meaning)

j) Thanks for finding my cat. You're a very _____ young man. (adjective)

k) My parents are always fighting. There is no [   ] between them anymore. **(noun)**

l) I really [   ] my packed lunch. I don't like it. **(verb with a negative meaning)**