

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Layers of Language:
Anglo-Saxon Morpheme Patterns

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~ Module 13, Session 6 ~ Lecture Notes

Morpheme Patterns

As words expand, we need to introduce morpheme patterns. Morphemes are the smallest meaningful linguistic units in words. Short Anglo-Saxon base words expand in one of two ways; they **compound** or **affix**. Compounding two base words as in base + ball forming baseball, or moon + light forming moonlight links two morphemes to make a word with a related but slightly different meaning. Affixing means that prefixes and/or suffixes are added to base words. The *s* in the plural *cats* is a morpheme as is the *s* in the verb *jumps*.

Compound Words

See if students already know compound words. Usually high-school students will know hundreds of compound words, although they may not know the term, *compound word*. Provide examples, and have students generate compound words. Point out how the meaning of the compound word relates to the base words. (See handout for numerous compound words.)

Affixing Prefixes and Suffixes

Prefixes and suffixes are added to base words to make thousands of new words. By learning the common prefixes and suffixes, students will automatically recognize these patterns within longer words, leading to fluent decoding. Students should learn several prefixes and suffixes simultaneously. They can generate their own words containing these patterns.

Students should try to define a **prefix**. They need to know that a prefix is a word part that comes at the beginning of a word, in front of the base word or root. A prefix may be defined as “A prefix is a morpheme attached to the beginning of a base word or root, such as *dis-* in *disclaim*, that creates a new word with changed meaning or function” (Henry, 2003, p. 288).

Prefixes have fairly specific meanings. Here are some common prefixes that we affix to Anglo-Saxon base words, along with their meanings. (NOTE: prefixes and suffixes are also provided as a handout.)

in (in or not)

infield inflate inlay inset
insane infirm

re (back, again)

recount repay reprint retrace
rejoin remark retell redo

un (not or opposite of)

unfit unable unclean unjust
unfair unlike unhappy unwise

pre (before)

preview predate presell premix
preplan prepay preheat presold

un (undo or reverse)

unarm unbind unchain uncoil
unhand unglue unfold unwrap

de (down or away from)

debug decamp decode defile
deplane defog delight declaim

a (on or in, to)

abound around ahead alight
away alive alike apart

be (completely, thoroughly)

became becloud bedeck belay
befoul beloved begrudge befriend

mis (bad, badly; wrong, wrongly)

miscall miscast misfire misname
misplace misspell mistake misuse

dis (not, absence of, or apart)

dislike disable disarm disclose
disgrace distrust displace dislodge

non (not, negative prefix)

nonstop nonreader nonhero
onperson nonskid nonstick

fore (before)

forearm forehead forewarn forecourt
foreleg foresail foresight foreman

mid (middle)

midline midterm midwinter
midstream midnight midweek

Students can use the dictionary to find hundreds of words using these common prefixes.

Students also need to be able to define a suffix. The response should be something like this: A morpheme added to the end of a base or root that creates a new word with changed meaning or grammatical function, such as *-er* added to the verb *jump* to make the noun *jumper*.

Suffixes may also have specific meanings, especially when added to Anglo-Saxon base words. However, most suffixes provide grammatical cues as to a word's part of speech. For example, adding *-less* or *-ful* to the noun *hope* forms the adjectives *hopeless* and *hopeful*. We can add *-ly* to *hopeless* and *hopeful* to make the adverbs *hopelessly* and *hopefully*. Meanings (if specific) are written in italics in the examples below.

The following common suffixes (listed alphabetically) are used often with Anglo-Saxon base words:

-able (adj. – *able, can do*) buyable, fixable, drinkable, eatable, reasonable, payable

-dom (noun – *quality, office*) boredom, chiefdom, earldom, freedom, kingdom, stardom

-ed (past tense verb) skated, fretted, jumped, crushed, opened, dreamed

NOTE: *-ed* is pronounced as a syllable after a base element ending in *d* or *t*, /t/ after a base element ending in an unvoiced consonant, and /d/ after a base element ending in a voiced consonant.

