

Suffixes

What are suffixes?

Suffixes are groups of letters added after a word, which then creates new words. For example: teacher - "er" means someone who does, so the new meaning is "someone who teaches"

sinful - "ful" means characterized by, so the new meaning is "someone characterized by sin"

There are many suffixes in English, some of which are quite common and some of which are used less frequently. In some cases, the same suffix may have more than one meaning, too. If you learn suffixes, your ability to comprehend new words will greatly improve. Unfortunately, it comes down to memorization.

Here's a list of many suffixes. The ones marked with the following symbol (O) are more often used, and should perhaps be studied first.

O -able or -ible

able to do; fit to do

debatable doable teachable

Finishing the report by noon is doable, I think.

-ance or -ence

used to form nouns from verbs; state or condition

assistance dependence difference

If you need assistance, please ask a store clerk.

O -d or -ed

used to form the past tense with verbs

dropped typed twisted

I twisted my ankle yesterday, and now I can hardly walk.

-en

used to form verbs from adjectives

harden strengthen whiten

I regularly have the dentist whiten my teeth.

-er

used to form comparatives

easier lighter slower

Which is easier, speaking in English or listening to English?

-er or -or

someone who does or is

actor swimmer teacher

Although I had wanted to become an actor, I became an acting teacher instead.

O -es or -s

used to form plural verbs

finishes passes plays

My daughter often plays in the yard with her friends.

-est

to the greatest degree

darkest greatest warmest

Babe Ruth is the greatest baseball player ever, isn't he?

-ful

characterized by; full of

bashful playful sinful

When my son turned two, he became quite bashful around adults.

-ise or -ize

cause to be or become; become like

dramatize hospitalize sterilize

After the accident, I was hospitalized for a few days.

-ist

someone who believes; someone who does

contortionist pianist sexist

My coworker is really sexist. I hate even talking with him!

-ity or -ty

used to express quality or state

complexity reality tasty

In reality, politicians rarely tell the truth.

-less

without

childless homeless penniless

If the stock market continues to drop, I'm going to be penniless!

O -ly

used to form adverbs from adjectives

carefully foolishly quickly

I foolishly told my boss the truth, so he fired me.

-ment

action or process, or the result of

advancement ailment movement

Unfortunately, advancement in my company is based on length of service and not skills.

-ness

condition; degree; quality; state

abruptness brightness darkness

The brightness of the car's headlights hurt my eyes.

O -sion or -tion

used to form nouns from verbs; expresses an action

comprehension orientation reaction

After orientation on the first day, new students are invited to a welcome party.

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