

New Word Formation

How are words formed? Are there any rules by which words are formed? Let's find out. This article will walk you through what word formation is, the various types of word formation and the rules to be adhered to when forming words. The number of examples given will make your learning process more effective and easier. Check it out.

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What is Word Formation?

The English language is known for its wonderful quality of the way in which words and sentences are formed and used. Formation of new words from an existing root word by adding a syllable or another word is the general process; however, there are multiple ways in which it can be done.

Types of Word Formation with Examples

Formation of words is classified into four types based on how the process of formation is carried out. They are:

- By adding prefixes
- By adding suffixes
- Converting from one word class to another
- Forming compound words

Let us look at each type of word formation in detail.

Adding Prefixes

The term 'prefix' refers to one or more alphabets added to the stem of a word, mostly to make it negative. The most commonly used prefixes include 'in-', 'un-', 'dis-', 'im-', 'ir-', etc. Look at the examples given below for a clearer understanding of how prefixes are used to form new words.

Examples of Word Formation by the Addition of Prefixes

- Discipline – indiscipline
- Just – unjust
- Tidy – untidy
- Respect – disrespect
- Understand – misunderstand
- Comfortable – uncomfortable
- Comfort – discomfort
- Responsible – irresponsible
- Honest – dishonest
- Happy – unhappy

- Polite – impolite
- Experience – inexperience
- Practical – impractical
- Important – unimportant
- Legal – illegal
- Ethical – unethical
- Potent – impotent

Adding Suffixes

A suffix is a short syllable added at the end of a base word. Addition of suffixes usually changes the word class of the particular word. The most common suffixes include ‘-ment’, ‘-ness’, ‘-ity’, ‘-ous’, ‘-tion’, ‘-sion’, ‘-al’, ‘-able’, ‘-ible’, ‘-ive’, ‘-ly’, ‘-ate’, ‘-er’, ‘-or’, etc. Check out the following examples to see how suffixes are added.

Examples of Word Formation by the Addition of Suffixes

- Comprehend (verb) – comprehension (noun) – comprehensible (adjective)
- Inform (verb) – information (noun) – informative (adjective)
- Invest (verb) – Investment (noun) – Investor (noun)
- Write (verb) – writer (noun)
- Authorise (verb) – authorisation (noun)
- Move (verb) – movement (noun)
- Add (verb) – addition (noun)
- Happy (adjective) – happiness (noun)
- Conserve (verb) – conservation (noun)
- Wide (Adjective) – widen (verb)
- Manage (verb) – manageable (adjective) – manager (noun)
- Courage (noun) – courageous (adjective)
- Brave (adjective) – bravery (noun)
- Profit (noun) – profitable (adjective)
- Quick (adjective) – quickly (adverb)
- Happy (adjective) – happily (adverb)
- Sad (adjective) – sadness (noun)

Conversion

The process of conversion focuses solely on changing the word class of the particular word. If you have noticed, you would have seen how some nouns are used to perform the role of a verb or an adjective acting like a noun just by the addition of another word or slightly altering the spelling of the actual word.

Examples of Word Formation by Conversion

- The rich should help the poor.

Adjectives such as ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ are used as nouns by using it with an article ‘the’.

- Everyone is talented.

‘Talented’ – a past participle is used as an adjective in the above sentence. The word is formed by adding a suffix ‘ed’ to the end of the noun ‘talent’.

- There will definitely be a lot of ups and downs in life.

Prepositions ‘up’ and ‘down’ are used as nouns by adding ‘s’ to the end of it.

- He texted me about the meeting only at the last minute.

The noun ‘text’ used to refer to a text message sent on a phone is used as a verb in the sentence by adding an ‘ed’ to the end of the word.

- The financial aid had to be approved before we could make a decision.

The noun ‘finance’ is used as an adjective by adding ‘ial’ to the end of it and the verb ‘decide’ is used as a noun by removing ‘de’ and adding ‘sion’ to the word.

Forming Compound Words

Compound words are formed by combining one part of speech with another to form a specific word class. There are many ways in which compound words are formed. Verbs are combined with adjectives to form compound verbs, a present participle is combined with a noun to form a compound noun, two nouns are combined to form a compound noun, an adjective and a noun is combined to form a compound noun, an adverb is combined with a noun to form a compound noun, an adjective is combined with a past participle to form a compound adjective and so on. Take a look at the following examples and go through the articles on compound nouns, compound words and compound adjectives to understand how they work.

