Root Words,

Prefixes and

Suffixes

What are root words?

Some words are made up of different parts, for example, **unemployment**

unemployment has a beginning (prefix), a middle (root word) and an ending (suffix).

unemployment

un	employ	ment
prefix	root word	suffix

The root word is the basic word and by adding prefixes and suffixes, we can change its meaning.

If we take the root word, **employ**, and add other suffixes we can make other words, such as **employ**ed, **employ**ee, **employ**er. Both the spelling and the meanings of the words are linked.

A root word is a real word and you can make new words from it by adding prefixes and suffixes.

Where words are linked like this, they are called a **word family**.

Root words are helpful for learning both the meaning and the spelling of a word.

Here are some more examples of root words and their word families:

use: **use**less, **us**able, **use**d, **us**ing, **use**r, mis**use**

friend: **friend**ly, **friend**ship, un**friend**ly, **friend**less

faith: **faith**ful, **faith**fully, un**faith**ful, un**faith**fully

Using root words to make new words

Add a **prefix** to these root words to fill the gaps:

I am always worried my writing will _____ (appear) from the computer screen. If that keeps happening I will have to _____(place) the computer but I will be very _____ (happy) if I have to do that. As a _____ (caution) I will save all my work on a memory stick.

Add a **suffix** to these root words to fill the gaps:

I am (learn) _____ to write formal (letter)_____. It is (prefer) _____ to begin the letter with a (greet) _____. If the letter is to someone I don't know, I end it 'Yours (faith) _____'. If the letter is to someone I know, I end it 'Yours (sincere) _____'.

Add **both a prefix and a suffix** to these root words to fill the gaps:

This is a sad story. I should have ___(trust)___ my boyfriend from the very start. Just before we were to be married I ___(cover)___ he had been ___faith____. He had a relationship with another woman that ___(date)__ ours. His mobile phone was his ___(do)___. I ___(cover)____ texts from her. It was a very ___(comfort)___ time all round when I ___(turn)___ his ring. It was all very ___(stress)___ but I've ___(cover)___ now.

Adding to root words

Build your own words, **adding prefixes and suffixes to the root words**: eg uncooked.

How many words can you make?

prefixes	root words	suffixes
dis	cover	ment
un	employ	er
pre	cook	ing
re	do	ed

Adding to root words - answers

These are the words you can make by adding to the root words. You may be able to find more.

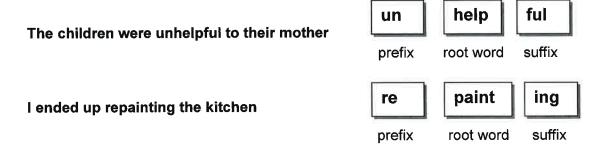|			
discover	re-employ	precook	doer
uncover	employment	cooker	doing
recover	employer	cooking	undo
rediscover	employing	cooked	undoing
covering	employed	precooking	undoer
covered	unemployed	precooked	redo
discovering	unemployment	uncooked	redoer
uncovering	re-employment		redoing
recovered	re-employing		
recovering	re-employed		
rediscovering			
discovered			
uncovered			
rediscovered			

Note: where the prefix ends in a vowel and the root word begins with a vowel, we add a hyphen (-) to make it easier to say the word: eg re-employment.

Prefixes and suffixes

Some words (**root** words) can have words or parts of words added to the beginning or end that change their meaning.

If you add parts of words to the beginning of a word, it is called a **prefix**.
If you add parts of words to the end of a word, it is called a **suffix**.

The children were unhelpful to their mother

un	help	ful
prefix	root word	suffix

I ended up repainting the kitchen

re	paint	ing
prefix	root word	suffix

Knowing about these parts of words is useful for spelling because they help you break down longer words into smaller parts and they also give you clues about their meanings.

Prefixes

Prefix	Meaning
un-	means **not** or the opposite of the rest of the word: eg **un**eaten means **not eaten**
dis-	also means **not**: eg **dis**agreed means **not agreed**
re-	means **again**: eg **re**done means **done again**
pre-	means **before** e.g. **pre**date means **to come before**

Suffixes

Suffix	Meaning
-s, -es	means **more than one** (plural): eg one book but many book**s**.
-ing or -ed	shows when something happened - in the present (**ing**) or past (**ed**) tense: eg I am work**ing** there now or I work**ed** there last week
-er, -est	means **more** or the most of something: eg that drink was cold**er** (more cold) or that was the cold**est** drink (the most cold)
-ful or -less	shows there is a **lot of** something (hope**ful** - a lot of hope) or none of something (hope**less** - no hope)

What is a prefix?

