

# Affixes

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An affix is a bound morpheme that occurs before or within or after a base. There are three kinds, prefixes, infixes, and suffixes, two of which you have already met in passing. Now we shall deal with them in greater detail.

Prefixes are those bound morphemes that occur before a base, as in *import*, *prefix*, *reconsider*. Prefixes in English are a small class of morphemes, numbering about seventy-five. Their meanings are often those of English prepositions and adverbials.

Infixes are bound morphemes that have been inserted within a word. In English these are rare. Occasionally they are additions within a word, as in *un get at able*, where the preposition *at* of *get at* is kept as an infix in the *-able* adjective, though the preposition is usually dropped in similar words, like *reliable* (from *rely on*) and *accountable* (from *account for*). But infixes in English are most commonly replacements, not additions. They occur in a few noun plurals, like the *-ee-* in *geese*, replacing the *-oo* of *goose*, and more often in the past tense and past participles of verbs, like the *-o-* of *chose* and *chosen* replacing the *-oo-* of *choose*. The more precise term for such infixes is "replacive allomorphs."

Suffixes are bound morphemes that occur after a base, like *shrinkage*, *failure*, *noisy*, *realize*, *nails*, *dreamed*. Suffixes may pile up to the number of three or four, whereas prefixes are commonly single, except for the negative *un-* before another prefix. In *normalizers* we perhaps reach the limit with four: the base *norm* plus the four suffixes *-al*, *-ize*, *-er*, *-s*. When suffixes multiply like this, their order is fixed: there is one and only one order in which they occur.

## Inflectional Affixes

The inflectional affixes can be schematized as follows:

<i>Inflectional Affix</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Name</i>
1. {-s pl.}	dogs, oxen, mice	noun plural
2. {-s sg ps}	boy's	noun singular possessive
3. {-s pl ps}	boys', men's	noun plural possessive
4. {-s 3d}	vacates	present third-person singular
5. {-ING vb}	discussing	present participle
6. {-D pt}	chewed, rode	past tense
7. {-D pp}	chewed, eaten, swum	past participle
8. {-ER cp}	bolder, sooner, nearer	comparative
9. {-EST sp}	boldest, soonest, nearest	superlative

The words to which these affixes (suffixes and infixes) are attached are called stems. The stem includes the base or bases and all the derivational affixes. Thus, the stem of *playboys* is *playboy* and that of *beautified* is *beautify*.

The inflectional suffixes differ from the derivational suffixes in the following ways, to which there are few exceptions.

1. They do not change the part of speech.

Examples: sled, sleds (both nouns)

cough, coughed (both verbs)

cold, colder (both adjectives)

2. They come last in a word.

Examples: shortened, villainies, industrializing

3. They go with all stems of a given part of speech.

Examples: He eats, drinks, dreams, entertains, motivates.

4. They do not pile up; only one ends a word.

Examples: flakes, working, higher, written

### **Derivational Suffixes**

In addition to a short list of inflectional suffixes English has a large supply of another kind of suffix, called derivational suffixes. These consist of all the suffixes that are not inflectional. Among the characteristics of derivational suffixes there are three that will be our immediate concern.

1. The words with which derivational suffixes combine is an arbitrary matter. To make a noun from the verb *adorn* we must add *-ment*-no other suffix will do-whereas the verb *fail* combines only with *-ure* to make a noun, *failure*.

2. In many cases, but not all, a derivational suffix changes the part of speech of the word to which it is added. The noun *act* becomes an adjective by the addition of *-ive*, and to the adjective *active* we can add *-ate*, making it a verb, *activate*. Although we have not yet taken up the parts of speech, you probably know enough about them to distinguish between nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

3. Derivational suffixes usually do not close off a word; that is, after a derivational suffix one can sometimes add another derivational suffix and can frequently add an inflectional suffix. For example, to the word *fertilize*, which ends in a derivational suffix, one can add another one, *-er*, and to *fertilizer* one can add the inflectional suffix *-s*, closing of the word.