









# Working with Common Prefixes

The beginning of a word can help you understand its meaning.

## 1. Vocabulary

Match the words in the box with the pictures.

- |            |         |                    |            |
|------------|---------|--------------------|------------|
| a. work x2 | c. port | e. marine          | g. smoking |
| b. hill    | d. day  | f. screw / tighten | h. net     |

1. _____		4. _____		7. _____	
2. _____		5. _____		8. _____	
3. _____		6. _____		9. _____	

## 2. Using Prefixes

### A. Match the prefixes to their meanings a-f.

Prefixes are letters added to the beginning of a word to make a new word with a different meaning. Prefixes can, for example, create a new word opposite in meaning to the word it is attached to. They can also make a word negative or express relations of time, place, or manner.

	Prefix	Base word	New word	Meaning
1. _____	im	possible	impossible	a. quantity (more than one)
2. _____	co	operate	cooperate	b. time (before)
3. _____	multi	media	multimedia	c. manner (too much)
4. _____	pre	historic	prehistoric	d. place (outside of/beyond)
5. _____	extra	terrestrial	extraterrestrial	e. not or no
6. _____	over	cook	overcook	f. together

**B. Study the information about hyphenating words with prefixes.**

There are only a few general rules for when to use a hyphen with a prefix. However, there are no hard rules. The best advice is to be consistent throughout your writing.

- 1. If the prefix is used before a proper noun, use a hyphen.  
e.g. un-British, mid-June.
- 2. If the prefix ends in the same vowel that the base word starts with, use a hyphen.  
e.g. re-enter, anti-intellectual.

**3. Practice**

**A. Review prefixes and their meanings.**

Prefix	Meaning	Prefix	Meaning
1. inter-	between	6. tele-	at a distance
2. mid-	middle	7. trans-	across
3. non-	not	8. un-	remove, reverse
4. over-	too much	9. up-	make or move higher
5. sub-	under, below		

**B. Make new words for pictures 1-9 in Part 1 using the prefixes above.**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_ day
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_ net
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_ screw / tighten
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_ work
- 5. \_\_\_\_\_ marine
- 6. \_\_\_\_\_ - smoking
- 7. \_\_\_\_\_ port
- 8. \_\_\_\_\_ work
- 9. \_\_\_\_\_ hill

**C. Brainstorm some words that work with the following prefixes.**

- 1. over \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. anti \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. dis \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. semi \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. tri \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. mis \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. up \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. un \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. pre \_\_\_\_\_
- 10. post \_\_\_\_\_
- 11. pro \_\_\_\_\_
- 12. bi \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. Reference

Review the chart of prefixes, meanings, and examples. Circle any new words to discuss.

Prefix	Meaning	Examples
1. a-, an-	without, not	anesthetic, atheist
2. ad-, a-, ac-, as-	to, toward	access, admit, assist
3. auto-	self	autoimmune, autonomous
4. co-, com-, con-	with, together	companion, concurrent
5. contra-, counter-	against	contradict, counteract
6. de-	down, undo, not	degenerate, depress
7. di-, dis-	lack of, not, apart	disadvantage, displacement
8. ex- (or e-)	out (of), former	expose, extract
9. fore-	before	foresee, foreshadow
10. hemi-	half	hemisphere
11. hyper	above, excessive	hyperactive, hypertension
12. macro-	large	macrobiotic, macrocosm
13. mal-	bad	malfunction, malignant
14. micro-	small	microbe, microscope
15. mis-	wrong	misfortune, mistake
16. mono-	one	monolingual, monopoly
17. multi-	many	multiple, multi-task
18. ob-, o-, oc-, op-	against, over, completely	object, occur, omit, oppose
19. omni-	all	omnipotent, omnivorous
20. poly-	many	polygamous, polygon
21. post-	after	postgraduate, postpone
22. pre-	before	precede, predict, prevent
23. pro-	forward	progress, promotion
24. quad-	four	quadruple, quadrillion
25. semi-	half, partially	semiannual, semiconscious
26. super-, supra-	above, excessive	superlative, supersonic
27. ultra-	beyond, excessive	ultrasonic, ultraviolet
28. uni-	one	uniform, unilateral

# Working with Common Prefixes



Level: Intermediate: B1  
Upper-Intermediate: B2

Updated: Apr 13, 2022

Language: Function: Comprehending text.

Teaching time: 60 minutes.

Overview: Students review word formation and prefixes to grow their vocabulary. A prefix is a group of letters added at the beginning of another word to modify its meaning. Students create new words and meanings, explore common prefixes, and understand how to use prefixes to understand unfamiliar words. A prefix reference sheet is included.

## 1. VOCABULARY

Individually or in pairs, students match words a-i with pictures 1-9. Higher-level students will find this activity easy so you may choose to discuss the pictures and what prefixes they already know match the pictures.

1. d. day
2. h. net
3. f. screw / tighten
4. a. work
5. e. marine
6. g. smoking
7. c. port
8. a. work
9. b. hill

## 2. USING PREFIXES

- A. Read the information about using prefixes to the class or nominate a student to read it. Prefixes can, for example, create a new word opposite in meaning to the word it is attached to. They can also make a word negative or express relations of time, place, or manner. Discuss with students and answer any questions that arise.

Individually, students match prefixes used in words 1-6 with their meanings a-f. Students can compare their answers with a partner and discuss any differences or check answers with the class.

- |          |                                |
|----------|--------------------------------|
| 1. im    | e. not or no                   |
| 2. co    | f. together                    |
| 3. multi | a. quantity; more than one     |
| 4. pre   | b. time (before)               |
| 5. extra | d. place (outside of / beyond) |
| 6. over  | c. manner (too much)           |

- B. As a class, read and discuss the information about hyphenating prefixes. Elicit examples from students and write them on the board to discuss. Remind students that there is a difference between American English and British English, but they shouldn't worry about which is correct; it is important that they stay consistent in their writing.

## 3. PRACTICE

- A. In pairs, students review the prefixes and their most common meanings. Discuss if necessary.

- B. Individually, students use the prefixes in Part 3A to make new words that correspond to pictures 1-9 in Part 1 of this Handout. Students should refer to pictures for help.

1. **mid** day
2. **inter** net
3. **un** screw / **un** tighten
4. **tele** work
5. **sub** marine
6. **non**-smoking
7. **trans** port
8. **over** work
9. **up** hill

- C. In pairs, students brainstorm words that work with prefixes 1-9. Elicit ideas from student pairs to share with the class. Correct any mistakes made and discuss if necessary. As an extended activity, student pairs read their prefixed words to the class. If other pairs have those words, they must cross them out. Students tally the number of words they have remaining and the pair with the most words remaining wins; they have the most unique prefixed words. Answers will vary but may include the following:

1. over overwork, overuse, overdo
2. anti antisocial, anticlockwise, antibiotic
3. dis disappear, disadvantage, disapprove
4. semi semicircle, semiannual, semiconscious
5. tri triangle, tripod, trimester
6. mis misfortune, mistake, misunderstand
7. up upload, uphill, upend
8. un undeserved, unhappy, unsure
9. pre preview, predict, prevent
10. post postgraduate, postpone, postmortem
11. pro promotion, pronoun, prohibit
12. bi biannual, bicycle, bilingual

## 4. REFERENCE

Students can read the reference chart of prefixes, meanings, and examples together. Encourage students to find the meanings of new words using their dictionaries or smart devices, then share afterward. Alternatively, they could circle new words to check in their pair, group, or as a class after.