

## Building Vocabulary: Prefixes, Roots, and Suffixes

Many studies show the importance of building children’s vocabulary. One study has shown that a set of 20 prefixes and 14 roots, and knowing how to use them, will unlock the meaning of over 100,000 words. A similar study showed that a set of 29 prefixes and 25 roots will give the meaning to over 125,000 words. Imagine adding suffixes! Below are lists of prefixes, suffixes, and roots – with their meanings and example words.\* Reviewing these also can help many ELL students to see relationships between and among languages. Many prefixes have a basis in Latin – also the basis for Spanish, French, and Italian – or Greek.

Table 1: 32 Prefixes

Prefix	Meaning	Example words and meanings	
a, ab, abs	away from	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ absent</li> <li>▪ abscond</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ not to be present, away</li> <li>▪ abscond – to run away</li> </ul>
ad, a, ac, af, ag, an, ar, at, as	to, toward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ adapt</li> <li>▪ adhere</li> <li>▪ annex</li> <li>▪ attract</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to fit into</li> <li>▪ to stick to</li> <li>▪ to add or join</li> <li>▪ to draw near</li> </ul>
anti	against	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ antifreeze</li> <li>▪ antisocial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a substance to prevent freezing</li> <li>▪ refers to someone who’s not social</li> </ul>
bi, bis	two	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ bicycle</li> <li>▪ biannual</li> <li>▪ biennial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ two wheeled cycle</li> <li>▪ twice each year</li> <li>▪ every two years</li> </ul>
circum, cir	around	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ circumscribe</li> <li>▪ circle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to draw around</li> <li>▪ a figure that goes all around</li> </ul>
com, con, co, col	with, together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ combine</li> <li>▪ contact</li> <li>▪ collect</li> <li>▪ co-worker</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to bring together</li> <li>▪ to touch together</li> <li>▪ to bring together</li> <li>▪ co-worker</li> </ul>
de	away from, down, the opposite of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ depart</li> <li>▪ decline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to go away from</li> <li>▪ to turn down</li> </ul>
dis, dif, di	apart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ dislike</li> <li>▪ dishonest</li> <li>▪ distant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ not to like</li> <li>▪ not honest</li> <li>▪ away</li> </ul>
epi	upon, on top of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ epitaph</li> <li>▪ epilogue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ writing upon a tombstone</li> <li>▪ speech at the end, on top of the rest</li> </ul>
equ, equi	equal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ equalize</li> <li>▪ equitable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to make equal</li> <li>▪ fair, equal</li> </ul>
ex, e, ef	out, from	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ exit</li> <li>▪ eject</li> <li>▪ exhale</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to go out</li> <li>▪ to throw out</li> <li>▪ to breathe out</li> </ul>
in, il, ir, im, en	in, into	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ inject</li> <li>▪ impose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to put into</li> <li>▪ to force into</li> </ul>
in, il, ig, ir, im	not	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ inactive</li> <li>▪ ignoble</li> <li>▪ irreversible</li> <li>▪ irritate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ not active</li> <li>▪ not noble</li> <li>▪ not reversible</li> <li>▪ to put into discomfort</li> </ul>

\* This document revised from Gary Gruber’s work on increasing children’s test scores: *Dr. Gary Gruber’s Essential Guide to Test Taking for Kids, Grades 3, 4, & 5.* (1986); *Dr. Gary Gruber’s Essential Guide to Test Taking for Kids, Grades 6, 7, 8, & 9.* (1986); and *Gruber’s Complete Preparation for the SAT* (9th Edition, 2001) -- all published by Collins, New York City.

