Building Words with Prefixes Workbook

prefixes

pre-  un-  il-  mis-
re-  mis-
anti-  prefixes
ir-  in-
dis-  im-
impatient, unnecessary, uncomfortable, irregular, dislike, incomplete, incorrect... Useful words but a bit scary when spelling and reading them. Do they scare you?

Knowing how words are built with prefixes is a really important strategy to help you improve your spelling, reading and vocabulary for all learners (native and non-native speakers). This lesson is especially good for Chinese students because Chinese is made up of one syllable words so longer words may cause problems.

Prefixes are little words we add to the beginning of root words to make the word negative or the opposite meaning:

- un + happy = unhappy = not happy = sad
- re + paint = repaint = paint again
- under + cooked = undercooked = not cooked enough
- un + comfortable = uncomfortable = not comfortable
- in + correct = incorrect = wrong = not correct, not right
- dis + like = dislike = don’t like

As I mentioned before vowel sounds can be a problem for ESL learners and hearing the vowel sounds of these little prefix words may be difficult, so use your visual memory, or memory tricks, to help you, and definitely develop your listening skills, especially for in- en- un- in- incorrect, inspire, indifferent, insane...

en- encourage, enchanted, encase
un- unhappy, unusual, uncomfortable
There are hundreds of prefixes, some of the most popular are:

*in-, ir-, il-, im-, un-, dis-, pre-, ex-, anti-, uni-, bi-

- happy - *un*happy = not happy/sad
- legal - *il*legal = not legal
- like - *dis*like = don’t like
- patient - *im*patient = not patient
- usual - *un*usual = not usual
- correct - *in*correct = not correct or wrong or not right
- complete - *in*complete = not complete

Notice the double letters in the following words. We add the prefix to the root word so we sometimes get double letters:

- *dis* + satisfied = *dis*satisfied
- *mis* + spell = *mis*spell
- *un* + necessary = *unn*ecessary
- *im* + mature = *imm*ature
- *ir* + responsible = *ir*esponsible

**Prefix rules**

Can you see the rules in these words?

illogical, illegal, illegible
irregular, irresponsible
immature, immortal, immigrant, impossible, imperfect, impatient

But there are exceptions so always use a good dictionary if you're not sure. Add these rules and exceptions to your personal dictionary, especially words you like, use and need for your life and work.
Prefix rules and exceptions

* Use 'il' before words starting with 'I'  legible - illegible, illegal, illuminate, (But - unlawful, unlearn, unless...)
* Use 'ir' before words starting with 'r' relevant - irrelevant irreconcilable, irregular, irradiate (But - unreal, unrated)
* Use 'im' before words stating with 'm', 'p' mature-immature, immigrant, immortal, immaculate, possible-impossible, perfect-imperfect impair, impact (But we have unpack, unpick, unpaid... unmarked, unmarried, unmask)

Let's look at some common prefixes with their meanings (some mean different things with different words).
un, in, il, ir, dis, non... - these make nouns, verbs, adjectives into the negative, opposite meaning and mean 'not'.
unfair, untidy not fair not tidy incomplete, informal illegal, illegitimate immature, impatient irregular, irrational dishonest, dislike non-smoker, non-toxic

de, dis, un, re these indicate reversal of verb's actions - reverse, back, again
defrost, debug
untie, unwrap, undo
repaire, retry, redo
disconnect
return, retell, regain

over, under, sub, mis means something is wrong or bad, under, lowly
oversleep, overpopulated (= too much sleep too many people, excessive)
undervalued, undercooked (= not valued enough, not cooked enough)
substandard, subspecies (= well below standard, not enough, lowly)
misunderstand, miscalculate (= bad) - to not understand, to not calculate right/to calculate badly

hyper, mega, super, ultra, micro, mini - to indicate size very big, very small, too much
hypermarket, hyperactive
megastore, megabyte
supermarket, supermodel
ultrasound, ultra-modern
microwave, microchip
miniskirt, minibus
mono, uni, bi, tri, multi, semi - to indicate number, frequency, shape
monorail, monologue = one universal, unisex = one, or the same
bilingual, bicycle = two
triangle, tripod = three
semicircle, semicolon = half
multinational, multi-storey/multistorey = many

Hyphens (-)

e-book or ebook, e-mail or email, multi-storey or multistorey,
anticlockwise or anti-clockwise? Which is right?
Both are right. Use a good dictionary to check the latest spellings with hyphens

Hyphens come and go. When it's a new word it usually starts with a hyphen so as not to confuse people then soon the hyphen is dropped (e-mail now email) - this has been going on for centuries!

• You must use an hyphen when the prefix comes before a capital letter, anti-British, pro-European, because a capital letter can’t appear inside a word proEuropean. mid-July, pro-European, post-Vietnam, un-American, pro-Canadian, anti-Reagan, off-Broadway, ex-Foreign Secretary...

• Sometimes if there are two vowel together and causes confusion - re-align.
  In British English: co-operate, co-operation, co-ordinate
  In American no hyphen: cooperate, cooperation, cooperative, coordinate

• If a word looks the same as another - re-cover (cover something again) not recover from a illness.

