WORD FORMATION

1. Prefixes

Prefixes (un-, in-, il-, ir-, and dis-) are often used to give adjectives (and some verbs and nouns) a negative meaning. Here are common examples:

- **happy**  **unhappy**  **like** (v)  **dislike** (v)
- **possible**  **impossible**  **legal**  **illegal (= against the law)**
- **correct**  **incorrect**  **regular**  **irregular, e.g. irregular verbs**

**un-** is used with many different words, e.g. **unfriendly, unable, unemployed** (= without a job), **untidy (= not in order; in a mess)**

**im-** is used before some words beginning with m or p, e.g. **impolite (= rude), impatient** (somebody who is **impatient** wants things to happen now; they cannot wait for things)

**il-** is used before some words beginning with l, e.g. **illegible (= cannot be read because the writing is very bad)**

**ir-** is only used before some words beginning with r, e.g. **irresponsible**

**dis-** is used before some adjectives, e.g. **dishonest, and a few verbs, e.g. dislike, disagree**

**in-** is used before a limited number of words, e.g. **invisible (= cannot be seen)**

**Note:** A prefix does not normally change word stress, e.g. happy/unhappy; possible/impossible. But the stress may change if you want to emphasise the negative or opposite:

A: Was he happy about the change?
B: No, he was very unhappy about it.

B. Verb prefixes: un- and dis-

These prefixes have two meanings: they can have a negative meaning (as above), but they can also mean 'the opposite of an action' or 'to reverse an action'. This meaning is used with certain verbs.

I **locked** the door when I left, but I lost the key, so I couldn't **unlock** it when I got back.

I had to **pack** my suitcase (= put everything in it) very quickly, so when I **unpacked** (= took everything out) at the hotel, most of my clothes looked terrible.

The plane **appeared** in the sky, then suddenly **disappeared** behind a cloud.

In the morning you **get dressed** (= put on your clothes); when you go to bed you **get undressed** (= take off your clothes).

C. Other verb prefixes with specific meanings

**re-** (= again)

- My homework was terrible, so I had to **redo** it.
- The shop closed down but will **reopen** next month.
- I failed my exam but I can **retake** (or **redo/resit**) it next year.

**over-** (= too much)

- I think my boss is **overdoing** it at the moment. (= working too hard; also overwork)
- I went to bed very late and I **overslept** (= slept too long) this morning.
- The shop assistant **overcharged** me. (= asked me for too much money)

**mis-** (= badly or incorrectly)

- I'm afraid I **misunderstood** what he said.
- Two of the students **misread** the first question.

D. Exercises

1.1. Which prefix forms the opposite of these words? (The bottom line are all verbs, the rest are adjectives.)

...happy  ...patient  ...polite  ...legal
1.2. Agree with these statements, using words from the theoretical part which have the same meaning as the underlined words.

**Example:** A: He *doesn't* have a job, does he?
B: No, *he's* unemployed.

1. It's against the law, isn't it?
   Oh yes, ................................................
2. His room is always in a mess, isn't it?
   Yes, ...................................................
3. He *took* off his clothes!
   Yes, ..................................................
4. This handwriting is *impossible* to read.
   Yes I know, ........................................
5. She *can never* wait for five minutes, *can* she?
   No, ..................................................
6. I thought it was *rude*, didn't you?
   Yes, it was very .....................................

1.3. Complete the verbs in these sentences.
1. I'm sorry, I *mis*..................... her message completely.
2. We un..................... as soon as we got to the hotel, then went out for a walk.
3. She was here a minute ago, but then she dis...................... I'm afraid I don't know where she is now.
4. We normally have similar opinions but I dis..................... with him totally on the subject of drugs.
5. My homework was so bad that I'll have to re......................... it.
6. Apparently her alarm clock didn't ring and she over...........................
7. She finally managed to un..................... the door and we were able to go inside.
8. I dis..................... the film, but the others enjoyed it.
9. I don't think I'll pass the exam, but I can always re..................... it in September.
10. The post office shuts for lunch but it should re..................... at 2.00 p.m.
11. She's over..................... at the moment. She really needs a holiday and a complete break from her job.
12. My sister wrapped up my present so well that it took me about five minutes to un............... it.

1.4. Keep several pages in your notebook for verbs or adjectives which combine with these prefixes. Each time you add a new word, read through your list of words with that prefix, then close your book and see how many you can remember.