A prefix is a group of letters that you can add to the **beginning** of a root word* to change the meaning of the word. For example, **mis** + fortune = **mis**fortune

> *A **root word** stands on its own as a word but you can make new words from it by adding beginnings (prefixes) and endings (suffixes).

For example, '**comfort**' is a root word. By adding the prefix 'dis' and the suffix 'able' you can make new words such as 'dis**comfort**' and '**comfort**able'.

The meanings of prefixes

Every prefix has a meaning. For example:

> The prefix **'un'** means 'not'

> The root word **'clear'** means 'bright', 'free from difficulty'

> So **un** + **clear** = **unclear** , meaning 'not clear' or 'dim', 'difficult to see or understand'.

There are no rules to help you remember which prefix you should use, although knowing the meaning of the prefix can help.

Here are some examples of prefixes and their meanings:

Prefix	Meaning
mis-	'wrong' or 'badly' eg '**mis**spelled' or **mis**spelt means 'wrongly spelled'
sub-	'under' eg '**sub**way' means 'a way under the ground'
pre-	'before in time', 'in front of' or 'superior' eg '**pre**packed' means 'packed before'
un-	'not' (there are also several other prefixes which mean 'not') eg '**un**hurt' means 'not hurt'

If you're uncertain whether the prefix you've used is correct, **check the word in a dictionary** when you proofread your writing.

Using prefixes

A **prefix** at the front of a word changes its meaning:

Prefix	Meaning
un-	means **not** or the opposite of the rest of the word: eg **un**eaten means **not eaten**
dis-	also means **not**: eg **dis**agreed means **not agreed**
re-	means **again**: eg **re**done means **done again**
pre-	means **before**: eg **pre**date means **to come before**

Which prefix would you use in each of these sentences?

1. I'm sorry, I'm (un, dis) ____able to come to your party next week.

2. I have to stay in to (pre, re) ____vise for my exam.

3. This is a secret, please don't (un, re) ____peat it to anyone.

4. She (un, dis) ____agrees with everything I say.

5. You need to (re, pre) ____cook the pastry before baking the pie.

What do these sentences mean? Is a) or b) the nearest meaning?

1. We need to **re**appoint for that job as soon as possible.

   a) We need to appoint again for that job as soon as possible.

   b) We do not need to appoint for that job as soon as possible.

2. A good CV is a **pre**condition of employment.

   a) A good CV is a condition of being employed again.

   b) A good CV is needed before anyone can be employed.

3. I'm worried that he will **dis**appear before he has paid.

   a) I'm worried that he will appear again before he has paid.

   b) I'm worried that he will not appear again before he has paid.

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Using prefixes - answers

Which prefix would you use in each of these sentences?

1. I'm sorry, I'm **un**able to come to your party next week.

2. I have to stay in to **re**vise for my exam.

3. This is a secret; please don't **re**peat it to anyone.

4. She **dis**agrees with everything I say.

5. You need to **pre**cook the pastry before baking the pie.

What do these sentences mean? Is a) or b) the nearest meaning?

1. We need to **re**appoint for that job as soon as possible.

   a) We need to appoint again for that job as soon as possible.

2. A good CV is a **pre**condition of employment.

   b) A good CV is needed before anyone can be employed.

3. I'm worried that he will **dis**appear before he has paid.

   b) I'm worried that he will not appear again before he has paid.

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What is a suffix?

A suffix is a word ending - a group of letters you can add to the **end** of a **root word***
eg   walk**ing**, help**ful**

> ***A root word** stands on its own as a word, but you can make new words from it by adding beginnings (prefixes) and endings (suffixes).
>
> For example, '**comfort**' is a root word. By adding the suffix 'able' you can make new words such as '**comfort**ing' and '**comfort**able'.

Adding suffixes to words can change or add to their meaning. But they can also show how a word will be used in a sentence and what part of speech the word belongs to (**eg** noun, verb, etc).

eg   If you want to use the root word 'talk' in the sentence "I was (talk) to Samina", then you must add the suffix -**ing** so that the word 'talk' makes better sense grammatically: "I was talk**ing** to Samina".