• Prefixes such as re-, co-, pre, anti-, self- sometimes have hyphens when added to words sometimes they don’t.
  
  co-owner / coexist
  pre-war / preview
  anti-hero / antibiotic
  self-assured / selfsame
  sub-branch / subcontinent
  up-market / upbeat
  off-Broadway / offbeat

• For single letter prefixes most have hyphens:
  X-ray, X-rated, X-certificate, A-list, T-shirt, T-junction/T-intersection, T-bone, Y-chromosome, U-turn... Notice the single letter is a capital.

• With the prefix co-  co-op, co-opt, co-organizer, co-owner, co-chairman, co-host, co-pilot, co-star co-worker, but not coexist
Syllable breakdown is a useful strategy to help you spell long words. It’s also great because it helps you identify bits of the word that cause problems or helps you remember those pesky silent letters.

Breaking a word down into syllables means you break a word down into little spoken chunks and each chunk is called a syllable. Each chunk usually has a vowel or vowel sound in it:

qualification = "qua/li/fi/ca/tion"
Wednesday = “wed/nes/day” (it helps you remember the silent “d” and “e”)
identify = “i/den/ti/fy”

Syllable counting

*Identifying how many syllables are in a word is about saying the word out loud to see how a word breaks down:

1 syllable: trick - “trick”
2 syllables: paper - “pa/per”
3 syllables: computer - “com/pu/ter”
4 syllables: application - “ap/plic/a/tion”
5 syllables: examination - “ex/am/in/a/tion”
6 syllables: unprofessionally - “un/pro/fes/sion/al/ly”
7 syllables: irresponsibility - ir/re/spon/si/bi/li/ty (notice the i’s)
*There can be different ways to breakdown these words - it’s up to you how you do it as long as it helps you. Use this in combination with memory tricks.*

Syllable breakdown also helps you identify prefixes and suffixes. Prefixes are small words added to the beginning of a root word. Suffixes are small words added to the end of words.

- **Prefix** root word **Suffix**
- **un**comfortable

- dissatisfied = “dis /sat / is / fied”
- uncomfortable = “un/com/fort/able”
- irregularly = “ir/ reg/u/lar/ly” or “ir/re/gu/lar/ly”

It’s up to you how you break these down as long as it helps you. There’s no right or wrong way.

But some people find it hard to identify syllables or hear them - that’s fine. So use other methods that rely on seeing the separate bits of the word. See the small word within the word, the vowels, the root word, prefix, suffix.

- uncomfortable = un - comfort - able (common suffix ending)
- misunderstood = mis - under - stood (past tense of stand under stand/stood
- immature = im + mature or im /ma/ ture
- dissatisfied = dis + sat+ is+ fied or dis+ satisfied

Good spellers have an excellent visual memory for what looks right. They know the 'qua' in qualification is spelt with 'qua' like the other 'qua' words like quarter, quart, quantity, quaint, quality...

They know that the suffix ending that sounds like "shun" is either: -tion, -sion or -cian. If they spell *qualification* like this they can usually see that this looks wrong

You can develop this skill too by practising/practicing (AmE) spelling, noticing the patterns and rules. Spelling won’t happen by just reading about it - you have to work at it.
Exercise

Make the following words opposite

1. happy ___________________
2. like ________________
3. legal ________________
4. kind ________________
5. patient ________________
6. mature ________________
7. understanding ________________
8. practical ________________
Exercise Answers

Make the following words opposite

1. happy - unhappy
2. like - dislike
3. legal - illegal
4. kind - unkind
5. patient - impatient
6. mature - immature
7. understanding - misunderstanding
8. practical - impractical
Exercise

Add a prefix to these words:

For example:

1. not comfortable = uncomfortable

2. not regular = ______________

3. not correct = ______________

4. not personal = ______________

5. not mobile = ______________

6. not patient = ______________

7. not logical = ______________

8. not possible = ______________

9. not responsible = ______________

10. not proper = ______________
Exercise Answers

Add a prefix to these words:

For example:

1. not comfortable = uncomfortable
2. not regular = irregular
3. not correct = incorrect
4. not personal = impersonal
5. not mobile = immobile
6. not patient = impatient
7. not logical = illogical
8. not possible = impossible
9. not responsible = irresponsible
10. not proper = improper
Exercise

Prefixes can be used to give adjectives a negative or opposite meaning.

Add a prefix to these words:

1. ___convenient  2. ___comfortable  3. ___loyal
4. ___patient  5. ___regular  6. ___polite
7. ___adequate  8. ___possible  9. ___legal

Prefixes can also be used in verbs:
Add a prefix to these verbs:

10. appear  11. dress  12. like  13. zip
Exercise Answers

1. inconvenient  2. uncomfortable  3. disloyal

4. impatient  5. irregular  6. impolite

7. inadequate  8. impossible  9. illegal

10. disappear  11. undress  11. dislike  11. unzip