## 2. Noun suffixes

**A. Verb + suffix**

Many nouns are formed in this way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Suffix</th>
<th>Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>improve (= get better)</td>
<td>-ment</td>
<td>improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manage (e.g. a shop or business)</td>
<td>-ment</td>
<td>management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elect (= choose somebody by voting)</td>
<td>-ion</td>
<td>election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discuss (= talk about something seriously)</td>
<td>-ion</td>
<td>discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inform (= tell someone something)</td>
<td>-ation</td>
<td>information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organise</td>
<td>-ation</td>
<td>organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jog (= running to keep fit or for pleasure)</td>
<td>-ing</td>
<td>jogging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spell (e.g. S-P-E-L-L)</td>
<td>-ing</td>
<td>spelling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: Sometimes there is a spelling change. The most common is the omission of the final 'e' before the suffix -ion or -ation: translate/translation; organise/organisation

B. Adjective + suffix

Nouns are also formed by adding a suffix to an adjective. Two suffixes often added to adjectives to form nouns are -ness and -ity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Suffix</th>
<th>Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>weak (≠ strong)</td>
<td>-ness</td>
<td>weakness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>happy</td>
<td>-ness</td>
<td>happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dark (e.g. at night, when you can’t see)</td>
<td>-ness</td>
<td>darkness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stupid (≠ intelligent, clever)</td>
<td>-ity</td>
<td>stupidity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>punctual (= always arrives at the right time)</td>
<td>-ity</td>
<td>punctuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>similar (= almost the same; ≠ different)</td>
<td>-ity</td>
<td>similarity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Pronunciation

The addition of these suffixes may change the pronunciation.

Nouns ending -ion or -ity have the main stress on the syllable before, so the pronunciation may be different from the verb or adjective:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>educate</td>
<td>education</td>
<td>similar</td>
<td>similarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>translate</td>
<td>translation</td>
<td>stupid</td>
<td>stupidity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discuss</td>
<td>discussion</td>
<td>punctual</td>
<td>punctuality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D. -er/-or and -ist

These are common noun suffixes added to existing nouns or verbs, and they describe people and their jobs.

-er -er -or -ist

dancer  driver  actor  artist
singer  manager  director  economist
murderer  footballer  translator  psychologist
farmer  employer  operator  journalist

Note: Notice the common spelling changes: translate/translator, operate/operator, economy/economist, psychology/psychologist.

E. Exercises

2.1. Complete the tables and mark the stress on each word. The last two in each column are not on the opposite page, but do you know or can you guess the noun formed from them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>educate</td>
<td></td>
<td>stupid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improve</td>
<td></td>
<td>dark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jog</td>
<td></td>
<td>weak</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spell</td>
<td></td>
<td>similar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hesitate</td>
<td></td>
<td>punctual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arrange</td>
<td></td>
<td>sad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>popular</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2. Combine the suffixes on the right with the verbs or adjectives on the left, and then complete the text below. (Remember you may need to make a small spelling change.)

improve, televise, elect, educate, weak, manage, govern, stupid -ment, -ity, -ion, -ation, -ness

In his first broadcast on (1)__________ since he won the (2)__________ last month, the Prime Minister promised to make health and (3)__________ two of his top priorities. And in a strong attack on the previous (4)__________, he said that the present (5)__________ of the British economy
was caused entirely by their (6)__________ and bad (7)__________ . He said he would act immediately and he hoped the British people would be able to see clear signs of an (8)__________ in the economy by the end of the year.

2.3. Write down the name of the person who does these things.
Example: farm farmer
1 act .................... 4 sing.................... 7 economics ....................
2 employ .................... 5 murder.................... 8 translate....................
3 football .................... 6 psychology .................... 9 manage ....................

2.4. Look at the two examples and then complete the rest of the definitions.
Example: An actor is a person who acts in films, plays and on TV. A murderer is a person who murders someone.

1. A journalist is a person who ..............................................................................................
2. A ballet dancer is a person who ..........................................................................................
3. A film director is a person who ..........................................................................................
4. A bank manager is a person who ..........................................................................................
5. An employer is a person who ............................................................................................
6. A pop singer is a person who ............................................................................................
7. A translator is a person who ..............................................................................................
8. A lorry driver is a person who ............................................................................................
9. A photographer is a person who ........................................................................................
10. An artist is a person who ...................................................................................................

4. Adjective suffixes

Suffixes change word class, e.g. from verb to noun or noun to adjective, but they can also change meaning (see sections B and C below).

