

Tools for Instruction

Explore Prefix and Suffix Families

Students can develop their vocabulary by identifying the parts of a word and analyzing how each part contributes to the meaning of the whole word. Help students understand and remember prefixes and suffixes by organizing them into “families” with related meanings, such as the “together” family (*com-*, *con-*, *co-*). Have students explore connections within prefix and suffix families by working with one family at a time to break words into meaningful parts, build new words, and investigate how adding a prefix or suffix can affect the meaning, spelling, and function of a word.

Three Ways to Teach

Identify Prefixes 15–20 minutes

Note: The instructions below use prefixes in the “together” family (*co-*, *com-*, *con-*), but this activity can be repeated with other prefix families. See **Prefixes, Suffixes, and Roots** (page 4).

- Remind students that a *prefix* is a word part added to the beginning of a base word that changes the meaning of the word. Explain that some prefixes have similar or related meanings. Then introduce prefixes in the “together” family.

| Family | Meaning | Prefix |
|------------|----------------|--|
| “together” | together, with | <i>co-</i> , <i>com-</i> , <i>con-</i> |

- As a group, brainstorm words that begin with prefixes in the “together” family. Display the words in a list. (*coexist*, *coauthor*, *cooperate*, *copilot*, *combine*, *comfort*, *compare*, *conjoin*, *connect*, *conversation*) Discuss how the meaning of each word relates to the meaning of the prefix.
- Point out that some words can be broken apart into a prefix and *base word*, or a word that can stand alone. (*co/pilot*, *con/form*) Other words can be broken into a prefix and root. (*com/bine*: the root *bi* means two) Remind students that a *root* has its own meaning but cannot stand alone as a word.
- Explain that there are also words that happen to start with the letters *co-*, *com-*, and *con-*, but that these letters don’t function as a prefix.

| prefix + base word | prefix + root | no prefix |
|--|---|-----------------------------|
| <i>co/pilot</i> “to steer <u>together</u> ” | <i>com/bine</i> “two or more <u>together</u> ” | <i>comics</i> “cartoons” |

- Give partners a list of words that start with *co-*, *com-*, and *con-*. Tell them that you want them to identify which words can be broken into a prefix and base word, which words can be broken into a prefix and root, and which words do not include a prefix at all.
- Provide a list of common roots from **Prefixes, Suffixes, and Roots** (page 4) to help students identify roots.

| | | | | |
|---------|----------|-----------|---------|---------|
| coexist | corner | construct | conjoin | cousin |
| costume | coauthor | compress | conform | command |

Identify Prefixes *continued*

- Encourage students to break each word into parts. Then ask: *Is one part a word that can stand alone? Is one part a root? Does the meaning of the word include "together"?*
- Ask students to share their ideas about each word. Help them clarify the meaning of each word and identify connections between words. (prefix + base word: *co/exist, con/join, co/author, com/press, con/form*; prefix + root: *con/struct, con/form, com/mand*; no prefix: *corner, cousin, costume*. Note: "Form" is both a base word and a Latin root.)

Create Words Using a Prefix Family 15–20 minutes

- Display a chart that shows prefixes in the "number" family.

| Prefix | Meaning | Example Words |
|--------------|------------|------------------------|
| <i>uni-</i> | one | unicycle, uniform |
| <i>mono-</i> | one | monotone, monorail |
| <i>bi-</i> | two | bilingual, biweekly |
| <i>tri-</i> | three | triangle, tricycle |
| <i>quad-</i> | four | quadruplets, quadruped |
| <i>pent-</i> | five | pentagon, pentathlon |
| <i>dec-</i> | ten | decade, decathlon |
| <i>cent-</i> | hundred | century, centipede |
| <i>semi-</i> | half, part | semicircle, semiannual |

- Ask students to brainstorm more example words that have "number" prefixes. Add their words to the chart. Discuss the meanings of the words and how the prefixes relate to the meanings.
- Say, *Let's create a new word. If a bi/cycle has two wheels, and a tri/cycle has three wheels, what would a vehicle with one hundred wheels be called?* (a *centicycle*)
- Ask partners to work together to break apart words from the chart and create new words by replacing the prefix with a different "number" prefix. Explain that it's okay to make up a silly word that isn't real (like *centicycle*) as long as it makes sense based on the meaning of the prefix and base word.
- Have students illustrate one of the words they have created.
- Ask volunteers to share their words and illustrations with the larger group. Guide a discussion about whether the words make sense based on the meaning of their parts. Then help students clarify whether each word is a real word or not. Use a dictionary, if needed.

Write Using a Suffix Family 15–20 minutes

Connect to Writing Display several suffixes in the “state, quality, or act” family (-ance/-ence, -hood, -ity/-ty, -ment, -ness). Explain how adding these suffixes to an adjective or verb creates a noun that describes a state, quality, or act. Provide examples.

verb **noun**
differ + ence = *difference*

Difference is the state or quality of being different.

adjective **noun**
sensitive + ity = *sensitivity*

Sensitivity is the state or quality of being sensitive.

