

LIST 28. THE 20 MOST COMMON PREFIXES

This is a research-based list for those who wish to see the data. These 20 prefixes account for 97 percent of occurrences.

Rank	Prefix	Meaning	%	Example
1	un	not, opposite of	26	<i>unhappy</i>
2	re	again, back	14	<i>return</i>
3	in, im, ir, ill	not, opposite of	11	<i>indirect</i>
4	dis	not, opposite of	7	<i>discover</i>
5	en, em	cause to	4	<i>enjoy</i>
6	non	not, opposite of	4	<i>nonfiction</i>
7	in, im	in or into	4	<i>inside</i>
8	over	too much, above	3	<i>overgrown</i>
9	mis	wrongly	3	<i>mistake</i>
10	sub	under, lower	3	<i>submarine</i>
11	pre	before	3	<i>prepared</i>
12	inter	between, among	3	<i>international</i>
13	fore	before	3	<i>foresee</i>
14	de	opposite of, down	2	<i>descent</i>
15	trans	across	2	<i>transport</i>
16	super	above, beyond	1	<i>supermarket</i>
17	semi	half	1	<i>semicircle</i>
18	anti	against	1	<i>antiwar</i>
19	mid	middle	1	<i>midsemester</i>
20	under	too little, below	1	<i>underfed</i>

All other prefixes accounted for only 3% of the words. See List 29 for a more complete list of prefixes.

Source: White, T. G., Sowell, V., and Yanagihara, A. (1999). Teaching elementary students to use word-part clues. *The Reading Teacher*, 42, 302-308.

LIST 29. MORE PREFIXES

Prefixes are small but meaningful letter groups added in front of a base word or root that contribute to the meaning of a word. There is some confusion between **prefixes** and **roots**. Linguists solve the problem by calling both **combining forms**. We have chosen to call all combining forms commonly found at the beginning of a word **prefixes**.

Knowing the meaning of these prefixes—together with the meaning of common base words and Greek and Latin roots—will give students the tools for unlocking the meanings of hundreds of words. In addition to teaching these prefixes directly, it is a good idea to explain prefixes and their meanings when students encounter them in new vocabulary words throughout the year.

You may wish to use the special list of prefixes expressing numbers (many of which also appear in the Intermediate to Advanced sublist) to form the basis of a lesson on number words.

BEGINNING PREFIXES

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
anti-	against	antiwar, antisocial, antislavery, antifreeze
dis-	not, opposite	disappear, disagree, disarm, dishonest, discontinue
ex-	former	ex-president, ex-student, ex-athlete, ex-teacher, ex-king
im-, in-	not	impossible, impassable, immobilize, immature, imbalance inaccurate, invisible, inactive, indecisive, independent
inter-	among, between	Internet, international, intermission, intervene, interrupt
intra-	within	intramural, intrastate, intravenous, intranet, intramuscular
micro-	small, short	microphone, microscope, microwave, microbe, microfilm
mis-	wrong, not	misbehave, misconduct, misfortune, mistake, miscount
multi-	many, much	multiply, multicolored, multimillionaire, multitude
non-	not	nonsense, nonfiction, nonresistant, nonstop, nonviolent
over-	too much	overdue, overdo, overpriced, overbearing, overactive
post-	after	postpone, postdate, postscript, postmeridian, postwar
pre-	before	prefix, precaution, preamble, prenatal, prelude
pro-	favor	pro-war, Pro-American, pro-education, pro-trade, pro-union
pro-	forward	proceed, produce, progress, project, prognosis, prophet
re-	again	redo, rewrite, reappear, repaint, reheat, relive
re-	back	recall, recede, repay, reflect, retract, rebate

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
sub-	under, below	submarine, subzero, submerge, subordinate, subhuman
super-	above, beyond	superman, supernatural, superior, superpower, supervise
tele-	distant	telephone, telescope, television, telegram, telepathy
trans-	across	transport, transfer, translate, transatlantic, transcribe
un-	not	unhappy, unable, uncomfortable, uncertain, unbeaten
under-	below, less than	underpaid, undercover, underground, underneath, underage

