

Chapter 8

Years 1 and 2: Morphemes – prefixes, suffixes and root words

Learning outcomes

This chapter will allow you to achieve the following outcomes:

- have a clear understanding of morphemes;
- know how to teach children about adding prefixes and suffixes;
- understand compound words and how to teach them.

Teachers' Standards

Working through this chapter will help you meet the following standards:

3. Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge:
 - Demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English, whatever the teacher's specialist subject.
 - If teaching early reading, demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics.
 - Have a secure knowledge of the relevant subject(s) and curriculum areas, foster and maintain pupils' interest in the subject, and address misunderstandings.

Links to the National Curriculum

Year 1

Pupils should be taught to:

- add prefixes and suffixes:
 - using the spelling rule for adding -s or -es as the plural marker for nouns and the third person singular marker for verbs

- using the prefix *un-*
- using *-ing*, *-ed*, *-er* and *-est* where no change is needed in the spelling of root words [for example, *helping*, *helped*, *quicker*, *quickest*].

(DfE, 2013, p23)

Year 2

The meaning of new words should be explained to pupils within the context of what they are reading, and they should be encouraged to use morphology (such as prefixes) to work out unknown words.

(DfE, 2013, p29)

Formation of **nouns** using **suffixes** such as *-ness*, *-er* and by compounding [for example, *whiteboard*, *superman*].

(DfE, 2013, p75)

Words, words, words

We could not possibly teach children all the words they need to know and use – there simply isn't enough time. Instead, we need to help them to understand words and how they are created. We need to help them to apply the knowledge and understanding they gain from learning about one or a few words to other words they meet.

For example, they might learn that an antonym (opposite) for *happy* can be *sad*, but can also be *unhappy*. They will learn that when we put the prefix *un-* at the beginning of a word, this means 'not'. At the same time, they might learn words like *unfriendly*, *unhelpful* and *untidy*. Later, when they meet words that they haven't been taught directly, they should be able to apply their knowledge to read and understand words like *unusually*, *unfamiliar* and *unlikely*.

An understanding of the role of morphemes is essential, as we need to know how to modify words to make plurals, adjectives, adverbs, past tenses and different parts of verbs.

What are prefixes and suffixes?

The clue is in the names. Prefixes are *morphemes* which we put before root words to modify their meaning. So the prefix *pre-* means 'before' and we can add it to words like *mature*, *beat* and *historic* to create *premature*, *prebeat* and *prehistoric*. The language is always acquiring new words and prefixes are often used to create these, for example some shops advertise second-hand items as 'pre-loved'.

Suffixes are added at the ends of words to modify their meanings, for example either *-s* or *-es* is added to most English nouns to show that they are plural. We also add *-ing* to words to turn nouns like *play*, *jump* and *run* into verbs like *playing*, *jumping* and *running*.

What do prefixes and suffixes have to do with phonics?

As children's phonemic awareness develops, they begin to find common patterns in words and can read more quickly. Prefixes and suffixes have common patterns and tend to be spelled consistently. By understanding these morphemes, children can decode longer words and develop their reading comprehension skills, the ultimate aim of reading. To *et al.* (2014, p13) argue that:

Because many English words are morphologically related, learning one base word might increase the total vocabulary by a count of several words, if the student learns word formation processes of English. For example, if a person learns the word 'love', then morphologically-related words (i.e., loveable, lovely) can also be acquired.

Johnston and Watson (2007, p44), too, maintain that *children's reading will become more fluent if they recognise these familiar chunks, and thus sound and blend them at the syllable level.*

What is a morpheme?

Phonemes are the smallest units of sound in words, so *dog* has three phonemes: /d/o/g/. *Morphemes* are the smallest units of meaning in words, so *love* is a single morpheme and *lovely* has two morphemes: *love* is the *root word* and *-ly* is a suffix which modifies the meaning of the root word. Similarly, *happy* is a single morpheme and *unhappy* has two morphemes: *un-* and *happy*, with the prefix *un-* modifying the meaning of the root word *happy*.

