

PREFIXES

Building your vocabulary is one of the most important things you can do to succeed in academic reading, writing, and test taking. One good way to do this is to become familiar with common English prefixes, because breaking an unfamiliar word into parts can sometimes help you guess its meaning.

Prefixes are usually one- or two-syllable groups of letters that come before a stem word with its own separate meaning. Therefore, not every word beginning with one of the letter combinations below is using it as a prefix: knowing that “bi” often means “two” will help you with *bicycle* but not with *bite*.

Prefix	Meaning	Example
a-, an-	not, without	apolitical, anarchy
ab-	away from	abduct, abnormal
acro-	high, top	acrophobia, acrobat
ambi-, amphi-	both, round	ambidextrous, amphibian
ante-	before, in front	antebellum, antechamber
anti-	against	antidote, antipathy
auto-	self	autoimmune, autonomous
bene-	good, well	benefactor, benevolent
bi-	two	bisect, bipolar
bio-	life	biology, biography
circum-	around	circumference, circumstance
co-	with	copilot, comorbidity
com-, con-	with, together	commingle, conference
contra-	against	contrary, contravene
counter-	oppose	counteract, counteroffensive
de-	reduce, remove, go down	degrade, descend
dis-	apart, not	discourage, dislocate
en-	place inside	enclose, envelope
endo-	within	endogamous, endoscopy
equi-	equal	equivocate, equitable
ex-	out, from	exodus, exhale
extra-	beyond, more than	extraneous, extraordinary
fore-	ahead, earlier, before	forewarned, foretell
geo-	earth	geology, geography
hetero-	different	heterogeneous, heterodox
homo-	same	homologous, homonym
hyper-	too much, above	hyperbole, hypertension
hypo-	too little, under	hypoglycemia, hypodermic

Prefix	Meaning	Example
il-, im-, in-, ir-	not, without	illicit, impatient, inglorious
in-	into	insert, inhale
inter-	between	interruption, international
intra-	within	intramural, intravenous
macro-	very large	macrocosm, macronutrient
mal-	bad, evil	malefactor, malediction
meta-	beyond	metaphysics, metadiscourse
micro-	very small	microscope, microbe
mono-	single	monotone, monogamy
neo-	new	neonatal, neologism
non-	not	nonentity, nonsense
omni-	all, every	omnipresent, omniscient
ortho-	straight, correct	orthodox, orthography
pan-	all	panorama, pandemic
para-	different but related to	paraphrase, paramedic
per-	through	permeable, percolate
peri-	around	perimeter, periscope
poly-	many	polytheistic, polyglot
post-	after	postpartum, postlude
pre-	before	preparation, prediction
proto-	first	prototype, protoplasm
pseudo-	false	pseudonym, pseudoscience
re-	again, back	return, reevaluate
retro-	back	retroactive, retrogressive
sub-	under	subcutaneous, subway
super-, sur-, supra-	over, above	surpass, supervise
syl-, syn-, sym-	with, together	syllabus, synthesis, symbiosis
tele-	across distance	television, telegraph
trans-	across	transsexual, transportation
tri-	three	tricycle, triumvirate
un-	not	unwise, uncharitable
uni-	one	unicycle, unitary

Last Revised Fall 2016