INTERMEDIATE TO ADVANCED PREFIXES

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
after-	after	afternoon, afterward, aftershock, aftereffect, afterthought
ambi-, amphi-	both, around	ambidextrous, ambiguous, ambivalent, ambience, amphibian, amphitheater, amphora
auto-	self	automobile, automatic, autograph, autobiography, autonomy
be-	make	befriend, bewitch, beguile, bejewel, becalm
bene-	good	benefit, benefactor, benediction, beneficial, benevolent
bi-, bin-	two	bicycle, binocular, bifocal, biannual, bimonthly
cent-, centi-	hundred, hundredth	century, centigrade, centimeter, centennial
circu-	around	circulate, circumference, circus, circumspect, circumstance
co-	together	cooperate, collaborate, coordinate, coincide, co-chair
com-, con-	with	combine, commune, combat, compare, command, concert, concur, connect, confer, concede, confident
contra-	against, opposite	contrary, contradict, contrast, contraband, contraception
counter-	against, opposite	counteract, countermand, counterproposal, counteroffensive
de-	down, away	deduct, descend, decrease, degrade, depart
de-	not, opposite	deform, deplete, deactivate, defuse, dehumidify
dec-	ten	decade, decathlon, December, decennial
deci-	tenth	decimeter, decimate, decibel, decile, decimal

MORE PREFIXES CONTINUED

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
di-	two, double	dilemma, dioxide, dichotomy, diploma, digraph
dia-	through, across	diameter, dialogue, diagonal, diagnose, dialect
du-, duo-	two	duo, duet, dual, duplex, duplicate
dys-	bad	dysfunctional, dysentery, dysphasia, dystrophy
e-	out, away	evict, eject, erupt, emigrate, edict, emancipate
equi-	equal	equator, equation, equilibrium, equidistant, equinox
eu-	good	eulogy, euphoria, euphemism, Eucharist, euthanasia
giga-	billion	gigawatt, gigahertz, gigabyte
hemi-	half	hemisphere, hemistich, hemiplegia, hemicycle
hept-	seven	heptagon, heptameter, heptarchy
hetero-	different	heteronym, heterodox, heterogenous, heterosexual
hex-	six	hexagon, hexameter, hexagram, hexadecimal
homo-	same	homogeneous, homogenize, homosexual, homophone
hyper-	excessive	hyperactive, hypersensitive, hyperbole, hypercritical
hypo-	under, too little	hypodermic, hypothesis, hypothermia, hypoxia
il-	not	illegal, illegible, illiterate, illogical, illegitimate
ir-	not	irregular, irreconcilable, irrevocable, irresponsible
kilo-	thousand	kilometer, kilogram, kilobyte, kilowatt, kiloliter
macro-	large, long	macroeconomics, macron, macrobiotic, macrocosm
magni-	great, large	magnify, magnificent, magnitude, magnanimous
mal-	bad	maladjusted, malfunction, malice, malevolent
mega-	large, million	megaphone, megalith, megacycle, megawatt, megaton, megabuck, megahertz
meta-	change	metamorphosis, metaphor, metastasis
mid-	middle	midnight, midway, midsummer, midyear, midshipman
milli-	thousand	million, milligram, millimeter, millennium, millibar
mon-, mono-	one	monk, monarch, monocular, monorail, monogamy
neo-	new	neoclassical, neologism, neonatal, neophyte, neon
omni-	all	omnibus, omnificent, omnipotent, omnivorous, omniscient
pan-	all	panorama, panacea, pandemonium, pandemic, Pan-American
para-	almost	paramedic, paralegal, paraprofessional, parasail
per-	through	perennial, permeate, permit, pervade, percolate
peri-	around	perimeter, periscope, peripatetic, periphery, periodontist

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
poly-	many	polysyllabic, polyglot, polyester, polyandry, polygamy
prot-	first, chief	protagonist, proton, prototype, protocol, protoplasm
pseudo-	false	pseudonym, pseudoclassical, pseudointellectual
quadr-	four	quadrangle, quadrant, quadriplegic, quadruple
quint-	five	quintuplet, quintet, quintessential, quintuple
self-	self	selfish, self-denial, self-respect, self-taught
semi-	half	semiannual, semicircle, semiconscious, semiautomatic
sept-	seven	September, septet, septuagenarian
syn-	together	synchronize, syndrome, synergy, synonym, synthesis
tri-	three	triangle, tricycle, trillion, triplet, tripartite, triumvirate
ultra-	beyond	ultramodern, ultraconservative, ultranationalist
uni-	one	unicorn, uniform, unite, universe, unique, unison