Prefixes and suffixes cannot usually stand alone as words and need to be attached to root words to give meaning, so they are known as *bound morphemes*. Morphemes that can stand alone and have meaning are called *free morphemes*. Often, in English, we put two free morphemes together to create a *compound word*, for example: *textbook*, *milkshake*, *hairbrush*, *handbag*, *football* and *timetable*.

Why do we need to teach children about morphemes?

Most English words can be modified by adding morphemes such as prefixes, suffixes and other free morphemes. If you look at the spelling appendix for Year 1 of the 2013 National Curriculum (DfE, p51), you will find that children are expected to know quite a lot about adding prefixes and suffixes to words. For example, they should be able to:

- add *-s* and *-es* to words (plural of nouns and the third person singular of verbs);
- add the endings *-ing*, *-ed* and *-er* to verbs where no change is needed to the root word;
- add *-er* and *-est* to adjectives where no change is needed to the root word.

Table 8.1, which can also be found in Chapter 11, shows the most commonly used nouns, verbs and adjectives in English. Almost all of them can be modified by adding the endings that Year 1 children need to learn. Many of those that cannot be modified in this way are irregular verbs and plurals, which are usually taught separately (see Chapter 11). The irregular noun plurals are *man – men*, *life – lives*, *child – children* and *woman – women*.

Table 8.1 The most commonly used nouns, verbs and adjectives in English

Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives
1 time	1 be	1 good
2 person	2 have	2 new
3 year	3 do	3 first
4 way	4 say	4 last
5 day	5 get	5 long
6 thing	6 make	6 great
7 man	7 go	7 little
8 world	8 know	8 own
9 life	9 take	9 other
10 hand	10 see	10 old
11 part	11 come	11 right
12 child	12 think	12 big
13 eye	13 look	13 high
14 woman	14 want	14 different
15 place	15 give	15 small
16 work	16 use	16 large
17 week	17 find	17 next
18 case	18 tell	18 early
19 point	19 ask	19 young
20 government	20 work	20 important
21 company	21 seem	21 few
22 number	22 feel	22 public
23 group	23 try	23 bad
24 problem	24 leave	24 same
25 fact	25 call	25 able

Source: www.oxforddictionaries.com/words/the-oec-facts-about-the-language

Activity: Adding prefixes and suffixes

Look at the word *like* and then at some of the words we can make by using *like* as the root word and adding prefixes and suffixes:

likes, likely, alike, liken, unlike, dislike, unlikely, likeliness, likeliest, unlikeliest

Now look at the three words below and see how many words you can make using each as a root word and adding prefixes and/or suffixes:

place pack view

Commentary

If you chose words like placemat and viewpoint, you created compound words (see below). In these words both morphemes are free and can stand alone as words. They do not have prefixes or suffixes.

If you go on to look at Year 2's National Curriculum spelling appendix, you will find that children are expected to learn how to:

- add *-es* to nouns and verbs ending in *-y*;
- add *-ed*, *-ing*, *-er* and *-est* to a root word ending in *-y* with a consonant before it;
- add the endings *-ing*, *-ed*, *-er*, *-est* and *-y* to words ending in *-e* with a consonant before it;
- add *-ing*, *-ed*, *-er*, *-est* and *-y* to words of one syllable ending in a single consonant letter after a single vowel letter;
- recognise the suffixes *-ment*, *-ness*, *-ful*, *-less* and *-ly*.

Activity: Modifying words in National Curriculum spelling lists

By the time they reach Years 3 and 4, children have a prescribed list of 104 words that they are expected to learn to spell (Table 8.2).

Table 8.2 Year 3–4 spellings in the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013, p64)

accident	early	knowledge	purpose
actual	earth	learn	quarter
address	eight/eighth	length	question
answer	enough	library	recent
appear	exercise	material	regular
arrive	experience	medicine	reign
believe	experiment	mention	remember
bicycle	extreme	minute	sentence
breath	famous	natural	separate
breathe	favourite	naughty	special
build	February	notice	straight

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busy/business	forward	occasion	strange
calendar	fruit	often	strength
caught	grammar	opposite	suppose
centre	group	ordinary	surprise
century	guard	particular	therefore
certain	guide	peculiar	though/although
circle	heard	perhaps	thought
complete	heart	popular	through
consider	height	position	various
continue	history	possess	weight
decide	imagine	possible	woman/women
describe	increase	potatoes	
different	important	pressure	
difficult	interest	probably	
disappear	island	promise	

Look at these words carefully and see which can be modified by adding prefixes and suffixes and which cannot.

