

# Word roots and derivations



Another way of understanding what words mean is to learn about how they are formed. Many words are formed by taking one word (a **root word**) and adding groups of letters called prefixes and suffixes to the beginning or end.

**For example:** act    action    active    activity    inactive    proactive

All these words are formed from the root word *act*, so the meanings of these words are also linked.



1. Look closely at these words. Draw a circle round the **root word** and underline the **prefixes** and **suffixes** that have been added.

a) red**irection**

d) enjoyment

g) unusually

b) repossession

e) imprisonment

h) returnable

c) misinformation

f) disagreeable

i) deformed



Some **prefixes** change the meaning of the **root word** to make a word with the **opposite** meaning.

**For example:** active (meaning 'working')    inactive (meaning '**not** working').

It is important to learn these **prefixes**:

in

dis

de

un

non

im

il



2. Use prefixes from the list above to make the **opposite** form of each word.

a) \_\_\_\_ fuse

f) \_\_\_\_ visible

k) \_\_\_\_ legal

b) \_\_\_\_ easy

g) \_\_\_\_ order

l) \_\_\_\_ human

c) \_\_\_\_ polite

h) \_\_\_\_ sense

m) \_\_\_\_ obey

d) \_\_\_\_ code

i) \_\_\_\_ patient

n) \_\_\_\_ happy

e) \_\_\_\_ approve

j) \_\_\_\_ certain

o) \_\_\_\_ possible

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Some words are built from two familiar parts. **For example:**



The *tele-* part of the word means 'far off'. So the word *telephoto* refers to taking photographs of something that is far away. If you learn the meaning of word parts, you can work out the meaning of lots of words.



3. Here are some word parts and their meanings. Use a **dictionary** to find four words that start in the same way. The first one is done for you.

a) **tele**  
meaning 'far off'

*telephone, telescope, telegraph, teleport*

b) **auto**  
meaning 'self'

c) **super**  
meaning 'more than'

d) **trans**  
meaning 'across'

e) **micro**  
meaning 'small'

4. Form four whole words from these word parts.

mega          inter          aero  
marine      plane          phone  
sub          national

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**Did you know...**

Many word roots come from Latin and Ancient Greek, and inventors often use them when they need to make up a word for something new. For example, telephones and televisions were invented in the twentieth century, but the word *tele* was used in Ancient Greece many hundreds of years earlier.