PREFIXES EXPRESSING NUMBER

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
deci-	tenth	decimeter
centi-	hundredth	centimeter
milli-	thousandth	millimeter
micro-	millionth	micrometer
nano-	billionth	nanometer
pico-	trillionth	picometer
femto-	quadrillionth	femtometer
atto-	quintillionth	attometer
demi-	half	demigod, demitasse
hemi-	half	hemisphere, hemicycle
semi-	half	semiannual, semicircle, semiclassic
prot-	first	protagonist, protein, proton, prototype
mon-, mono-	one	monk, monarch, monocular, monogamy
uni-	one	unicorn, unicycle, uniform, unify, unite
di-	two	digraph, dioxide, diphthong
tri-	three	triangle, tricycle, trillion, triplet
quadr-	four	quadrangle, quadrant, quadruple
tetra-	four	tetrahedron, tetrameter
pent-	five	pentagon, pentathlon, Pentecost
quint-	five	quintet, quintuplets, quintile
hex-	six	hexagon, hexameter
sex-	six	sextant, sextet, sextuple
hept-	seven	heptagon, heptameter
sept-	seven	September, septuagenarian

MORE PREFIXES CONTINUED

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
oct-	eight	October, octagon, octane, octopus
ennea-	nine	enneagon, enneahedron, ennead
non-	nine	nonagenarian
nove-	nine	November, novena
deca-, dec-	ten	December, decade, decathlon, decameter
cent-	hundred	century (<i>note: cent- is a shortened form of centi, which usually means one hundredth</i>)
hect-	hundred	hectogram, hectometer, hectare
milli-	thousand	million, millipede (<i>note: in metric system, milli- means thousandth</i>)
kilo-	thousand	kilometer, kilogram, kilowatt, kiloliter
myria-	ten thousand	myriameter, myriad
mega-	million	megawatt, megabyte
giga-	billion	gigabyte
tera-	trillion	terameter
peta-	quadrillion	petameter
exa-	quintillion	exameter

PREFIXES THAT DESCRIBE SIZE

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
macro-	large, long	macrocosm, macron, macroscopic
magni-	great	magnify, magnitude, magnificent
mega-	large	megacycle, megalith, megalomania
micro-	small, short	microbe, microphone, microcosm
mini-	small	miniature, minute, minimal

PREFIXES THAT DESCRIBE WHEN

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
after-	after	afterglow, afternoon, aftertaste, afterward
ante-	before	antebellum, antecedent, antedate, antediluvian
epi-	after	epilogue, epitaph, epidermis
post-	after	postdate, postdoctoral, posterior, postpone, postscript
pre-	before	preamble, precaution, prefix, prejudice
pro-	before	prognosis, progeny, program, prologue

PREFIXES THAT DESCRIBE WHERE

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
a-	on	aboard, afire, afoot, ashore, atop
ab-	from	abnormal, abhor, abolish, abstain
ac-	to	accent, accept, access, accident, acquire
ad-	to	adapt, add, addict, adhere, admit
af-	to	affair, affect, affiliate, affirm, afflict

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
ag-	to	agglomeration, aggrandize, aggravate
an-	to	annex, annihilate, annotate, announce
as-	to	ascend, ascertain, aspect, aspire, assert
by-	near, side	bypass, byplay, bystander, byway
circu-	around	circulate, circumference, circumspect
de-	from, down	debate, decay, deceive, decide, deform
dia-	through, across	diagnose, diagonal, dialogue, diameter
e-	out, away	effect, effort, eject, emigrate, erupt
em-	in	embalm, embed, embezzle, embrace
en-	in	enchant, enclose, encounter, encourage
enter-	among, between	enterprise, entertain
epi-	upon	epicenter, epidemic, epidermis, epithet
ex-	out	excel, exalt, exceed, exhaust, exit
extra-	outside	extracurricular, extraordinary
hypo-	under	hypochondria, hypodermic, hypothesis
im-	into	immediate, immerse, immigrate, implant
in-	into	incision, include, induce, inhale, infect
inter-	among, between	intercede, interpret, interrupt
intra-	within	intramural, intrastate, intravenous
intro-	inside	introduce, introspect, introject, introvert
mid-	middle	midriff, midshipman, midsummer
off-	from	offset, offshoot, offshore, offspring
on-	on	oncoming, ongoing, onrush, onshore
para-	beside	paradigm, paragraph, parallel, paraphrase
per-	throughout	perceive, percolate, perfect, perform
peri-	all around	perimeter, periscope, peripatetic
pro-	forward	proceed, produce, proficient, progress
pro-	in front of	proclaim, profane, profess
re-	back	recall, recede, reflect, repay, retract
retro-	back	retroactive, retrogress, retro-rocket
sub-	under	subcontract, subject, submerge
super-	over	superimpose, superscript, supersede
tele-	distant	telegram, telekinesis, telephone
through-	through	thoroughbred, thoroughfare
trans-	across	transatlantic, transcend, transcribe
under-	below	undercover, underground, underneath
with-	back, away	withdraw, withhold, within, without

