

Word Study

Stems and Affixes

Using context clues is one way to discover the meaning of an unfamiliar word. Another way is word analysis, that is, looking at the meanings of parts of words. Many English words have been formed by combining parts of older English, Greek, and Latin words. If you know the meanings of some of these word parts, you can often guess the meaning of an unfamiliar English word, particularly in context.

For example, *report* is formed from *re*, which means back, and *port*, which means carry. *Scientist* is derived from *sci*, which means know, and *ist*, which means one who. *Port* and *sci* are called stems. A stem is the basic part on which groups of related words are built. *Re* and *ist* are called affixes, that is, word parts that are attached to stems. Affixes like *re*, which are attached to the beginning of stems, are called prefixes. Affixes attached to the end, like *ist*, are called suffixes. Generally, prefixes change the meaning of a word and suffixes change its part of speech. Here is an example:

| | | |
|---------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Stem | pay (verb) | honest (adjective) |
| Prefix | repay (verb) | dishonest (adjective) |
| Suffix | repayment (noun) | dishonestly (adverb) |

Word analysis is not always enough to give you the precise definition of a word you encounter in a reading passage, but often along with context it will help you to understand the general meaning of the word so that you can continue reading without stopping to use a dictionary.

Below is a list of some commonly occurring stems and affixes. Study their meanings. Your teacher may ask you to give examples of other words you know that are derived from these stems and affixes. Then do the exercises that follow.

Prefixes

| | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| com-, con-, col-, cor-, co- | together, with | cooperate, connect |
| in-, im-, il-, ir- | in, into, on | invade, insert |
| in-, im-, il-, ir- | not | impolite, illegal |
| micro- | small | microscope, microcomputer |
| pre- | before | prepare, prehistoric |
| re-, retro- | back, again | return, retrorocket |

Stems

| | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| -audi-, -audit- | hear | auditorium, auditor |
| -chron- | time | chronology, chronological |
| -dic-, -dict- | say, speak | dictator, dictation |
| -graph-, -gram- | write, writing | telegraph, telegram |
| -log-, -ology- | speech, word, study | biology |
| -phon- | sound | telephone |
| -scrib-, -script- | write | describe, script |
| -spect- | look at | inspect, spectator |
| -vid-, -vis- | see | video, vision |

Suffixes

| | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| -er, -or | one who | worker, spectator |
| -ist | one who | typist, biologist |
| -tion, -ation | condition, the act of | action, celebration |

Exercise 1

1. In each item, select the best definition of the italicized word.

a. He lost his *spectacles*.

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1. glasses | <input type="checkbox"/> 3. pants |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. gloves | <input type="checkbox"/> 4. shoes |

b. He drew *concentric* circles.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. ○○ | <input type="checkbox"/> 3. ○○ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. ⊙ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4. ⊙ |

c. He *inspected* their work.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. spoke highly of | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 3. examined closely |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. did not examine | <input type="checkbox"/> 4. did not like |

2. Circle the words where *in-* means *not*. Watch out; there are false negatives in this list.

| | | | |
|------------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| inject | inside | insane | inspect |
| invaluable | inflammable | inactive | invisible |

3. In current usage, the prefix *co-* is frequently used to form new words (for example, *co-* + editors becomes coeditors). Give another example of a word that uses *co* in this way.

4. The prefix *re-* (meaning *again*) often combines with simple verbs to create new verbs (for example, *re-* + do becomes redo). List three words familiar to you that use *re-* in this way.

Exercise 2

Word analysis can help you to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words. Using context clues and what you know about word parts, write a synonym, description, or definition of the italicized words.

1. _____ The doctor asked Martin to *inhale* deeply and hold his breath for 10 seconds.
2. _____ Many countries *import* most of the oil they use.
3. _____ Three newspaper reporters *collaborated* in writing this series of articles.
4. _____ Calling my professor by her first name seems too *informal* to me.
5. _____ It is Joe's *prediction* that by the year 2000 there will be a female president of the United States.
6. _____ Historians use the *inscriptions* on the walls of ancient temples to guide them in their studies.
7. _____ You cannot sign up for a class the first day it meets in September; you must *preregister* in August.
8. _____ After his long illness, he didn't recognize his own *reflection* in the mirror.
9. _____ I *dictated* the letter to my secretary over the phone.
10. _____ I'm sending a sample of my handwriting to a *graphologist* who says he can use it to analyze my personality.
11. _____ That university has a very good *microbiology* department.
12. _____ *Phonograph recordings* of early jazz musicians are very valuable now.
13. _____ At the drug store, the pharmacist refused to give me my medicine because she could not read the doctor's *prescription*.
14. _____ He should see a doctor about his *chronic* cough.
15. _____ Maureen was not admitted to graduate school this year, but she *reapplied* and was admitted for next year.
16. _____ I recognize his face, but I can't *recall* his name.

17. _____ Ten years ago, I decided not to complete high school; *in retrospect*, I believe that was a bad decision.
18. _____ She uses *audiovisual* aids to make her speeches more interesting.
19. _____ Some people believe it is *immoral* to fight in any war.
20. _____ Babies are born healthier when their mothers have good *prenatal* care.

Exercise 3

Following is a list of words containing some of the stems and affixes introduced in this unit. Definitions of these words appear on the right. Put the letter of the appropriate definition next to each word.

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|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. <u>d</u> microbe | a. an instrument used to make soft sounds louder |
| 2. <u>A</u> phonology | b. not able to be seen |
| 3. <u>C</u> audience | c. a group of listeners |
| 4. _____ chronicler | d. the study of speech sounds |
| 5. _____ chronology | e. not normal |
| 6. <u>e</u> irregular | f. a historian; one who records events in the order in which they occur |
| 7. <u>a</u> microphone | g. an organism too small to be seen with the naked eye |
| 8. <u>b</u> invisible | h. a listing of events arranged in order of their occurrence |