



# MAKING MORPHEMES MEANINGFUL

How to build an app in your brain  
that breaks words into prefixes,  
bases and suffixes

## ABSTRACT

“Is there an app I can use to help me break words into prefix/base/suffix?”

Unfortunately, that takes a human brain! The good news is, you can learn how to do this quickly and easily with some guidance and practice.

Lyn Stone

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# Welcome!

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This handout contains some worksheets and information to help the webinar run smoothly. We have many great things to cover and we are going to be very interactive, with lots of scope for questions, answers and discussion.



The recording of this webinar will be up for two weeks after the live event. You can review it anytime. Eventually, the footage will become an online course. We'll let you know when that's ready and you will be automatically enrolled for six weeks.

Here is our agenda:

- We'll start with a look at how words are formed in the first place.
- Then we'll look at how prefixes behave.
- We'll look at the difference between bound and unbound bases and how to spot the tricky ones.
- We'll look at the two types of suffix and how they interact with bases and each other.
- We'll also head over to Etymonline and look at how this resource is structured so that you can get the very best out of it.

Looking forward to working with you!

Lyn Stone, Lifelong Literacy

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## HOW WORDS ARE FORMED

### 1. Not the things themselves

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THINK: What symbols do humans use to transmit thought?

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### 2. Abstract concepts employed to transmit thought

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### 3. Can be categorized based on their function

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### 4. Formed in a variety of ways

#### EXAMPLES

BASE \_\_\_\_\_

BASE + BASE \_\_\_\_\_

PREFIX + BASE \_\_\_\_\_

BASE + SUFFIX \_\_\_\_\_

5. Have several different representations

<b>hand</b>	
orthographic	<hand>
phonemic	/hænd/
semantic	“the end part of a person's arm beyond the wrist, including the palm, fingers, and thumb” (OED)
syntactic	noun
morphemic	1 base

<b>handshake</b>	
orthographic	<handshake>
syntactic	noun
morphemic	base + base

<b>unhand</b>	
orthographic	
syntactic	
morphemic	

<b>handy</b>	
orthographic	
syntactic	
morphemic	



**companion (n.)**

c. 1300, "one who accompanies or associates with another," from Old French *compagnon* "fellow, mate, friend, partner" (12c.), from Late Latin *companionem* (nominative *companionio*), literally "bread fellow, messmate," from Latin *com* "with, together" (see **com-**) + *panis* "bread," from PIE root **\*pa-** "to feed."

The Late Latin word is found first in the 6c. Frankish *Lex Salica*, and probably it is a translation of some Germanic word (compare Gothic *gahlaiba* "messmate," from *hlaib* "loaf of bread"). It replaced Old English *gefera* "traveling companion," from *faran* "go, fare."

The meaning "A person who lives with another in need of society, and who, though receiving remuneration, is treated rather as a friend and equal than as an inferior or servant" [OED] is from 1766.

- When was the first known use of 'positive'?

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- What are the two morphemes in 'dinosaur' and what do they mean?

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- What language is the closest in time to our modern version of 'meat'?

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- What PIE root does 'ski' go back to?

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- What other words are related to this root?

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## POLYSYLLABIC WORDS: MYTHS AND PITFALLS

Recurring word parts  $\neq$  morphemes. “Look for the little word inside the big word” is the main culprit in perpetuating this myth.

### CAN

‘scan, candle, coelacanth’

The moment you talk about little words inside big words is the moment you risk introducing an unrelated word. In terms of cognitive load, you are decreasing attentional capacity by adding irrelevant information.

With polysyllabic words, the first step is to determine if there is indeed a combination of bases and/or affixes.

Watch out! Some word parts *look* like familiar affixes but aren’t. For example, the <er> in *tiger* looks a lot like a suffix, but a tiger is neither ‘one who tiges’ nor ‘more tige’ than something. Confirm with a good dictionary or Etymonline if you are not sure.

### Polysyllabic monomorphs

ANIMALS	FOOD	NAMES	MISC
rabbit	orange	Mississippi	paper
axolotl	lettuce	Canada	hunger
tiger	tomato		mascot
kiwi	mango		parka
	banana		anorak
	caramel		element
	taco		scissors
	coffee		aroma
	toffee		

**Homophones can illustrate the function of morphemes well.**

bridal/bridle

principal/principle

baron/barren

callous/callus

advice/advise, device/devise, practice/practise

## BOUND AND UNBOUND BASES

### Free bases

Play, help, run – easy peasy.