Commentary

The activity above illustrates that most English words can be modified by adding prefixes and/or suffixes. It is important that children learn this because it will enable them to apply what they learn about some words to others they meet. For example, if they understand that the verb teach becomes a noun, teacher, when the suffix -er is added, they will also be able to work out that someone who plays football is a footballer, someone who gardens is a gardener and so on.

Teaching your class

This chapter includes two lessons on morphemes; one for Year 1 and one for Year 2. Each can be adapted for use with children of different abilities in the other year group.

Even before they can read, young children know a lot about adding suffixes to words. Try a simple exercise to see what they know. The Phonics Screening Test requires Year 1 children to read pseudo or invented words to check on their ability to match graphemes to phonemes. Invent some phonically regular words or use some of the

ones below and draw pictures to illustrate what the words might be names for. You could try:

rutch, flid, murn, lun, pib, vatch, vuss, wob

Before showing children the words, say them and show them a picture. You might decide to make a simple drawing of each as an animal, a flower or a vehicle. As you say each word, ask the children what you would call the thing if there were two of them:

This is a *rutch*; if I had another one I'd have two ...

This is a *flid*; if I had lots of them I'd have some ...

Even children who cannot read will almost certainly say *rutches* for the first and *flids* for the second, because they are used to hearing those endings for plurals. They may not be able to explain that words which end with a /ch/ or /tch/ sound add *-es* in the plural, while words which end with *d* add an *s*, but because they hear plurals for *watch*, *match*, *switch*, etc. and *lid*, *wood*, *bud*, etc., they know what the endings sound like in the plural.

You can try the same thing for verbs to check their oral knowledge of verb endings in the present and past tense. Try some of these:

Make an action such as waving your arms or tapping your fingers on a table and say:

I'm *mibbing*. I'm going to do it again. What am I going to do? I'm going to ...

Children will probably say *mib*.

Then say: *I did the same thing yesterday. Today I am mibbing, but yesterday I ...*

Children will probably say *mibbed*.

Commentary

Of course, not all plurals are made by adding -s or -es and this leads to children and people whose first language is not English making mistakes. We often hear things like: There were two mans or some sheeps, or I wented out or I swimmmed, which is quite understandable, given how often plurals are made by adding -s and past tenses by adding -ed. It is through oral work and hearing adults read to them that children become familiar with correct versions for irregular plurals and past tenses.

The key to helping children to understand how words are modified by the addition of prefixes and suffixes is to begin with oral work. We do not suggest that you combine practising reading pseudo words with looking at prefixes and suffixes, however. It is particularly important that children develop their ability to read meaningful text with real words if they are to see reading as a useful activity.

Main lesson

Morpheme windows

In this lesson children are encouraged to think about some of the prefixes and suffixes they have learnt and to attempt some word building.

Introduction

Begin by playing some oral word games focusing on prefixes. Say a prefix such as *un-*, *pre-*, *dis-* and *re-*. Ask children to tell their neighbours as many words as they can which begin with each prefix. Write some examples on the board and discuss the words' meanings. Use the opportunity to address any misconceptions children may have. For example, some may suggest words such as *under*, *united* or *university* for the *un-* prefix, but *un-* does not mean 'not' in these words. Explain the meanings of the prefixes.

Commentary

Un- is one of the first prefixes children learn, but they can confuse it with *uni-*, which means 'one'. If this arises, explain the difference through examples such as *united*, which means 'coming together as one'. In fact, there are very few words which begin with the *uni-* prefix and lots which begin with *un-* meaning 'not', so it will be easy to provide plenty of examples which most children will know, including *unknown*, *unkind*, *untie*, *undo*, *unload*, *unsafe* and *unroll*. It is a good idea to have a good quality dictionary nearby so that you can check the etymology of the words children suggest.

Development

When you have collected some words on the board, ask children to see if they can add suffixes to any of them to modify their meaning. For example, *unlike* could become *unlikely*, *prepare* could become *prepared*, *disappoint* can become *disappointment*, *prefix* can become *prefixes* and *reset* can become *resets*.

