



How Prefixes and Suffixes Change Word Meanings

KS2 ENGLISH

GRAMMAR

VOCABULARY

Ages 9-12 ⌚ 3 min read

What Are Prefixes and Suffixes?

Prefixes are letters added to the **beginning** of a word that change its meaning.

Suffixes are letters added to the **end** of a word that also change its meaning. Think of them as special building blocks that transform how words work and what they mean.

Think of it like: A word is like a sandwich. The prefix is what you add before the bread, and the suffix is what you add after. The same bread (the main word) becomes completely different depending on what you add.

Common Prefixes

Some popular prefixes include **un-**, which usually means 'not'. When you add **un-** to 'happy', you get 'unhappy', which means the opposite. Another common prefix is **re-**, meaning 'again'. If you **rewrite** something, you're writing it again. The prefix **dis-** also means 'not' or 'opposite' — if you **disagree** with someone, you don't agree with them.

Other useful prefixes include **pre-** (before), **over-** (too much), and **sub-** (under). When you **preheat** an oven, you heat it before cooking. If something is **overloaded**, it has too much load.

Common Suffixes

Suffixes work differently from prefixes. The suffix **-ing** shows that something is happening right now. 'Walk' becomes 'walking'. The suffix **-ed** shows that something happened in the past — 'walked'. The suffix **-ful** means 'full of', so 'helpful' means full of help. Meanwhile, **-less** means the opposite — 'helpless' means without help.

Think of it like: Adding **-less** is like taking away something important. Fearless means you don't have fear. Homeless means without a home.

Other important suffixes include **-able** (can be done), **-tion** (creates nouns), and **-ly** (creates adverbs). Something **readable** can be read. The word 'action' comes from adding **-tion** to the word act. 'Slowly' comes from adding **-ly** to 'slow'.

Why This Matters

Understanding prefixes and suffixes helps you read and spell better. When you see an unfamiliar word, you can break it into pieces and figure out what it means. Instead of memorizing thousands of words, you can learn how prefixes and suffixes combine with root words to create new meanings. This makes your vocabulary grow faster and helps you become a better reader.