There are various suffixes. The most common are probably -**ed** and -**ing**.

	Suffix	Example
Verb suffixes	-ed	walk + ed = walk**ed**
	-ing	say + ing = say**ing**
Noun suffixes	-ness	happy + ness = happi**ness**
	-sion	divide + sion = divi**sion**
	-ment	excite + ment = excite**ment**
	-tion	educate + tion = educa**tion**
	-cian	music + cian = musi**cian**
Adjective suffixes	-al	accident + al = accident**al**
	-er	tall + er = tall**er**
	-able	accept + able = accept**able**
	-ary	imagine + ary = imagin**ary**
	-est	large + est = larg**est**
	-ful	help + ful + help**ful**
Adverb suffixes	-ly	love + ly = love**ly**
	-fully	hope + fully = hope**fully**

NB: Adding a suffix to some root words will change the spelling of the new word. There are some spelling rules to help you learn why and when this happens. **For more about this, see the factsheets on suffix spelling rules.**

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Suffix spelling rules: double letters

When adding a suffix to a root word the spelling of both usually stays the same:
eg   care + ful = careful

But there are several important groups of words in which the spelling of the root word **changes** when you add a suffix.

Sometimes the spelling changes because of the **Doubling rules**.

As always, there are exceptions to these four rules, but they are a good starting guide:

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1. For most short (one syllable) words that end in a single consonant (anything but 'a', 'e', 'i', 'o', 'u'), double the last letter when adding a suffix:

eg   run + ing = running
      sun + y = sunny

If the word ends with more than one consonant, don't double the last letter:

eg   pump + ed = pumped
      sing + ing = singing

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2. For most longer (more than one syllable) words that end in 'l', double the 'l' when adding the suffix:

eg   travel + ing = travelling
      cancel + ed = cancelled

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3. If you have a word ending in a consonant and a suffix starting with a consonant, you don't need to double the last letter of the word:

eg   enrol + ment = enrolment
      commit + ment = commitment

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4. For most longer (more than one syllable) words that have the stress on the last syllable when you say them **and** end with a single consonant (anything but 'a', 'e', 'i', 'o', 'u'), double the last letter:
eg   begin + er = beginner
      prefer + ing = preferring

If the word has more than one syllable and ends with a single consonant, but the stress isn't on the last syllable, you don't need to double the last letter before adding a suffix:
eg   offer + ing = offering
      benefit + ed = benefited

Using suffixes
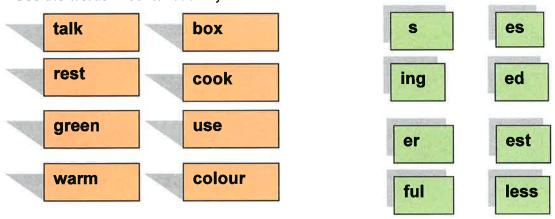
A **suffix** on the end of a word changes its meaning.

Suffix	Meaning
-s, -es	means **more than one** (plural): eg one book but two book**s**; one tax but too many tax**es**
-ing or **-ed**	shows when something happened - in the present (**-ing**) or past (**-ed**) tense: eg I am work**ing** there now or I work**ed** there last week.
-er, -est	means **more** or **most** of something: eg that drink was cold**er** (more cold) or that was the cold**est** drink (the most cold)
-ful or **-less**	shows there is **a lot of** something (hope**ful** - a lot of hope) or none of something (hope**less** - no hope)

Which suffix would you use in these sentences?

1. I am look____ (ing, ed) for information on Paris, but there are too many book____(s, es) to choose from in the library.
2. The woman next to me was young____ (er, est) than me, but Sarah was by far the young____ (er, est) person in the room.
3. It was really thought____ (ful, less) of you to bring that cake, especially as my son had been so care____(ful, less) in burning the one he made.
4. Are you look____ (ing, ed) for yesterday's paper? After I look____(ing, ed) at it, I put it in the recycl____ (ing, ed).

How many words can you make from these root words and suffixes?
Use the words in sentences of your own.

talk	box
rest	cook
green	use
warm	colour

s	es
ing	ed
er	est
ful	less

Prefixes and suffixes
Using suffixes

Exercise in using suffixes.