Examples of Word Formation by Compounding

- Over (adverb) + load (noun) – Overload
- White (adjective) + wash (verb) – Whitewash
- Black (adjective) + board (noun) – Blackboard
- Cup (noun) + board (noun) – Cupboard
- Short (adjective) + hand (noun) – Shorthand
- Swimming (present participle) + pool (noun) – Swimming pool
- Three (adjective) + legged (past participle) – Three-legged
- Break (verb) + Down (preposition) – Breakdown
- Up (preposition) + town (noun) – Uptown
- Copy (verb) + writer (noun) – Copywriter
- Sun (noun) + rise (verb) – Sunrise
- Count (verb) + down (preposition) – Countdown
- Flash (verb) + mob (noun) – Flash mob
- Master (noun) + piece (noun) – Masterpiece
- Round (adjective) + table (noun) – Round-table

Rules to be Followed When Forming Words

Formation of words can be a very interesting exercise but you have to be really careful when you are adding inflections or affixes. There are a few things you will need to bear in mind when you are forming words. Take a look at the following points to learn what they are.

- Before making any change to the stem of the word, try to analyse what is the kind of meaning you want the word to convey and what role the word will have to play in the sentence.
- In most cases the beginning of the base word remains the same. Only when prefixes are added, the word has a syllable added to the beginning of it. Notice that even in this case, the word is retained as such.
- When suffixes are added, there are many instances where you will have to remove the last one or more alphabets of the word and add the suffix. However, there are words like ‘movement’ where the suffix is just added without any change in the spelling of the base word.
- Here is one way to easily know which suffix has to be added to form a particular word class – most often, nouns end in ‘er’, ‘or’, ‘ist’, ‘ian’, ‘ion’, ‘ment’, ‘ness’, and ‘ity’; verbs end in ‘ise’, ‘ate’ and ‘en’; adjectives end in ‘able’, ‘ible’, ‘ive’, ‘ic’, ‘ed’, ‘ing’ and ‘al’; and adverbs normally end in ‘ly’.
- When words are formed by conversion, be very careful. Make sure you know what you are converting them accurately and using them in the sentence properly.
- When forming compound words, see to it that you hyphenate it if necessary, use the right combination of words and not just mix and match any word.
- Changing from one tense to another also can also be considered a type of word formation as the word is inflected to indicate the twelve different tenses in the English language.
- Forming degrees of comparison can also be put under word formation. In this case, the comparative and superlative degrees are formed by adding ‘er’ and ‘est’ to the end of the adjective. The comparative and superlative degrees of polysyllabic words are formed by using ‘more’ and ‘most’ respectively along with the adjective.

Test Your Understanding of Word Formation

Exercise 1 – Add Prefixes and Suffixes

Add prefixes and suffixes to the following words.

1. Passion_____
2. Remember_____
3. _____conscious
4. Sense_____
5. _____acceptable
6. Entertain_____
7. _____representation
8. Neat_____
9. Invent_____
10. _____interpret

Exercise 2 – Conversion of Words

Go through the following words and convert them as directed.

1. Money (convert into adjective)

2. Brave (convert into noun)
3. Clean (convert into noun)
4. Prayer (convert into adjective)
5. Resemblance (convert into verb)
6. Slow (convert into adverb)
7. Treat (convert into noun)
8. Confession (convert into verb)
9. Vary (convert into adjective)
10. Beauty (convert into verb)

Exercise 3 – Form Compound Words

Go through the words in the box given below and use them to form ten compound words.

up, table, spend, load, green, machine, case, make, estimate, over, self

1. _____ confident
2. Washing _____
3. Time _____
4. Under _____
5. _____ sufficient
6. Up _____
7. _____ set
8. Suit _____
9. _____ over
10. _____ thrift

Frequently Asked Questions on Word Formation in English

What is word formation?

Word formation is the process by which new words are formed by adding an affix, another word or converting from one word class to another by removing and adding alphabets.

What are the four types of word formation?

The four types of word formation include:

- Addition of prefix
- Addition of suffix
- Conversion from one word class to another
- Forming compound words

Give some examples of word formation.

Here are some examples of the various types of word formation for your reference:

- Practical – impractical (prefix)
- Purpose – purposeful (suffix)
- Silent – silence (conversion)
- Dining + room – Dining room (compound word)
- Small – smaller – smallest (degrees of comparison)