**WORD FORMATION**

**Word families**

Look at this group of words and decide what they have in common:

- ability
- disabled
- inability
- disability
- enable
- unable

All of the above words are formed from – and are related to – the adjective **able**. So we can call **able** the ‘base word’ from which all these other words are developed. Can you guess which word is the base word for this next group?

- destroyer
- destruction

All these words are formed from the base word **destroy**. We call these groups of related words ‘word families’. Like members of real families, the words that make up a word family share some of the same features: they all share some of the letters of the base word, and their meanings are related too.

**ACTIVITY**

Look at the following groups of words and try to decide in each case what the base word is. The answers are on page LS19. Then try to guess the meaning of each word. Check in the dictionary to see if you are right.

- discomfort
- comfortable
- uncomfortable
- comforting

- decision
- undecided
- indecision
- decisive
- indecisive

- impure
- purist
- purify
- impurity

**How are words formed?**

Many English words are formed from combinations of other words, or from combinations of words and prefixes or suffixes. So if you know what each of the parts means, you will often be able to guess the meaning of a new word.

**What are prefixes and suffixes?**

A **prefix** is added to the beginning of a word to make another word. A prefix can be either a short word, or a group of letters that is not a word. An example of the first type is **self**. **Self** means ‘yourself’ or ‘itself’, so if you are **self-employed**, you work for yourself, and if something **self-destructs**, it destroys itself. An example of the second type is **non-**, which means ‘not’. So a **non-violent** protest is a protest that does not involve violence.

A **suffix** is added to the end of a word to make another word. A suffix can be either a short word, or a group of letters that is not a word. An example of the first type is **-rich**, which is added to nouns to make adjectives for describing something that ‘contains a lot’ of something. So **oil-rich** rocks are full of oil, and **vitamin-rich** foods contain a lot of vitamins. An example of the second type is **-ish**, which means ‘slightly’ or ‘rather’. So **greenish** water looks slightly green.

**ACTIVITY**

Look at the words in **bold** in the following sentences and see if you can guess what they mean. After you have guessed, you can check the meanings in the dictionary. All the prefixes and suffixes used in these sentences (and shown here in red) have their own entries in the dictionary.

- The software is **overpriced** and doesn’t offer anything more than its rivals.
- Local residents are calling for the police to crack down on **antisocial** behaviour by troublemakers, some of whom are as young as ten.
- **E-commerce** now accounts for 84 per cent of the company’s sales.
- The machines are very **user-friendly** and they tell you how hard you are working and how many calories you have used up.
The new district health boards will be required to act in an efficient and businesslike way.

- **ACTIVITY** See if you can make some more words using these prefixes and suffixes. Check in the dictionary to see if your words are there.

**Compounds**

Using prefixes and suffixes is not the only way to form new words. Many English words are *compounds*. Compounds are formed by combining two or three words. Sometimes these combinations remain as two or three separate words and sometimes they combine to form one new word. For example, the word *troublemakers* in the second example above has been formed by combining the two nouns *trouble* and *maker*. This has created a new word meaning ‘someone who makes (=causes) trouble’.

Most compounds are treated as separate entries in this dictionary, so that you can see immediately that they have a meaning of their own that is different from the meanings of the words from which they are formed. Sometimes these meanings are easy to guess. For example, a *bus stop* is a place where buses stop to pick up passengers, and a *bookshop* is a place where you buy books. However, a *soap opera* does not contain any singing and has nothing to do with soap: it is a television or radio show that is broadcast several times a week, and tells the story of the lives of a group of ordinary people.

**Other ways of forming words**

Some new words are formed by combining part of one word with part of another. For example, *brunch* is a meal you eat in the late morning that combines *breakfast* and *lunch*, and *edutainment* is something such as a video, television programme, or software program that combines *education* and *entertainment*.

- **ACTIVITY** Can you guess which words have combined to form the following computer terms: *emoticon, netiquette, netizen, technophobe*?

And can you guess their meanings from the words that have combined to form them? The answers are at the bottom of this page.

Other new words are formed from the first letters of the words in a compound or phrase. Examples of this are *CD-ROM* (compact disc read-only memory), *FAQs* (frequently-asked questions), and *IT* (information technology). These new words are called *acronyms*.

- **ACTIVITY** Think about how new words are formed in your own language. Are they formed mainly by using prefixes and suffixes, by combining words to form compounds, by means of acronyms, or in other ways?

**Spelling note:** Words that are formed from combinations of other words, whether these are compounds or words formed from prefixes or suffixes, are often written in several different ways. You may see them written as separate words, or with hyphens, or as single words. For example: *hard hat, hard-hat, or hardhat*. Although one form is often more frequent than others, you shouldn’t worry too much about which is correct. If you want to be sure, write the word using the form that you find in this dictionary.

**ANSWERS**

- *emoticon*: emotion + icon (=a symbol such as :-) or :-( that you type in an email or text message to show how you are feeling)
- *netiquette*: Internet + etiquette (=the polite way of expressing yourself when communicating with people on the Internet)
- *netizen*: Internet + citizen (=someone who spends a lot of time using the Internet)
- *technophobe*: technology + -phobe (=someone who does not like to use new technology, especially computers)
- *edutainment*: education + entertainment (=a video, television programme, or software program that combines education and entertainment).

The base words are *comfort, decide, pure*.