Prefix	Meaning	Example words and meanings	
inter	between, among	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ international</li> <li>▪ interpose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ among nations</li> <li>▪ to put between</li> </ul>
mal, male	bad, ill, wrong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ malpractice</li> <li>▪ malfunction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ bad practice</li> <li>▪ fail to function, bad function</li> </ul>
mis	wrong, badly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ mistreat</li> <li>▪ mistake</li> <li>▪ misplace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to treat badly</li> <li>▪ to get wrong</li> <li>▪ to put in wrong place</li> </ul>
mono	one, alone, single	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ monopoly</li> <li>▪ monotone</li> <li>▪ monologue</li> <li>▪ monosyllable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ one ownership</li> <li>▪ one note</li> <li>▪ speech by one person</li> <li>▪ one syllable</li> </ul>
non	not, the reverse of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ nonsense</li> <li>▪ nonprofit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ not making sense</li> <li>▪ not making a profit</li> </ul>
ob	in front, against, in front of, in the way of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ obstacle</li> <li>▪ obvious</li> <li>▪ obviate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ something that stands in the way of</li> <li>▪ right in front of, apparent</li> <li>▪ to do away with, make unnecessary</li> </ul>
omni	everywhere, all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ omnipresent</li> <li>▪ omnipotent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ always present, everywhere</li> <li>▪ all powerful</li> </ul>
per	through	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ pervade</li> <li>▪ perceive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to pass through, to spread through</li> <li>▪ to become aware through sight</li> </ul>
poly	many	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ polysyllable</li> <li>▪ polygon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ many syllables</li> <li>▪ figure with many sides</li> </ul>
post	after	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ postpone</li> <li>▪ postmortem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to do after</li> <li>▪ after death</li> </ul>
pre	before, earlier than	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ preview</li> <li>▪ prehistoric</li> <li>▪ preface</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a viewing earlier than another</li> <li>▪ before written history</li> <li>▪ a statement before an article or book</li> </ul>
pro	forward, going ahead of, supporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ proceed</li> <li>▪ prowar</li> <li>▪ promote</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to go forward</li> <li>▪ supporting the war</li> <li>▪ to raise or move forward</li> </ul>
re	again, back	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ retell</li> <li>▪ recall</li> <li>▪ recede</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to tell again</li> <li>▪ to call back</li> <li>▪ to go back</li> </ul>
se	apart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ secede</li> <li>▪ seclude</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to withdraw, become apart</li> <li>▪ to stay apart from others</li> </ul>
sub	under, less than	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ submarine</li> <li>▪ subway</li> <li>▪ subliminal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ under water</li> <li>▪ a path or way to move under ground</li> <li>▪ below the level of consciousness</li> </ul>
super	over, above, greater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ superstar</li> <li>▪ superimpose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a star greater than other stars</li> <li>▪ to put over something else</li> </ul>
trans	across	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ transcontinental</li> <li>▪ transverse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ across the continent</li> <li>▪ to lie or go across</li> </ul>
un, uni	one	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ unidirectional</li> <li>▪ unanimous</li> <li>▪ unilateral</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ having one direction</li> <li>▪ sharing one view</li> <li>▪ having one side</li> </ul>
un	not	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ uninterested</li> <li>▪ unhelpful</li> <li>▪ unethical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ not interested</li> <li>▪ not helpful</li> <li>▪ not ethical</li> </ul>