### Latin bound bases - Quite common and easy to spot:

BASE	struct	spect	ject	dict	junct	puls/pel	cred	rupt
MEANING	build	see	throw	say	join	push	believe	break
EXAMPLE	construct	spectate	inject	dictate	junction	impel	credit	disrupt
EXAMPLE								

### Greek bound bases: Quite common and easy to spot

BASE	chron	psych	eu	ped	therm	derm
MEANING	time	mind	pleasant	foot	heat	skin
EXAMPLE	chronic	psychology	eulogy	pedometer	thermal	dermatologist
EXAMPLE						

### Cranberry morphemes: 'unique morpheme/fossilized term'

cran + berry  
 gorm + less  
 luke + warm  
 un + kempt

## HOW PREFIXES BEHAVE

Analyse the first syllable of the following words:

apprehensive

aggressive

occupy

assign

opportunity

affix

illusion

immortal

irregular

suffix

support

If your current system teaches <pp>, <gg>, <cc> etc. as 'digraphs', you will miss the point *and* your students will have no framework for their 'choices'.

An assimilated prefix is:

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## THE TWO TYPES OF SUFFIX AND ONE SURPRISE

### Type 1: inflectional suffixes

“...the kind of variation that words exhibit on the basis of their grammatical context.”  
(Carstairs-McCarthy 2018)

CATEGORY	SUFFIX	EXAMPLE
NOUN	-s (plural)	birds
	-’s (possessive)	bird’s
VERB	-ed (past etc.)	landed
	-s (third person singular)	she lands
	-ing (progressive)	landing
ADJECTIVE	-er (comparative)	greater
	-est (superlative)	greatest

### Type 2: derivational suffixes

To derive, is to trace the origin. In its most literal sense, words float downstream from other words.

Derivational suffixes are used to make (or derive) new words. In particular, they can distinguish one part of speech from another. If you take the bound base *fin-*, meaning ‘end’, you can derive a noun/verb (‘finish’), adjectives (‘final/finite’), verb (finalise), adverb (finally) and so on.

### SURPRISINGLY

There are two suffixes that can be used without exception whether its base is regular or irregular:

-ing: This can go on the end of any verb, regular or irregular, even *be*, without exception.

-’s: This is a suffix that places a noun *phrase* into the possessive case.

The bird in the tree.

The bird in the tree’s beak.

Whose beak? Bird or tree?

Inflectional suffixes will always be last:

riv- stream

de + riv

de+riv + ate

de + riv +ate +ion

de + riv + ate + ion + al + s

“Are we talking about inflectionals or derivationals?”

## CONNECTING VOWELS

Sometimes a syllable in a word will simply be a connecting vowel, rather than a morpheme. Greek-derived words mostly use the connecting vowel -o-, as in *arachn* + o + *phobia*. What they do is connect bases to bases or suffixes to bases and to one another.

Connecting vowels also appear in Latin words. The letters <i>, <e> and <u> are used for this purpose. They are not always syllabic.

Examples:

### **Greek <o> (syllabic)**

ped + o + meter  
therm + o + stat  
phone + o + loge + y  
helic + o + pter  
pter + o + dactyl

### **Latin <i> (syllabic)**

cone + i + fer  
aqu + i + fer

### **Latin <i> (non-syllabic)**

part + i + al  
de + lic + i + ous

### **Latin <e> (syllabic/non syllabic)**

hom + o + gene + e + ous  
gas + e + ous  
aqu + e + ous

### **Latin <u> (syllabic)**

sens + u + ous  
tort + u + ous

## CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

Example words used in this course are listed below. For your revision, you can do the following things:

1. Create a word sum for each one, showing the morphemes and connecting vowels
2. Create a word matrix linking a/the base to other morphemes that go with it

If you wish to send us your sums and matrices so as to continue this dialogue, please do so by emailing us on [inf@lifelongliteracy.com](mailto:inf@lifelongliteracy.com) or using the QR code below:



handshake  
unhand  
handy  
companion  
positive  
dinosaur  
candle  
coelacanth  
scribble  
scribal  
bridle  
bridal  
principle  
principal  
construct  
spectate  
inject  
dictate  
juncture  
impel  
credit  
disrupt

chronic  
psychology  
eulogy  
pedometer  
thermal  
dermatologist  
cranberry  
gormless  
lukewarm  
unkempt  
apprehensive  
aggressive  
occupy  
assign  
opportunity  
affix  
illusion  
immortal  
irregular  
suffix  
support  
landed

landing  
greater  
greatest  
derivational  
arachnophobia  
pedometer  
thermostat  
phonology  
helicopter  
pterodactyl  
conifer  
aquifer  
partial  
delicious  
homogeneous  
righteous  
gaseous  
aqueous  
sensuous  
tortuous



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