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Word Formation Games

Activities with Prefixes and Suffixes



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Methods and activities for more effective teaching with less preparation

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Introduction

Affixation is the process of adding suffixes and prefixes to a base to change the meaning of the word and/or change it to another part of speech. Prefixes primarily affect the meaning of a word, the most common being the ones which form opposites, like **-un**, **-in**, **-im**, **-il**, **-ir**, etc. However, in this group are also those which add more specific meaning, like **-de**, which can indicate the removal of something (de-ice, destabilize, dehydrate, etc.) and **-mis**, which refers to things which are done wrongly or badly (miscalculate, misquote, misuse, etc.). In addition, there are numerous prefixes with specific connotation (**-bi** = two, **-co** = with, **-pre** = before, etc.)

Suffixes, on the other hand, primarily classify words. There are two types of suffixes, inflectional suffixes, which denote the word's grammatical function, (**-s** indicates plural, **-est**, the superlative, **-ed**, -past tense and participles) and derivational suffixes, which classify the part of speech. For example, the suffix **-al** turns nouns into adjectives (accidental, regional, musical, etc.) and **-ion** changes verbs into nouns (action, creation, exhibition, etc.). However, in this group there are still some that impart some semantic notion, like **-er** and **-or** which form nouns to refer to people (actor, drummer, etc.) and others like **-ence**, which form nouns which refer to the action, state or process connected to the original verb (insistence, correspondence, preference). Then there are suffixes whose semantic contribution is much more obvious, like **-less**, indicating the lack of something (careless, endless, flawless) and **-proof**, which indicates protection against something (waterproof, foolproof, soundproof).

From the student's perspective, affixation is a valuable aspect of English to understand and use. Attention to meaning, even if it's merely recognizing the part of speech of an affixed word, will lead to improved receptive skills, while understanding structural patterns would enhance production. Most, if not all, students would agree that expanding their lexicon is a priority. Affixation provides a relatively easy way of achieving that. The following example, taken from an upper-intermediate class, shows the lengths that a student had to go to because he lacked a relatively simple affixed word to express a concept he was trying to describe. Had he known the affixed word, "outnumbered", he could have expressed himself a lot more clearly and efficiently.

The Polish Army had only 4,000 soldiers. The Swedes were 10,000. There were too many of the Swedes. But the Polish Army won the battle.

Word Formation Scavenger Hunt



Speaking
Vocabulary



Listening
Grammar



Reading
Pronunciation



Writing
Warmer/Icebreaker

This activity is unusual because it is a competitive game that involves receptive skills rather than productive ones. You can use this game with any text that is appropriate to the students' level, i.e., at their level or even above it. Students are given a checklist of certain types of affixed words and they go over a text and try to find examples of each one. Ones that are rarer or more difficult to find or categorize can be assigned higher point values. You can write the scavenger list based on the affixed words that you find in a certain text or you can use a general, "all-purpose" one as the fact that some items may not appear in the text makes it even more challenging for students. An example of a scavenger hunt list is below.

CATEGORY	POINT VALUE	WORD 1	WORD 2	LINE TOTAL
a noun with a suffix	1			
an verb with a suffix (not with -ed or -ing)	25			
an adjective with a suffix	1			
an adverb with a suffix	1			
an adverb of opinion	5			
a word with a negative prefix	2			
a prefix that has a specific meaning (not just to negate)	15			
a word with a negative prefix with a positive meaning	25			
a noun formed from an adjective	10			
a noun formed from a verb	10			
a verb formed from an adjective	20			
an adjective formed from a noun	10			
an adjective formed from a verb	10			
an adverb formed from an adjective	2			
Total				