PREFIXES THAT DESCRIBE AMOUNT OR EXTENT OF

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
equi-	equal	equal, equilibrium, equidistant, equator
extra-	beyond	extraordinary, extravagant
hyper-	excessive	hyperactive, hyperbole, hypercritical
hypo-	too little	hypoactive, hypoglycemic
is-	equal	isometric, isomorph, isosceles, isotope
multi-	many, much	multicolored, multifarious, multiply
olig-	few	oligarchy, oligopoly, oligophagous

MORE PREFIXES CONTINUED

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
omni-	all	omnibus, omnificent, omnipotent
out-	surpassing	outbid, outclass, outdo, outlive
over-	too much	overactive, overbearing, overblown
pan-	all	panacea, pandemonium, Pandora
pene-	almost	peneplain, peninsula, penultimate
poly-	many	polyandry, polyester, polygamy, polyglot
super-	more than	superfine, superhuman, supernatural
ultra-	beyond	ultraconservative, ultramodern
under-	less than	underage, underdone, underripe

PREFIXES THAT EXPRESS TOGETHERNESS AND SEPARATENESS

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
ab-	away from	abdicate, abduct, aberrant, absent
co-	together	coauthor, cognate, coincide, cooperate
col-	with	collaborate, collateral, colleague, collect
com-	with	combat, combine, comfort, commune
con-	with	concede, concur, concert, confident
syl-	together	syllable, syllogism
sym-	together	symbiosis, symbol, symmetry, sympathy
syn-	together	synchronize, syndrome, synergy

PREFIXES THAT EXPRESS NEGATION

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
a-	not	apathy, atheist, atrophy, atypical
an-	not	anemia, anarchy, anesthesia, anorexia
counter-	opposite	counteract, countermand
de-	opposite	deactivate, deform, degrade, deplete
for-	prohibit	forbid, forget, forgo, forsake, forswear
il-	not	illegal, illegible, illegitimate, illiterate
im-	not	imbalance, immaculate, immature
in-	not	inaccurate, inactive, inadvertent
ir-	not	irrational, irreconcilable, irredeemable
ne-	not	nefarious, never
neg-	not	negative, neglect, negotiate
non-	not	nonchalant, nonconformist, nondescript
un-	opposite	unable, undo, unbeaten, uncertain

PREFIXES THAT MAKE A JUDGMENT

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
anti-	against	antinuclear, antisocial, antislavery
bene-	good	benediction, benefactor, beneficial
contra-	against	contraband, contraception, contradict
dys-	bad	dysentery, dysfunction, dyspepsia
eu-	good	Eucharist, eugenic, euphoria, eulogy
mal-	bad	maladjusted, malaise, malevolent

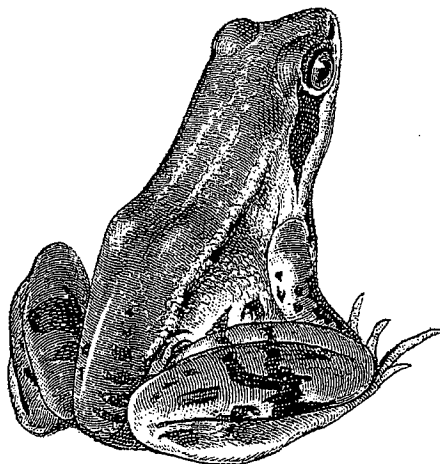
mis-	bad	misanthrope, misbehave, miscarriage
pro-	for	pro-American, pro-education

MISCELLANEOUS PREFIXES

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
ambi-	both, around	ambidextrous, ambience, ambiguous
amphi-	both, around	amphibian, amphitheater, amphora
auto-	self	autobiography, autocratic, autograph
be-	make	becalm, befriend, beguile, bewitch
hetero-	different	heterodox, heteronym, heterosexual
homo-	same	homogeneous, homogenize, homograph
meta-	change	metabolism, metamorphosis, metaphor
neo-	new	neoclassic, neologism, neon, neonatal
para-	almost	paralegal, paramedic
pseudo-	false	pseudoclassic, pseudonym, pseudopod
re-	again	reappear, reclassify, recopy, redo, repaint
self-	self	self-denial, self-respect, selfish

PREFIXES WITH TWO MEANINGS

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Examples</u>
un-	not	unhappy
un-	reversal	undress
a-	not	amoral
a-	on	aboard
in-	not	incomplete
in-	within	inhouse



See also List 28, The 20 Most Common Prefixes; List 30, The 20 Most Common Suffixes; List 31, More Suffixes; List 34, Greek and Latin Roots; List 36, -Ology Word Family; List 37, -Phobia and -Philia Word Families; List 156, Double-Letter Spelling Patterns.