

Understanding Word Roots

Some words, such as *human*, *lamp*, *door*, and *road* are simple and straightforward. Others, such as *automobile*, *inaccessible*, *uneducated*, and *overqualified* are more complex, consisting of multiple words or word roots with prefixes and/or suffixes.

A **word root** is a word or word part to which a prefix or suffix can be added. A prefix is something added to the beginning of a word or word root. Common prefixes include pre-, in-, un-, post-, and dis-. A suffix is something added to the end of a word or word root. Common suffixes include -ing, -ed, -ness, -able, and -ful.

When a prefix and/or suffix is added to a root, a new word is formed. For example, the word *uninspired* can be broken down into three parts:

Prefix: un-

Root: inspire

Suffix: -ed

To determine the meaning of this word, consider what each part means. The prefix un- means "not something". The word root, *inspire*, means "to provoke a feeling". The suffix -ed can mean that something happened in the past, or can imply that something has a particular characteristic. When you put each of the three parts together you get a word that means "having the characteristic of not provoking a feeling". In other words, *uninspired* means "not original" or "not distinctive".

Here are some common word roots:

Root	Refers to	Example
aero	air	aeronautics—science of flight
agri	land/dirt	agriculture—farming
ante	before	antebellum—before a war
audi/aur	hearing/ear	aural—relating to sound
auto	self	automotive—self-moving
bene	good	benefactor—one who supports someone
bio	life	biosphere—planet Earth and its life
cardio	the heart	cardiologist—heart specialist
chrono	time	chronological—in order of time
cycl	circular	cycle—repeated sequence of events
demo	people	demographic—of human populations

Root	Refers to	Example
derm	skin	epidermal—outer layer of skin
dict	speaking	dictionary—book of word meanings
dors	back	dorsal—on the back of something
duc	pulling or taking	abduct—to steal someone away
gene	origin/birth	genealogy—study of family history
graph	writing	autograph—signature
herba	plants	herbivore—one who eats plants
juris	the law	jury—a group that makes legal decisions
liber	books	library—place that keeps many books
meter	measurement	odometer—tool that measures distance traveled
neo	new	neophyte—a new convert
ocu	eye	ocular—referring to vision
pater	father	paternal—of or relating to the father
path	feeling	empathy—feeling for someone
ped	child	pediatrician—children's doctor
phon	hearing	phonograph—a type of audio recording
retro	backward	retrospect—to look back
scient	knowing	scientist—one who knows
scrib	write	scribner—a writer
sol	sun	solar—from the sun
spec	sight	spectacles—eyeglasses
tele	distant	telephone—tool used to talk over long distances
theo	god	theology—study of God
vita	life	vitality—liveliness

These are only a few of the many roots and word parts that exist in the modern English language. Modern English, as spoken in the United States, has been greatly

influenced by other languages, including Greek, Latin, and Anglo-Saxon languages. As people from different parts of the world met, interacted, and settled together, aspects of their languages merged. Over time, English evolved.

When reading, think about the roots of words and where and how they may have originated. This will help you to determine their meanings.

EXAMPLE 10

What does it mean to *fumigate* something?

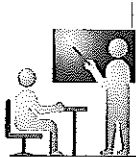
- (A) to drop a ball in a game
- (B) to spray gases in a house to kill pests
- (C) to build a doorway that can be easily opened
- (D) to extract water from something

When you fumigate, you spray gases into a house or room, generally to kill pests, such as fleas. The root of the word *fumigate* is fumus, which means "smoke".

EXAMPLE 11

Which word means "to give something up"?

- (A) regale
- (B) vertical
- (C) adjudicate
- (D) abnegate



Your Teacher Will Discuss Your Answer