Table 2: 27 Roots

Root	Meaning	Example words & meanings	
act, ag	to do, to act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Agent</li> <li>▪ Activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ One who acts as a representative</li> <li>▪ Action</li> </ul>
apert	open	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Aperture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ An opening</li> </ul>
bas	low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Basement</li> <li>▪ Basement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Something that is low, at the bottom</li> <li>▪ A room that is low</li> </ul>
cap, capt, cip, cept, ceive	to take, to hold, to seize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Captive</li> <li>▪ Receive</li> <li>▪ Capable</li> <li>▪ Recipient</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ One who is held</li> <li>▪ To take</li> <li>▪ Able to take hold of things</li> <li>▪ One who takes hold or receives</li> </ul>
ced, cede, ceed, cess	to go, to give in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Precede</li> <li>▪ Access</li> <li>▪ Proceed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To go before</li> <li>▪ Means of going to</li> <li>▪ To go forward</li> </ul>
cred, credit	to believe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Credible</li> <li>▪ Incredible</li> <li>▪ Credit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Believable</li> <li>▪ Not believable</li> <li>▪ Belief, trust</li> </ul>
curr, curs, cours	to run	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Current</li> <li>▪ Precursory</li> <li>▪ Recourse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Now in progress, running</li> <li>▪ Running (going) before</li> <li>▪ To run for aid</li> </ul>
dic, dict	to say	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dictionary</li> <li>▪ Indict</li> <li>▪ Indicate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A book explaining words (sayings)</li> <li>▪ To say or make an accusation</li> <li>▪ To point out or say by demonstrating</li> </ul>
duc, duct	to lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Induce</li> <li>▪ Conduct</li> <li>▪ Aqueduct</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To lead to action</li> <li>▪ To lead or guide</li> <li>▪ Pipe that leads water somewhere</li> </ul>
equ	equal, even	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Equality</li> <li>▪ Equanimity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Equal in social, political rights</li> <li>▪ Evenness of mind, tranquility</li> </ul>
fac, fact, fic, fect, fy	to make, to do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Facile</li> <li>▪ Fiction</li> <li>▪ Factory</li> <li>▪ Affect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Easy to do</li> <li>▪ Something that is made up</li> <li>▪ Place that makes things</li> <li>▪ To make a change in</li> </ul>
fer, ferr	to carry, bring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Defer</li> <li>▪ Referral</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To carry away</li> <li>▪ Bring a source for help/information</li> </ul>
graph	write	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Monograph</li> <li>▪ Graphite</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A writing on a particular subject</li> <li>▪ A form of carbon used for writing</li> </ul>
mit, mis	to send	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Admit</li> <li>▪ Missile</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To send in</li> <li>▪ Something sent through the air</li> </ul>
par	equal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Parity</li> <li>▪ Disparate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Equality</li> <li>▪ No equal, not alike</li> </ul>
plic	to fold, to bend, to turn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Complicate</li> <li>▪ Implicate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To fold (mix) together</li> <li>▪ To fold in, to involve</li> </ul>
pon, pos, posit, pose	to place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Component</li> <li>▪ Transpose</li> <li>▪ Compose</li> <li>▪ Deposit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A part placed together with others</li> <li>▪ A place across</li> <li>▪ To put many parts into place</li> <li>▪ To place for safekeeping</li> </ul>
scrib, script	to write	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Describe</li> <li>▪ Transcript</li> <li>▪ Subscription</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To write about or tell about</li> <li>▪ A written copy</li> <li>▪ A written signature or document</li> </ul>
sequ, secu	to follow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sequence</li> <li>▪ Sequel</li> <li>▪ Consecutive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In following order</li> <li>▪ A second, following, book</li> <li>▪ One that follows another</li> </ul>
spec, spect, spic	to appear, to look, to see	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Specimen</li> <li>▪ Aspect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ An example to look at</li> <li>▪ One way to see something</li> </ul>
sta, stat, sist,	to stand, or make stand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Constant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Standing with</li> </ul>

Root	Meaning	Example words & meanings	
stit, sisto		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Status</li> <li>▪ Stable</li> <li>▪ Desist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Social standing</li> <li>▪ Steady (standing)</li> <li>▪ To stand away from</li> </ul>
tact	to touch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Contact</li> <li>▪ Tactile</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To touch together</li> <li>▪ To be able to be touched</li> </ul>
ten, tent, tain	to hold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tenable</li> <li>▪ Retentive</li> <li>▪ Maintain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Able to be held, holding</li> <li>▪ Holding</li> <li>▪ To keep or hold up</li> </ul>
tend, tens, tent	to stretch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Extend</li> <li>▪ Tension</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To stretch or draw out</li> <li>▪ Stretched</li> </ul>
tract	to draw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Attract</li> <li>▪ Contract</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To draw together</li> <li>▪ An agreement drawn up</li> </ul>
ven, vent	to come	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Convene</li> <li>▪ Advent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To come together</li> <li>▪ A coming</li> </ul>
ver, vert, vers	to turn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Avert</li> <li>▪ Revert</li> <li>▪ Reverse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To turn away</li> <li>▪ To turn back</li> <li>▪ To turn around</li> </ul>

