

# WORD FORMATION

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Intermediate Grammar  
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In linguistics, **word formation** is the creation of a new word. Word formation is sometimes contrasted with semantic change, which is a change in a single word's meaning. The boundary between word formation and semantic change can be difficult to define: a new use of an old word can be seen as a new word derived from an old one and identical to it in form.

## I. OVERVIEW

There are many word beginnings (prefixes) and word endings (suffixes) that can be added to a word to change its meaning or its word class. The most common ones are shown here, followed by examples of how they are used in the process of word formation. More can be found in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.

### a. Verb Formation

The endings *ize* and *ify* can be added to nouns and adjectives to form verbs.

#### **Noun + ize = Verb**

Example:

American + ize = Americanize

Legal + ize = legalize

This will make the factory more modern. This will **modernize** the factory.

#### **Adjective + ify = Verb**

False + ify = Falsify

Humid + ify = humidify

These tablets make the water pure. They **purify** the water.

## **b. Adverb Formation**

The ending *ly* can be added to most adjectives to form adverbs.

**Adjective + ly = Adverb**

Easy + ly = easily

His behaviour was stupid. He behaved **stupidly**.

## **c. Noun Formation**

The endings *er*, *ment*, and *ation* can be added to many verbs to form nouns.

**Verb + er = Noun**

Fasten + er = fastener

## II. WORD FORMATION

### a. Compounds

#### 1) Compound Nouns

A compound noun can be formed by joining two nouns together,

e.g. hand + bag = handbag.

a handbag the weekend football a guidebook my bedroom

We stress the first part of the word: a 'handbag.

There is little difference between a compound noun and two separate nouns used one after the other, e.g. a phone bill. Some combinations can be written either as a compound or as two separate nouns, e.g. guidebook or guide book.

Some compound nouns are formed from an adjective + noun or from a verb + noun.

a greenhouse a blackboard some workmen a searchlight

NOTE:

Compare these phrases.

Compound noun: a 'hotplate (= a place on a cooker where you heat food)

Adjective + noun: a hot 'plate (= a plate which is hot)

## 2) Gerund + Noun

We can use a gerund to classify a noun, to say what type it is or what its purpose is.

the dining-room (= the room for dining in)

a washing-machine (= a machine that washes clothes) a sailing-ship some writing-paper a swimming-pool the booking office

We often use a hyphen after the gerund. We stress the gerund, e.g. the 'dining-room.

NOTE:

Compare a gerund and a participle.

Gerund: a 'sleeping-pill (= a pill that helps you to sleep) Participle: a sleeping 'child (= a child who is sleeping)

### 3) Noun + Gerund

We can form a compound with a noun + gerund.

Taxi-driving was what I ended up doing. We had three days of sightseeing.

Coin-collecting is an interesting hobby.

We stress the noun, e.g. 'coin collecting.

The noun in this pattern is singular, e.g. coin-collecting. But after a gerund the noun can be either singular or plural depending on the meaning.

### 4) Compound Modifiers

*We can use a number + noun to modify another noun.*

Examples:

a three-day visit a sixty-mile journey

a car with four-wheel drive

The noun in this pattern is usually singular, e.g. a three-day visit.

*The modifier can also be a number + noun + adjective.*

Examples:

a three-day-old baby

a hundred-metre-long queue

*We can also form compounds with participles.*

Examples:

a road-widening scheme

a hard-boiled egg

## **b. Prefixes**

A prefix is something that we can put at the beginning of a word to change the meaning. Compare these two sentences.

*I calculated the amount I would need.*

*I miscalculated the amount I would need.*

(= I wrongly calculated the amount I would need.) Here the prefix mis- (= wrongly) changes the meaning.

Here are some prefixes and some examples of words we can form with them.

anti- (= against): anti-nuclear protestors, anti-social behavior

auto- (= self): an autobiography, auto-suggestion

co- (= together): co-exist, a co-production, my co-driver

ex- (= previously): his ex-wife, an ex-footballer

inter- (= between): an inter-city train, an international phone call

mini- (= small): a minibus, a minicab

mis- (= badly/wrongly): misuse, misbehave, miscount, a misprint

mono- (= one): a monorail, monolingual, speak in a monotone

multi- (= many): a multinational company, a multi-storey car park

out- (= more/better): outnumber the opposition, outplayed their opponents

over- (= too much): overweight, an overgrown garden, ill from overwork

post- (= after): the post-war years, a post-dated cheque

pre- (= before): the pre-war years, preheat an oven

pro- (= in favour of) : pro-government forces, pro-European policies

re- (= again): re-write a letter, remarry, the resale value of the car

semi- (= half): semi-precious stones, reach the semi-final

sub- (= under/less): the subway, subnormal intelligence, sub-zero temperatures

super- (= big/more) : a superstar, a superhuman effort, a supersonic aircraft

trans- (= across): a transatlantic flight, a heart transplant operation

under- (= too little): undercooked food, an underused resource, underpopulation



NOTE:

Out- and under- can have a literal meaning: underwear, the Underground, underline a word; an outbuilding, an outdoor pool, the outskirts of the town.

There are some negative prefixes meaning 'not'.

