

STAGE 23

INTRODUCING PREFIXES



HIGHLIGHTING REGULARITY

Teaching children to analysis language in terms of morphemes, word roots and meanings is a great way for them to start understanding the connections between how different words are spelled. This can reduce the number of separate units the child has to learn. It massively reduces the number of irregular units that need to be learned.

For example- 'recycle', 'bicycle', 'motorcycle', 'tricycle' are all spelled consistently if you know the word 'cycle'.

HINTS AND TIPS

Do not be surprised if a child has less difficulty building complex words, but still struggles with spelling simple base words. Use this opportunity to practice spelling common base words as you combine them with affixes.

Often base words are what cause the most difficulty for children with dyslexia. This is because they are the most unpredictable parts of the language. In contrast, many prefixes and suffixes have stable spellings.

Once again some children with dyslexia will be less likely to make these links without having them explicitly pointed out. I think that for many children this is simply because the process of decoding each word is so taxing that there is little brain power left for noticing interesting connections. However, once given the opportunity many children with dyslexia become skilled at noticing these links and quickly use this knowledge to strengthen their spelling and reading comprehension. As this programme progresses we will be looking at the morphological structure of English in more depth.

ETYMOLOGY AS A TEACHING TOOL

Etymology is the study of how words originate and how their meanings change over time. One of the most fascinating aspects of English is how it has evolved. Sometimes the meaning or sound of a words shift over time. Traces of these shifts can be seen in how the base words are used with their affixes.

transport to move between ports ('port' was another word for gate in old English)

mislead to give inaccurate guidance ('lead' was another word for guide in old English)

subway something below the way ('way' another word for road or path in old English)

Many children with dyslexia have very good skills in the areas of lateral thinking, pattern finding and imagination. This means that etymological explorations appeal to many of them. It also allows them to access literacy in a way that is certainly not 'babyish', something that is likely to appeal to older children.

HINTS AND TIPS

Comprehension of longer passages of text often plummets when we introduce complex words. This is just because of the extra processing required to partition and decode words. This will improve again later as the child grows familiar with the common affixes.

For now, focus on developing strategies for reading longer more complex words. Reassure the child that they are not getting 'worse' at reading. They are just so good at reading now we are giving them harder text.

MEANING OF PREFIXES



When working with prefixes it is important to recognise their role in changing the meaning of the base word. Ask the child to consider groups of words and see if they can figure out the meaning of the prefix for themselves. Be clear that prefixes do not affect base words. Just like with compound words we just 'glue' the bits together to make the new word. Exploring prefixes and meanings can be entirely oral - just talking about words and what they mean. It is not expected that children will write or remember all these prefixes.

RE-

It means
'again'
or
'back'

*subway
subtitle
subsoil*

EN- EM-

It means
'causes'

*enjoy
entrap
enclose*

SUPER-

It means
'better'
or
'bigger'

*superman
superstar
superglue*

OVER-

It means
'too much'
or
'above'

*overload
overflow
overgrow*

SEMI-

It means
'half'

*semicircle
semisolid
semicolon*

PRE-

It means
'before'

*prejudge
preschool
preview*

FORE-

It means
'before'
or 'in front'

*forehead
forearm
forewarn*

MID-

It means
'in the
middle of'

*midnight
midweek
midwinter*

IN- IM-

It means
'in' or
'into'

*inside
include
implant*

INTER-

It means
'between'

*intercity
international
interpersonal*

TRANS-

It means
'across'

*transplant
transfusion
transport*

SUB-

It means
'below'

*subway
subtitle
subsoil*

UNDER-

It means
'under' or
'not
enough'

*underline
underground
underpay*

DE-

It means
'down' or
'opposite
of'

*decode
deform
degrade*

MIS-

It means
'wrongly'

*misuse
mislead
misplace*

ANTI-

It means
'against'

*antisocial
antibiotics
antiaging*

IN- IM- IL- IR-

It means
'not'

*impossible
indirect
impolite*

DIS-

It means
'not'
or
'opposite'

*dislike
disagree
disorder*

UN-

It means
'not'

*unlucky
unhappy
unable*

NON-

It means
'not'
or
'opposite'

*nonslip
nonsense
nonstick*

PREFIX ACTIVITIES



TEACHING PREFIXES

I use a 'word sum' format, where the parts of words are introduced as blocks and a plus sign is used to indicate the process of combining parts to make a new word.

dis + like = dislike

Taking this 'word builder' approach also allows children to see the reverse is true, and they can deconstruct words to find the base.

overgrown - over = grown

Both reading and spelling can be vastly improved when children learn to break down words into more manageable chunks in this way.

EXAMPLE TEACHING ACTIVITIES

Find a Friend – Provide the child with prefixes and base words that can be paired. Make the game more challenging by including bases that can be paired with more than one prefix, but only one solution in which all bases are paired.

Recombination – Provide the child with words made of a prefix and base word. Ask them to cut the word to separate the prefix from the base word. They then have to make new words using the word parts, e.g. 'repack' to 'unpack', 'preview' to 'review'.

Word Blasts – Take an individual prefix and scribe all the words the child can think of beginning with that prefix

What Does it Mean? – Take familiar and unfamiliar words and ask the child to provide a definition based on knowing the meaning of the prefix and base word, e.g. 'preschool', 'return', 'prewar', 'rewind' etc.

TEACHING COMPOUND VS COMPLEX WORDS

These activities help the child to get used to chunking words into manageable parts for spelling. The distinction between compound and complex words will become critical for spelling decisions later. We introduce it at this stage so that it is already a practiced familiar skill before they need to think about spelling.

EXAMPLE COMPOUND VS COMPLEX ACTIVITIES

Sorting Circles – Sort words into complex and compound words, reading each word aloud as the decision is made.

Complex vs Compound Word Spotter – Highlight prefixes in texts in one colour and compound words in another colour.

Buzzer – Have one buzzer marked for prefixes, one for base words. Provide words orally or as flashcards and the child responds with the correct buzzer presses.

RESOURCES AND UNIT SIZE

Until this point there has been a fixed association between single spelling units and using resources where letters have been fixed together, for example teaching the 'IGH' spelling using a single magnetic 'IGH' unit rather than three separate letters. Affix units are quite different in that the reason the letters are grouped is because they form a stable morphological unit. Most of the units follow regular spelling patterns and can be sounded out. Make this difference explicit and use fixed affix units when introducing prefixes

For less confident children – choose just two or three of the most common prefixes. I would suggest 'un', 're' and 'in/im'. Use games and activities where these are presented as fixed units rather than individual letters. Focus on the way the prefix changes the meaning of the base word.

For more confident children with larger vocabularies – include a broad range of prefixes and include activities where they are generating words from their spoken vocabulary. This will help them begin identifying stable morphemes without the stress of having to spell the more advanced words.