-en (verb) blacken, darken, harden, ripen soften, thicken, tighten
(adj.) barren, broken, frozen, olden, golden, silken, woolen

-er (noun) baker, skater, swimmer, runner, spoiler, crawler, banker
(adj. - comparative degree) older, milder, browner, greener, shorter, taller, happier

-ess (feminine noun) actress, authoress, lioness, countess, princess, hostess, tigress

-est (adj – superlative degree) oldest, coldest, greenest, fattest, thinnest

-fold (noun) fiftyfold, manifold, tenfold, twofold

-ful (adj. - *full of, full*) hopeful, armful, doubtful, careful, joyful, shameful, wishful

-hood (noun – *condition, state*) girlhood, boyhood, livelihood, childhood, manhood

-ing (noun as action, process or art) dancing, drawing, swimming, gathering
(adj; present participle of verb) believing, seeing, thinking, drinking

-ish (adj. – *origin, nature*) babyish, biggish, clownish, girlish, sheepish, stylish

-less (adj. - *without*) ageless, careless, endless, cheerless, cloudless, pointless

-ling (noun – *very small*) duckling, cageling, foundling, seedling, yearling

-ly (adverb - *like*) clearly, broadly, foolishly, friendly, hoarsely, roundly

-ment (noun – *act of, state of*) agreement, amazement, basement, enjoyment, movement

-ness (noun - *state of*) fitness, gladness, loudness, greatness, madness, shortness

-ship (noun - *office, state, skill*) authorship, courtship, kinship, lordship, membership

-y (adj. – *inclined to*) brainy, bushy, cloudy, fishy, flashy, healthy, sleepy, tricky

Students should read and spell numerous words that contain these prefixes and suffixes. For word lists see:

Fry, E. B., Polk, J. D., & Fountoukidis, D. L. (1996). *The reading teacher's new book of lists* (3rd Ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Henry, M. K. (2003) *Unlocking literacy: Effective decoding and spelling instruction*. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing.

Jones, T. B. (1997). *Decoding and encoding English words*. Timonium, MD: York Press.

Suffix Addition Rules

Certain spelling rules must be taught when beginning to add suffixes. Teachers begin by adding suffixes that require no change in the base word as *spell + ing* (*spelling*), *cheap + er* (*cheaper*), or *camp + ed* (*camped*).

NOTE: Prefixes and suffixes will often be unaccented, and contain a schwa sound. The symbol (ə) represents the schwa, a vowel in an unaccented syllable.

Once students have the idea of adding suffixes, teachers begin presenting the following suffix addition rules:

Doubling Rule:

1. In one-syllable words: One-syllable base words ending in a single consonant immediately following one short vowel must double the final consonant before a suffix beginning with a vowel (e.g., *-er*, *-ing*, *-est*, *-ed*, *y*, etc.)

Do not double the final base word consonant if the suffix begins in a consonant (e.g., *-ment*, *-ful*, *-less*, *-ness*, *-ly*, etc.)

Examples: *big + -er = bigger*, but *big + -ness = bigness*
fret + -ing = fretting, but *fret + -ful = fretful*

2. In polysyllabic base words: The above rule applies to the final syllable in a polysyllabic base word if the final syllable is accented.

Examples: *begin' – beginning, beginner*
But, *o'pen – opening, opened*

Again no doubling is necessary when the suffix begins with a consonant as in *forget – forgetting*, but, *forgetful, forgetfulness*.

Final e Rule:

When a base word ends with final *-e*, drop the *e* before adding a suffix beginning with a vowel.

Examples: *blame - blaming, blamed, but blameless*
Time - timing, timer, timed, but timely, timeless

Final y Rule:

- When a base word ends in *y*, change the *y* to *i* before adding a suffix;
Examples: *heavy - heaviness, heavier; silly - silliest, silliness*
- **Except** when the *y* is preceded by a vowel;
Examples: *play - played, playing, played, playful*
- **Except** when the suffix begins with an *i*;
Examples: *cry - crying, but cried; baby - babyish; copy - copying, copyist*

Students need numerous opportunities to spell words that add suffixes to make these rules automatic.