*un-*: feeling unhappy, an unfair decision, unhealthy conditions, high unemployment, unplug a machine, unpack a suitcase

*in-*: an independent state, an inoffensive remark, the invisible man, an incurable disease, a terrible injustice

*il- (+ l)*: an illegal act, an illogical argument

*im- (+ b/m/p)*: an imbalance, an immoral act, immature behaviour, an impossible situation, an impractical dreamer, wait impatiently

*ir- (+ r)*: an irrational fear, an irresponsible attitude

*dis-*: a dishonest statement, a violent disagreement, disappearing out of the door, a dislike of flying

*non-*: non-alcoholic drinks, non-stop entertainment, a non-smoking area

*de-*: defrost a fridge, the depopulation of the countryside, the decentralization of government

We do not use *in-* before *b*, *l*, *m*, *p*, or *r*. We use *il-*, *im-*, and *ir-* instead.

### c. Suffixes

A suffix comes at the end of a word. For example, we can add the suffix –ness to the adjective kind to form the noun kindness. Compare these two sentences.

*We won't forget how kind you've been.*

*We won't forget your kindness.*

Here the use of the suffix to form a noun makes the sentence shorter and neater.

Sometimes the addition of a suffix involves other changes in the form or pronunciation of the word.

apply → application

possible → possibility

courage /'kʌrɪdʒ/ → courageous /kə'reɪdʒəs/

#### 1) Abstract Nouns

Here are some ways that we can add a suffix to a verb or adjective to form a noun – usually an abstract noun.

**Verb + -ion**     correct → correction,

**Verb + -ment**     development, government, movement, payment

**Verb + -ance/-ence** acceptance, performance; existence, preference

**Verb + -ing** a building, my feelings

**Adjective + -ness** blindness, forgetfulness, illness, sadness

**Adjective in -ant/-ent** distant → distance,

**noun in -ance/-ence** important → importance

**Adjective + -ty/-ity** certainty, royalty; nationality, stupidity

## 2) Person's Role

There are a number of endings that we use to express a person's role.

**Noun/Verb + -er/-or** builder, driver, footballer, interviewer, editor, navigator

**Noun/Verb/Adjective + -ist** journalist, motorist, nationalist, tourist

**Verb + -ant/-ent** assistant, informant, inhabitant, servant, correspondent

**Verb + -ee** addressee, employee, interviewee, payee

**Noun + -an/-ian** republican; historian, musician

### 3) Verbs

There are many verbs in –ize formed from adjectives with an abstract meaning.

We can also add –en to some adjectives with a concrete meaning.

**Adjective + -ize** centralize, legalize, modernize, popularize, privatize

**Adjective + -en** brighten, harden, loosen, sharpen, shorten, widen

### 4) Adjectives

**Noun + -al** industrial, national, natural, original, traditional

**Noun + -ic** artistic, energetic, heroic, photographic

**Noun + -ful** careful, hopeful, peaceful, powerful, wonderful

**Noun + -less** careless, hopeless, powerless, useless, worthless

**Noun + -ous** courageous, dangerous, famous, luxurious

**Noun + -y** greedy, healthy, salty, thirsty, wealthy

**Noun + -ly** costly, cowardly, friendly, neighbourly

**Verb + -ive** active, effective, exclusive, informative

**Verb + -ing** amusing, exciting, surprising

**Verb + -ed**      amused, excited, surprised

**Verb + -able/-ible**      acceptable, eatable, excusable, manageable

#### 5) Adverbs

Many adverbs are formed from an **adjective + -ly**, e.g. quick → quickly

#### d. Words Used in More than One Way

Many words can be both verbs and nouns:

Verb:	Noun:
<i>We had to <b>wait</b> a long time.</i>	<i>We had a long <b>wait</b>.</i>
<i>How much will it <b>cost</b>?</i>	<i>What about <b>the cost</b>?</i>
<i>Things are going to <b>change</b> around here.</i>	<i>I'm going to make some <b>changes</b>.</i>

Here are some common words of this kind.

<i>aid</i>	<i>claim</i>	<i>drive</i>	<i>hit</i>	<i>plan</i>	<i>support</i>
<i>answer</i>	<i>control</i>	<i>experience</i>	<i>hope</i>	<i>report</i>	<i>talk</i>
<i>attack</i>	<i>cost</i>	<i>fall</i>	<i>look</i>	<i>run</i>	<i>test</i>
<i>attempt</i>	<i>cut</i>	<i>fear</i>	<i>love</i>	<i>sound</i>	<i>vote</i>
<i>call</i>	<i>deal</i>	<i>fight</i>	<i>market</i>	<i>start</i>	<i>wait</i>
<i>cause</i>	<i>demand</i>	<i>form</i>	<i>need</i>	<i>stay</i>	<i>walk</i>
<i>change</i>	<i>design</i>	<i>help</i>	<i>offer</i>	<i>stop</i>	

Sometimes a noun differs from a verb in where the stress goes. Usually the verb is stressed on the second syllable and the noun on the first.

Verb	Noun
<i>The goods are expensive to <b>transport</b>.</i> <i>/træn'spɔ:t/</i>	<i>What <b>transport</b> do you use?</i> <i>/'trænspɔ:t/</i>
<i>How is your research <b>progressing</b>?</i> <i>/'prɒgrɛsɪŋ/</i>	<i>Are you making <b>progress</b>?</i> <i>/'prɒgrɛs/</i>