A. Noun or verb + suffix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun or Verb</th>
<th>Suffix</th>
<th>Adjectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>danger, fame</td>
<td>-ous</td>
<td>dangerous, famous (= well-known)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>music, politics, industry, economics</td>
<td>-al</td>
<td>musical, political, industrial, economical (= saves you money)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cloud, fog, sun, dirt</td>
<td>-y</td>
<td>cloudy, foggy, sunny, dirty (≠ clean)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attract, create</td>
<td>-ive</td>
<td>attractive (= pretty, nice to look at); creative (= able to produce new ideas; with imagination)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Sometimes there is a spelling change. Here are common examples:
✓ double the consonant, e.g. sun/sunny, fog/foggy
✓ leave out the final 'e', e.g. create/creative, fame/famous
✓ leave out the final 's' before 'al', e.g. politics/political; economics/economical
✓ change 'y' to 'i' before 'al', e.g. industry/industrial

B. -able

This suffix (also -ible in some words) is used to form many adjectives from nouns or verbs: enjoyable, comfortable, knowledgeable (= knows a lot), suitable (= right/correct for a particular situation).
Quite often, -able (and -ible) has the meaning 'can be done'. For example, something that is washable 'can be washed'. Other examples include:
drinkable, comprehensible (= can be comprehended or understood), reliable (= can be relied on or trusted, e.g. a car or other machine that never goes wrong or breaks down).
Words ending -able quite often express the opposite meaning by adding the prefix un-:
undrinkable, unreliable, unbreakable (= cannot be broken), unsuitable, uncomfortable.
Words ending -ible add the prefix in-:
incomprehensible, inflexible (somebody who is inflexible has a fixed idea about something and cannot change quickly or easily; an inflexible timetable cannot be changed easily); inedible (= cannot be eaten).

C. -ful and -less

The suffix -ful often means 'full of' + the meaning of the adjective: careful, you are full of care; if you are helpful you are full of help. Other examples are: painful (= hurts a lot), useful, and thoughtful (= someone who is thoughtful is kind and always thinks about others; a thoughtful action shows care for others).
The suffix -less means 'without' + the meaning of the adjective: if you are careless, you do something 'without care'. Other examples are: painless, useless (= has no use or function) thoughtful, jobless and homeless (= with nowhere to live).

Note: You can see that -ful and -less are often used with the same words to form opposites. This is not always true: a person with a home is NOT homeful.

D. Exercises

3.1. Write down an adjective (or adjectives) formed from these nouns or verbs. Cover the theoretical part first.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>thought</th>
<th>dirt</th>
<th>pain</th>
<th>comfort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>attract</td>
<td>care</td>
<td>knowledge</td>
<td>fame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>create</td>
<td>danger</td>
<td>suit</td>
<td>rely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fog</td>
<td>politics</td>
<td>sun</td>
<td>wash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>home</td>
<td>enjoy</td>
<td>music</td>
<td>break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2. Fill the gaps with suitable adjectives from the opposite page.

1. You must be very ..................... when you drive in wet weather.
2. It was so ..................... this morning that I couldn't see more than twenty metres in front of me.
3. Everyone in my country has heard of her; she's very .....................
4. The people in the tourist information office were very ..................... and answered all our questions without any problems.
5. This is a very ..................... road; there were at least three serious accidents on it last year.
6. It was very ..................... when I hit my leg against the corner of the table.
7. This bag is very ..................... because I can use it for work or when I go on holiday.
8. We’ve never had any problems with our TV in ten years; it’s been very .....................
9. The factory is in the middle of the ..................... part of the city, surrounded by other factories.
10. I made some coffee but it was horrible. In fact, my sister said it was .....................
11. I'm afraid my working hours are very .....................; I have to start at exactly the same time every day and finish at the same time every day.
12. It seems terrible to me that there are so many ..................... people living in a city with thousands of empty houses.

3.3. How many of these words can form opposites with the suffix -less?
painful, wonderful, useful, careful, beautiful, tactful, awful, thoughtful

Can you think of words which mean the opposite of the other words (the ones without -less)?

3.4. From the adjectives on this page and the opposite page, choose three which could describe each of these people or things. (You can use the same adjective more than once.)

1. the weather
2. someone who is a very bad driver
3. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
4. a large city
5. Albert Einstein
6. a new car
7. a speech
8. yourself

..............................
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