

Prefixes for English Language Learners

Adding prefixes to existing words (the base or root) to form new words is common in academic English. Prefixes are added to the front of the base word in order to create a new word with a different meaning. For example: (*like*→ *dislike*). Prefixes usually do not change the class (*part of speech*) of the base word. Prefixes are not words in their own right and cannot stand on their own in a sentence: if they are printed on their own they have a hyphen after them(*pre-*). To know whether or not the new word is hyphenated or not, consult a dictionary.

Verbs: prefix + verb→ verb e.g. dis- + appear→ disappear

The most common prefixes used to form new verbs in academic English are: *re-*, *dis-*, *over-*, *un-*, *mis-*, *out-*.

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

Nouns: prefix + noun→ noun e.g. auto- + biography→ autobiography

The most common prefixes used to form new nouns in academic English are: *co-* and *sub-*.

| Prefix | Meaning | Examples |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <i>anti-</i> | against | anticlimax, antidote, antithesis |
| <i>auto-</i> | self | autobiography, automobile |
| <i>bi-</i> | two | bilingualism, biculturalism, bi-mentalism |
| <i>co-</i> | joint | co-founder, co-owner, codependent |
| <i>counter-</i> | against | counter-argument, counter-example, counter-proposal |
| <i>dis-</i> | the opposite of | discomfort, dislike |
| <i>ex-</i> | former | ex-chairman, ex-hunter, ex-boyfriend |
| <i>hyper-</i> | extreme | hyperinflation, hypersurface |

| | | |
|----------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <i>in-</i> | the opposite of | inattention, incoherence, incompatibility |
| <i>in-</i> | inside | inpatient |
| <i>inter-</i> | between | interaction, inter-change, interference |
| <i>intra-</i> | within | intravenous |
| <i>kilo-</i> | thousand | kilobyte |
| <i>mal-</i> | bad | malfunction, maltreatment, malnutrition |
| <i>mega-</i> | million | megabyte |
| <i>mis-</i> | wrong | misconduct, misdeed, mismanagement |
| <i>mini-</i> | small | mini-publication, mini-theory |
| <i>mono-</i> | one | monosyllable, monograph, monogamy |
| <i>neo-</i> | new | neo-colonialism, neo-impressionism |
| <i>out-</i> | separate | outbuilding, outpatient |
| <i>poly-</i> | many | polysyllable |
| <i>pseudo-</i> | false | pseudo-expert, pseudonym |
| <i>re-</i> | again | reorganization, reassessment, reexamination |
| <i>semi-</i> | half | semicircle, semidarkness |
| <i>sub-</i> | below | subset, subdivision |
| <i>super-</i> | more than, above | superset, superimposition, superpowers |
| <i>sur-</i> | over and above | surtax |
| <i>tele-</i> | distant | telecommunications |
| <i>tri-</i> | three | tricycle |
| <i>ultra-</i> | beyond | ultrasound |
| <i>under-</i> | below, too little | underpayment, underdevelopment, undergraduate |
| <i>vice-</i> | deputy | vice-president |

Prefix A A

Adjectives: negative (prefix) + adjective → adjective e.g. un-+ comfortable → uncomfortable

Adjectives can be formed from other adjectives, especially with negative prefixes: *un-*, *in-*, and *non-*.

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

Prefix root suffix

Mixed: Root words can have both a prefix and suffix e.g. dis-+ appoint+ -ment → disappointment

Adjectives: uncomfortable, unavailable, unimaginable, inactive, semi-circular

Nouns: disappointment, misinformation, reformulation

E-mail is an example of a word that was formed from a new prefix, *e-*, which stands for *electronic*. This modern prefix has formed an ever-growing number of other Internet-related words, including *e-book*, *e-cash*, *e-commerce*, and *e-tailer*.

Contributed by Kelly Cunningham