Give children challenges to write words on paper or mini white boards, for example:

- How many words can you write beginning with *un-*?
- How many words can you write ending with *-ing*?

Word windows

To reinforce children's understanding of morphemes, you can play a simple game involving two- and three-part words that include a prefix, a root word and a suffix. Make a collection of words that have three morphemes, such as *reported*, *reports*, *unlikely*, *delightful* written on pieces of card which slot into a card holder with three liftable flaps. Make the card holder by sticking two pieces of card together and leaving a space in which to slot the words on cards. Number the flaps 1, 2 and 3.

Explain to children that there is a word hidden by the flaps and that they could choose any of the three to be raised to reveal part of the word. When someone has chosen a flap, lift it to reveal part of the hidden word and ask children to write down as many words as possible that might include the morpheme revealed and have three parts. For example, if *un-* was revealed under flap 1 they might write *unlucky, unlikely, unusually, unfunny*, etc. You might wish to award points for each word that is possible and write some of these correctly spelled on the board.

Next, ask someone to choose another flap to lift. If this revealed *un + fasten* you could ask them to write as many words as the hidden one could be on their white boards: these might be *unfastens, unfastened, unfastening*.

Independent work

Provide a selection of words that include the prefixes and suffixes children have been learning. Ask them to write sentences that include each one to reinforce their understanding of the morphemes. This activity is best done in pairs or threes so that children can discuss their answers. Ensure there is a dictionary for each group so that they can look the words up when necessary.

Extension

Provide children who are confident in using prefixes and suffixes with a table like the one below (Table 8.3), which has some common prefixes in the left-hand column and a series of root words in the right-hand column. Ask them to use each prefix and each root word as many times as they like to see how many words they can create. They can check that their words are correct by using a dictionary.

Table 8.3 Prefixes and root words

Prefix	Root word
un-	like
multi-	market
tri-	storey
dis-	scope
re-	use
micro-	form
mega-	store
super-	fortunate
uni-	cycle

If they create new words that can't be found in dictionaries, they could try explaining what the words might mean. For example, one group of Year 2 children made up *uncycle* and said that it meant 'walk', and *relike*, which they thought could mean 'making friends with people you'd fallen out with'.

Commentary

Many new words are formed each year by combining existing prefixes with existing words to create words which match a specific meaning. Think about unfriend, which is used on Facebook, but which didn't exist before Facebook was introduced.

You might go on to try similar activities with suffixes, as in the activity below.

Activity: Adding suffixes

How many new words can you create by adding suffixes to the root words? Sometimes the addition of a suffix necessitates a modification to the spelling of the root word, as in *love* and *loving*, *fun* and *funny* and *fit* and *fitted*. Consider how you would teach spelling generalisations for such words (Table 8.4).

Table 8.4 Root words and suffixes

Root words	Suffixes
cheer	-y
hope	-s
watch	-ful
make	-ly
fox	-es
like	-ing
help	-ed
run	-ness
fit	-less

Commentary

Activities like this help children understand how words work and how we can build them. They help them to make generalisations, which they can apply when they meet new words. For example, they will understand that words which end with -e like hope and like usually drop the e when -ing is added.

Compound words

A compound word is formed from two or more other words. For example, *bathroom* from *bath* and *room*; *football* from *foot* and *ball*. Compound words may be written in three different ways.

- As one word: *bathroom, lunchbox, hairbrush*.
- Hyphenated: *cover-up, break-in, play-off, shoot-out*.
- As two words: *bus stop, post office, rap music*.

Most compound words are nouns, but some are adjectives or verbs.

- Nouns include: *coffeetable, haircut, screwdriver*.
- Adjectives include: *risk-taking, homesick, awe-inspiring*.
- Verbs include *rubber-stamp, undertake, sunbathe*.

The words which make up a compound word must each be able to stand alone, so *peanut* is made up of *pea* and *nut*. This distinguishes compound words from those which are created by adding prefixes or suffixes to existing words, for example, *likely* is made up of *like*, which can stand alone, and the suffix *-ly*, which cannot, and *going* is made up of *go*, which can stand alone, and *-ing*, which cannot.