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Ww/E3.1
Ww/E3.2

Using suffixes - answers

Which suffix would you use in each of these sentences? The answers are given in **bold**:

1. I am looking for information on Paris, but there are too many books to choose from in the library.
2. The woman next to me was younger than me, but Sarah was by far the youngest person in the room.
3. It was really thoughtful of you to bring that cake, especially as my son had been so careless in burning the one he made.
4. Are you looking for yesterday's paper? After I looked at it, I put it in the recycling.

How many words can you make from these root words and suffixes?

Below are some of the words you can make. A few of them have meanings that are different from the ones in the models (for example, cooker does not mean 'more cook', but refers to an item of kitchen equipment).

-s	-es	-ing	-ed	-er	-est	-ful	-less
talks		talking	talked	talker			
	boxes	boxing	boxed	boxer			
rests		resting	rested			restful	restless
cooks		cooking	cooked	cooker			
greens		greening	greened	greener	greenest		
uses		using*	used	user		useful	useless
warms		warming	warmed	warmer	warmest		
colours		colouring	coloured	colourer		colourful	colourless

* NOTE: in the word '**using**', the 'e' is dropped before adding the suffix.

ivacy Policy   Cookies

Choosing suffixes for root words

In the table below, only one out of the three suffixes next to each root word is right for that word.

Choose the one you think is correct and write the new word in the space provided, as in the example. Don't forget the suffix spelling rules.

Root word	Suffixes	Correct word
origin	al / ly / ary	**original**
music	sion / cian / tion	
noise	y / ly / ary	
happy	ness / less / ful	
beauty	ful / est / ly	
like	ed / er / ful	
manage	ment / ible / al	
friend	y / ly / ary	
comfort	able / ible / ly	
love	y / ary / ly	
subtract	sion / tion / cian	
divide	cian / sion / tion	

Choosing suffixes for root words - answers

The the right suffixes for each of the root words are given in **bold** below:

Root word	Suffixes	Correct word
origin	al / ly / ary	**original**
music	sion / cian / tion	**musician**
noise	y / ly / ary	**noisy**
happy	ness / less / ful	**happiness**
beauty	ful / est / ly	**beautiful**
like	ed / er / ful	**liked**
manage	ment / ible / al	**management**
friend	y / ly / ary	**friendly**
comfort	able / ible / ly	**comfortable**
love	y / ary / ly	**lovely**
subtract	sion / tion / cian	**subtraction**
divide	cian / sion / tion	**division**

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Taking away the prefix to find the root word

Take away the prefix from each of the root words in the table. Write the root word in the space provided, as in the example.

Prefix + root word	Root word
untidy	**tidy**
indecent	
immature	
misprint	
underarm	
reappear	
transplant	
intercity	
unusual	
immobile	
inaccurate	
unimportant	
supermarket	
antifreeze	
prejudge	
decrease	
submerge	
triangle	
misspent	
dissatisfy	

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Taking away the prefix to find the root word - answers

The correct root words are given in **bold** below:

Prefix + root word	Root word
untidy	**tidy**
indecent	**decent**
immature	**mature**
misprint	**print**
underarm	**arm**
reappear	**appear**
transplant	**plant**
intercity	**city**
unusual	**usual**
immobile	**mobile**
inaccurate	**accurate**
unimportant	**important**
supermarket	**market**
antifreeze	**freeze**
prejudge	**judge**
decrease	**crease**
submerge	**merge**
triangle	**angle**
misspent	**spent**
dissatisfy	**satisfy**

Taking away the suffix to find the root word

Write the correctly spelled root word in the space provided, as in the example. Don't forget the suffix spelling rules.

Root word + suffix	Root word
biggest	**big**
friendship	
quietly	
sadness	
hoping	
secondary	
employment	
funny	
professional	
confusing	
magician	
decision	

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Taking away the suffix to find the root word - answers

The table below shows the root words with correct spellings in bold:

Root word + suffix	Root word
biggest	**big**
friendship	**friend**
quietly	**quiet**
sadness	**sad**
hoping	**hope**
secondary	**second**
employment	**employ**
funny	**fun**
professional	**profession**
confusing	**confuse**
magician	**magic**
decision	**decide**