Table 3: 23 Suffixes

Suffix	Meaning	Example words & meanings	
able, ible, ble	able to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Edible</li> <li>▪ Salable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Able to be eaten</li> <li>▪ Able to be sold</li> </ul>
acious, cous, al	like, having the quality of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nocturnal</li> <li>▪ Vivacious</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Of the night</li> <li>▪ Having the quality of being lively</li> </ul>
ance, ancy	the act of, a state of being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Performance</li> <li>▪ Truancy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The act of performing</li> <li>▪ The act of being truant</li> </ul>
ant, ent, er, or	one who	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Occupant</li> <li>▪ Respondent</li> <li>▪ Teacher</li> <li>▪ Creator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ One who occupies</li> <li>▪ One who responds or answers</li> <li>▪ One who teaches</li> <li>▪ One who creates</li> </ul>
ar, ary	connected with, related to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ocular</li> <li>▪ Beneficiary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Related to the eye</li> <li>▪ Connected with one who receives benefits</li> </ul>
ence	quality of, act of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Existence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The act of existing or being</li> </ul>
ful	full of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fearful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Full of fear</li> </ul>
ic, ac, il, ile	of, like, pertaining to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cardiac</li> <li>▪ Civil</li> <li>▪ Infantile</li> <li>▪ Acidic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pertaining to the heart</li> <li>▪ Pertaining to citizens</li> <li>▪ Pertaining to infants</li> <li>▪ Like acid</li> </ul>
ion	the act or condition of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Correction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The act of correcting</li> </ul>
ism	the practice of, support of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Patriotism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support of one's country</li> </ul>
ist	one who makes, does	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Artist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ One who creates art</li> </ul>
ity, ty, y	the state of, character of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unity</li> <li>▪ Shifty</li> <li>▪ Showy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The state of being one</li> <li>▪ State of shifting around</li> <li>▪ State of always showing oneself</li> </ul>
ive	having the nature of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Active</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Having the nature of acting or moving</li> </ul>
less	lacking, without	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Heartless</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Without a heart</li> </ul>
logy	the study of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Biology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The study of life processes</li> </ul>
ment	the act of, the state of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Retirement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ State of being retired</li> </ul>
ness	the quality of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Eagerness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The quality of being eager</li> </ul>
ory	having the nature of, a place or thing for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Laboratory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A place where work is done</li> </ul>

Suffix	Meaning	Example words & meanings	
ous, ose	full of, having	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dangerous</li> <li>▪ Verbose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Full of danger</li> <li>▪ Full of words, or wordy</li> </ul>
ship	the art or skill of, the ability to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The ability to lead</li> </ul>
some	full of, like	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Troublesome</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Full of trouble</li> </ul>
tude	the state of quality of, the ability to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Aptitude</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The ability to do</li> </ul>
y	Full of, somewhat, somewhat like	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Musty</li> <li>▪ Chilly</li> <li>▪ Willowy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Having a stale oror</li> <li>▪ Somewhat cold</li> <li>▪ Like a willow</li> </ul>

Table 4: Taking words apart

Word	Prefix	Root	Suffix	Meaning
Concurrence	con: with	curr: run	ence: act of	Act of running with, happening at same time
Exaggerate	ex: out	ag: to do, act	---	To act out
Irreversible	ir: not	vers: turning	ible: able to	Not able to turn back
	re: again			
Malediction	male: bad	dict: to say	---	To say bad things, a negative statement
Precursor	pre: before	curs: to run	or: one who	Something that comes before
Unity	uni: one	---	ty: state of	State of being one, a single thing or being
Untenable	un: not	ten: holding	able: able to	Not able to hold on