Lesson 2: Compound words

Introduction

Show the class some or all of the words in Table 8.5 and ask them to say them aloud with you and then with their partners.

Table 8.5 Common compound words

everyone	everybody	everything	nowhere	nobody
somewhere	anyone	anywhere	anybody	someone

Ask if anyone notices anything about the words. If necessary, prompt them by saying the words slowly with clear separation between each morpheme in each compound word: *every/one, some/where*, etc.

One way to emphasise the way in which the words are formed is to look at their antonyms or opposites; so *everyone's* opposite is *no-one* and *everybody's* opposite is *nobody*. Help children to see the roles that the different parts of the compound words play and how changing them can create words with different meanings. For example, *everyone* can become *no-one* and *someone*. You may need to explain that *no-one* is usually hyphenated or written as two separate words (*no one*) because the double *o* might lead to confusion when pronouncing the word (sometimes read in the same way as *noon*).

Extension

Ask children to find other compound words in a range of texts and show them how to separate the words into their morphemes. Get them to use dictionaries when necessary to find out their meanings.

Assessment

Note children's ability to identify words within words both when reading and writing. Can they combine words to create compounds? Are they able to find examples of compound words in texts?

Teaching Key Stage 2 children who may need support

Try giving children a selection of root words that can be combined to create compound words. In the example below (Table 8.6) many words can be used more than once to create more words, for example *headache*, *toothbrush*, *hairbrush*.

Table 8.6 Root words for combining

head	hair	brush	room
tooth	house	green	farm
school	snow	fall	water
day	class	break	ache

For children who struggle with reading and spelling, longer words such as compounds can appear daunting. However, if you explain to them that the words are actually made up of shorter, simple words this can be reassuring and can encourage them to feel more confident about spelling and reading.

Learning outcomes review

You should now have a clear understanding of morphemes and understand that words are made up of these. You should know how to teach children about adding prefixes and suffixes and understand compound words and how to teach them.

Answers to adding prefixes and suffixes activity (page 88)

How did you do? Among the possibilities are:

- place: places, placed, placing, replace, placement
- pack: unpack, repack, packs, packing, packed, package, packer
- view: views, viewing, viewer, review, preview.

Answers to modifying words in NC spelling lists activity (page 89)

In the table below you will find one example of a modification for each of the words that can be modified. In most cases, there could be several other ways to modify the words. Only *enough*, *perhaps*, *potatoes* and *therefore* cannot be modified. Note that *potatoes* is the modified (plural) version of *potato*.

accidents	earlier	knowledgeable	purposeful
actually	earthly	learner	quartered
addresses	eight/eighths	lengths	questionable
answers	enough	librarian	recently
appearance	exercises	materials	regularly
arrived	experienced	medicinal	reigned
believer	experimental	mentioned	remembered
bicycles	extremely	minutes	sentenced
breathless	famously	naturally	separates
breathing	favourites	naughtiness	specially
builder	Februaries	noticed	straighten
busy/businesses	forwards	occasionally	strangely
calendars	fruity	oftener	strengthen
uncaught	grammarian	opposites	supposed
centred	groups	ordinarily	surprised
centuries	guardian	particularly	therefore
certainty	guidance	peculiarly	although
circles	unheard	perhaps	thoughtful
completed	hearten	popularity	throughout
considered	heights	positioned	variously
continued	historical	possession	weighty
decider	imaginative	possibility	womanly
describes	increased	potatoes	
differently	importantly	pressurize	
difficulty	interested	improbably	
disappearance	islands	promised	

Answers to adding suffixes activity (page 94)

You probably managed to create several words with the same suffix, as well as several with the same roots. Possible words include:

- cheer: cheery, cheerful, cheers, cheering, cheered
- hope: hopes, hopeful, hoped, hopeless, hoping
- watch: watches, watchful, watching, watched
- make: makes, making, maker
- fox: foxy, foxes, foxing, foxed
- like: likes, likely, likes, liking, likeness

- help: helps, helpful, helped, helping, helpless
- run: runny, runs, running
- fit: fits, fitful, fitting, fitted, fitness

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A useful resource for developing your understanding of morphology; see especially Chapter 6.

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