- Have students brainstorm other words they know with these suffixes. List the words and underline the suffixes.

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| assistance <u>ance</u> | performance <u>ance</u> | preference <u>ence</u> | reference <u>ence</u> | childhood <u>hood</u> | generosity <u>ity</u> |
| cruelty <u>ty</u> | fondness <u>ness</u> | darkness <u>ness</u> | sleepiness <u>ness</u> | agreement <u>ment</u> | judgment <u>ment</u> |

- Point out how adding a suffix can change the spelling. (*sleepy* + *ness* → *sleepiness*) It can also change the pronunciation. (/prə'fər/ → /'pref(ə)rəns/)
- Ask students to use words from the list to write questions that they can ask a partner. (Do you have a preference for apples or bananas? When did a friend ask you for assistance?)
- Have students work with a partner to take turns asking and answering the questions aloud. Have volunteers share their responses with the larger group. Clarify word meanings and model correct pronunciation and usage as needed.

Check for Understanding

| If you observe... | Then try... |
|--|--|
| difficulty understanding how a suffix can turn an adjective or verb into a noun | asking questions that directly relate familiar base words with suffixed nouns. For example, say, <i>What's the state or quality of being happy?</i> (<u>happiness</u>) |
| difficulty understanding how the addition of a “state, quality, or act” suffix affects the meaning of a word | providing sentence frames that relate the suffixed noun with its base word: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Fondness</u> is the state or quality of being _____. (<u>fond</u>) • <u>Sensitivity</u> is the state or quality of being _____. (<u>sensitive</u>) |

Prefixes, Suffixes, and Roots

Prefix and Suffix Families

This list shows prefixes and suffixes by meaning and includes example words that represent a range of grade levels, arranged from lower to higher levels. Choose words for activities that match your students' needs and abilities.

| Prefix Family: "not" | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Prefix | <i>dis-</i> | <i>il-</i> | <i>im-</i> | <i>in-</i> | <i>ir-</i> | <i>non-</i> | <i>un-</i> |
| Meaning | not, opposite of | | | | | | |
| Example Words | disagree disappear disloyal | illogical illegal illegible | imperfect immobile imperceptible | invisible inedible inevitable | irregular irreplaceable irrelevant | nonstop nonfiction nonviolent | unpack unafraid unjust |

| Prefix Family: "position" | | | | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Prefix | <i>pre-</i> | <i>fore-</i> | <i>mid-</i> | <i>inter-</i> | <i>post-</i> |
| Meaning | before | before, in front | middle | between | after |
| Example Words | preview premade prearrange | forehead forewarn forethought | midnight midair midwinter | interact interstate interrupt | postseason postwar postmodern |

| Prefix Family: "over and under" | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|--|---|--|-----------------------------|
| Prefix | <i>hyper-</i> | <i>over-</i> | <i>super-</i> | <i>hypo-</i> | <i>under-</i> | <i>sub-</i> |
| Meaning | more than, too much | more than, too much, above | above, beyond | too little, below | too little, below | below |
| Example Words | hyperactive hyperextend hyperbole | overcoat overload overexert | superhuman supervise superimpose | hypothermia hypothesis hypochondria | underground underdone understatement | subway subset subside |

| Prefix Family: "together" | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Prefix | <i>co-</i> | <i>com-</i> | <i>con-</i> |
| Meaning | together, with | | |
| Example Words | copilot coexist cooperate | compress compassion community | conform conclusion concern |

Prefix Family: "against"

| | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Prefix | <i>anti-</i> | <i>contra-</i> |
| Meaning | against, opposite | |
| Example Words | antifreeze antislip antibiotic | contrast contradict contraindication |

Prefix Family: "bad"

| | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Prefix | <i>mis-</i> | <i>mal-</i> |
| Meaning | bad, wrong, not | bad, ill |
| Example Words | misuse misunderstand misaligned | maltreat malnourished maladjusted |

Prefix Family: "number"

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Prefix | <i>uni-</i> | <i>mono-</i> | <i>bi-</i> | <i>tri-</i> | <i>quad-</i> |
| Meaning | one | | two | three | four |
| Example Words | unicycle uniform unidirectional | monorail monotone monocle | bicycle bilingual biannual | tricycle triathlon tripod | quadrilateral quadrangle quadruped |

Prefix Family: "number"

| | | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| Prefix | <i>penta-</i> | <i>dec-</i> | <i>centi-</i> | <i>semi-</i> |
| Meaning | five | ten | hundred | half, part |
| Example Words | pentagon pentathlon pentameter | decade decathlon decibel | cent century percent | semicircle semiformal semiconscious |

