

## Prefixes for English Language Learners

Adding prefixes to the base, or root, of existing words to form new words is common in English. The prefix is added in front of the base word (*pre-* means *before*) to create a new word with a different meaning. For example, if you add the prefix *dis-* to the word *like*, you get *dislike*—the opposite of *like*. Prefixes usually do not change the part of speech of the base word, so, for example, adding a prefix to a verb results in a new verb, while adding a prefix to an adjective results in a new adjective. Prefixes are not words in their own right and cannot stand on their own in a sentence (unless you are writing about prefixes!); if they are printed on their own, they have a hyphen attached. Note: even though the lists below are sorted by part of speech, prefixes can attach to almost any word (for example, you'll see *co-* listed below as a prefix for verbs, adjectives, and nouns. Some words using prefixes are hyphenated and some are not, and some that used to be hyphenated no longer are. Check a dictionary to be sure.

### Prefixes with verbs

Adding a prefix to a verb usually results in a new verb. For example, adding *dis-* to the verb *appear* results in the verb *disappear*. The most common prefixes used to form new verbs in English are *re-*, *dis-*, *over-*, *un-*, *mis-*, *out-*.

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

### Prefixes with adjectives

Adding a prefix to an adjective usually gives you a new adjective. To illustrate, adding the prefix *un-* to the adjective *comfortable* gives you an adjective with an altered meaning: *uncomfortable*. Common prefixes for adjectives include negative prefixes *un-*, *in-*, and *non-*.

Prefix	Meaning	Examples
bi-	two	bilingual, bicultural, biweekly
co-	together	codependent, cooperative
dis-	not/reverses the meaning	disloyal, dissimilar
im-, in-, ir-, il-	not/reverses the meaning	impatient, inconvenient, irreplaceable, illegal
mal-	bad	maladjusted, malformed, malfunction
mini-	small	miniature, minimum, minibike
mis-	wrong	misunderstood, misanthropic

non-	not/reverses the meaning	nonfiction, nonpolitical, non-neutral
over-	too much	overexcited, overtired, overworked
pre-	before	prefabricated, prehistoric, premarital, prepaid
sub-	under/below	subconscious, subpar
un-	not/reverses the meaning	unfortunate, uncomfortable, unjust, unlucky
under-	below, too little	unpaid, undervalued, underachieving

## Prefixes with nouns

Adding a prefix to a noun usually results in a new noun. For instance, if you add *auto-* to the noun *biography*, you get the new noun *autobiography*. The most common prefixes used to form new nouns in English are *co-* and *sub-*.

Prefix	Meaning	Examples
anti-	against	anticlimax, antithesis
auto-	self	autobiography, automobile
bi-	two	bilingualism, biculturalism
co-	together	cofounder, co-owner, codependent
counter-	against	counterargument, counterexample, counterproposal
dis-	the opposite of	discomfort, dislike, disinformation
e-	electronic	email, e-book, e-commerce, e-tailer
ex-	former	ex-chairman, ex-spouse, ex-boyfriend
hyper-	extreme	hyperinflation, hyperventilation
in-	the opposite of	inattention, incoherence, incompatibility
in-	inside	inpatient, input
inter-	between	interaction, interference
kilo-	thousand	kilobyte, kilogram, kilowatt
mal-	bad	malfunction, maltreatment, malnutrition
mega-	million	megabyte, megawatt, megaton
mini-	small	miniature, minimum, minibike, minivan
mis-	wrong	misconduct, misdeed, misunderstanding
mono-	one	monosyllable, monograph, monogamy
neo-	new	neocolonialism, neoimpressionism
out-	separate	outbuilding, outpatient
poly-	many	polyglot, polygamy, polytheist
pre-	before	prejudice
pseudo-	false	pseudo-expert, pseudonym
re-	again	reorganization, reassessment, reexamination
semi-	half	semicircle, semidarkness
sub-	below	subset, subdivision
super-	more than, above	superimposition, superpower
sur-	over and above	surtax, surcharge
tele-	distant	telecommunications, television
tri-	three	tricycle, tripod
ultra-	beyond	ultrasound
under-	below, too little	underpayment, underdevelopment, undergraduate
vice-	deputy	vice-president, vice chancellor

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