Other Useful Prefixes

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Prefix | <i>de-</i> | <i>en-/em-</i> | <i>ex-</i> | <i>in-/im-</i> | <i>re-</i> | <i>trans-</i> |
| Meaning | away, apart | put into, cause something to be more | out of, away from | in | again, back | across, through |
| Example Words | decode defrost decentralize | enlarge enrich empower | export exhale exclude | intake inhale import | reheat remove reorder | transnational transport transmit |

Suffix Family: "person"

| Suffix | -ee | -ian | -ist | -er | -or |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Meaning | a person who is or does something | a person who does or works at something | | a person who does or works at something, a thing that does something | |
| Example Words | employee referee trainee | librarian vegetarian physician | pianist dentist therapist | writer sprinkler consumer | inventor elevator donor |

Suffix Family: "state, quality, or act"

| Suffix | -ance/-ence | -hood | -ity/-ty | -ment | -ness |
|---------------|--|--|---|--|---|
| Meaning | the state, quality, or act of | state or quality of | the state or condition of being or having something | the state or result of doing something | the state or quality of being a certain way |
| Example Words | performance difference existence | childhood falsehood neighborhood | similarity humanity equality | movement improvement encouragement | darkness kindness sleepiness |

Other Useful Suffixes

| Suffix | -ant/-ent | -age | -able/-ible | -al/-ial | -er | -est |
|---------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Meaning | being or doing something | the process or result of | can be done, having or giving something | relating to, referring to | more than | the most |
| Example Words | student pleasant resident | usage storage voyage | breakable visible believable | natural survival trivial | faster greater larger | fastest greatest largest |

Other Useful Suffixes

| Suffix | -ion/-tion | -ive/-ative/-itive | -ful | -less | -ous/-eous/-ious |
|---------------|--|--|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Meaning | the process, act, or result of doing something | tending to | full of | without, free of | having or being full of |
| Example Words | action collection competition | supportive imaginative inquisitive | colorful helpful suspenseful | fearless endless selfless | dangerous harmonious spontaneous |

Source: Based on "Bumping Into Spicy, Tasty Words That Catch Your Tongue": A Formative Experiment on Vocabulary Instruction by James F. Baumann, Donna Ware, and Elizabeth Carr. *The Reading Teacher*, 61(2), 2007, pp. 108–122.

Common Greek and Latin Roots

| Root | Meaning | Origin | Example Words |
|--------------------|---------------|--------|----------------------------|
| <i>aster/astro</i> | star | Greek | asteroid, astronomy |
| <i>aud</i> | hear | Latin | audible, audience |
| <i>auto</i> | self | Greek | automobile, automatic |
| <i>bene</i> | good | Latin | benefit, benign |
| <i>bio</i> | life | Greek | biology, biography |
| <i>chrono</i> | time | Greek | chronology, synchronize |
| <i>dict</i> | say | Latin | dictate, predict |
| <i>duc</i> | lead, make | Latin | deduce, produce |
| <i>fend</i> | ward off | Latin | fender, defend |
| <i>form</i> | shape | Latin | formation, inform |
| <i>gen</i> | give birth | Latin | gene, generate |
| <i>geo</i> | earth | Greek | geography, geology |
| <i>graph</i> | write | Greek | autograph, graph |
| <i>jur/jus</i> | law | Latin | jury, justice |
| <i>log/logue</i> | thought | Latin | logic, dialogue |
| <i>luc</i> | light | Latin | lucid, translucent |
| <i>man(u)</i> | hand | Latin | manual, manuscript |
| <i>mand/mend</i> | order | Latin | demand, recommend |
| <i>meter</i> | measure | Greek | thermometer, kilometer |
| <i>min</i> | little, small | Latin | minimum, miniature |
| <i>mis/mit</i> | send | Latin | mission, transmit |
| <i>omni</i> | all | Latin | omnivore, omnipotent |
| <i>path</i> | feel | Greek | empathy, sympathy |
| <i>ped</i> | foot | Latin | pedal, pedestrian |
| <i>phil</i> | love | Greek | philosophy, bibliophile |
| <i>phon</i> | sound | Greek | telephone, phonics |
| <i>photo</i> | light | Greek | photograph, photosynthesis |
| <i>port</i> | carry | Latin | portable, export |
| <i>qui(t)</i> | quiet, let go | Latin | tranquil, acquit |
| <i>rupt</i> | break | Latin | rupture, disrupt |
| <i>scrib/scrip</i> | write | Latin | scribble, script |

| Root | Meaning | Origin | Example Words |
|------------------|---------|--------|-------------------------------|
| <i>sens/sent</i> | feel | Latin | sensation, sentimental |
| <i>spect</i> | see | Latin | spectator, spectacle, inspect |
| <i>struct</i> | build | Latin | structure, construct |
| <i>tele</i> | far off | Greek | telescope, television |
| <i>terr</i> | earth | Latin | terrain, territory |
| <i>therm</i> | heat | Greek | thermometer, thermal |
| <i>vac</i> | empty | Latin | vacuum, vacant |
| <i>vid, vis</i> | see | Latin | video, visible |