Word structure and word formation

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The word is the basic unit which relates the grammar of a language to its vocabulary. Words have internal structure which indicates their grammatical identity (e.g. that the word is plural, or past tense) and their lexical identity (e.g. that the word *unhappiness* is a noun with negative meaning referring to emotions).

Grammar is generally divided into the study of the structure of sentences, which is called syntax, and the study of the internal structure of words, which is called morphology.

Words are composed of morphemes. A morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning. Some words consist of just one morpheme; some consist of several.

In the table below, the words *dog* and *drink* cannot be broken down into smaller meaningful units. They are words which consist of one morpheme.

### Examples of words and their morphemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>word</th>
<th>morpheme(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dog</td>
<td>dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drink</td>
<td>drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dogs</td>
<td>dog + s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drank</td>
<td>drink + irregular past a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drinkable</td>
<td>drink + able</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impenetrable</td>
<td>im + penetr + able</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intolerable</td>
<td>in + toler + able</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>irregular</td>
<td>ir + regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>midday</td>
<td>mid + day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homesick</td>
<td>home + sick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homesickness</td>
<td>home + sick + ness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the table we may note various kinds of morpheme.

### Affixes

Some of the morphemes are attached to the beginning or the end of words. These are affixes. Affixes attached to the beginning of words are prefixes; those attached to the ends of words are suffixes.

### Inflectional morphemes

Some of the affixes express grammatical relations (e.g. the *-s* on *dogs* indicates plural; the past form *drank* contrasts with the present *drink*). These are inflectional morphemes.
Derivational morphemes
Some of the affixes express lexical relations by forming new or different words when attached to basic words (e.g. -able indicates that something is possible; mid- indicates the middle part of something). These are derivational morphemes.

Allomorphs
Some morphemes have a variation in form, even though their meaning is the same (e.g. im-penetrable, in-edible, ir-regular, all meaning ‘not’; -ible and -able both meaning ‘can be done’). These variations are known as allomorphs. Allomorphs are also seen in inflections, e.g. noun plurals (books, glasses) and verb endings (seems, watches).

Compounds
Whole words may combine with each other (e.g. home and sick). Such combinations are called compounds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word, stem and base</th>
<th>258b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The form of a word to which prefixes and suffixes attach is called the stem. A simple word of one morpheme consists of a stem only. Words consisting of a stem plus prefixes and/or suffixes are complex words.

Examples of words showing stems and affixes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>word</th>
<th>stem</th>
<th>prefixes/suffixes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>snowy</td>
<td>snow</td>
<td>-y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>untraceable</td>
<td>trace</td>
<td>un- -able</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deduce, reduce, produce</td>
<td>-duce</td>
<td>de- re- pro-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>capture, captive</td>
<td>capt-</td>
<td>-ure -ive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recapture</td>
<td>capt-</td>
<td>re- -ure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The stem may not necessarily be a whole independent word, as can be seen in the table.

Snow and trace are free stems; they can stand alone. The forms -duce and capt- are bound stems; they can only be used in combination with prefixes or suffixes.

The stem on its own may be restricted to certain combinations. In example 5 in the table the prefix re- can only attach to capture (we cannot say recaptive). In recapture, capture is called the base. A base may already include an affix. In the following words, the base is in bold:

grammariand
grammaticality
ungrammatical

Inflectional morphemes (bold) attach to whole lexemes (in green):

Grammarians have often disagreed on this point.
Poetry de-familiarizes the everyday.
We never send postcards.
Inflectional morphology of various kinds is central to many of the chapters in this book. This chapter describes the main types of inflection, but deals mainly with lexical morphology, i.e. in the four main word classes, noun, verb, adjective, adverb. Grammatical morphology is dealt with under areas such as tense, aspect, person, voice and number in other chapters.

### Inflection

English does not make much use of word structure to express grammatical meanings and, unlike other languages, the inflection of words is limited. Inflections in English are realised by the suffixes in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inflectional suffixes</th>
<th>examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>noun plurals (e.g. -s, -es, -en)</td>
<td>cars, bushes, oxen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd person singular present tense -s</td>
<td>he works, it rises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>past tense -ed</td>
<td>we walked; I smoked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ing form as progressive aspect</td>
<td>she’s running; we were laughing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ed form as -ed participle</td>
<td>they’ve landed, he was beaten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comparative forms -er, -est</td>
<td>he’s smaller, I’m smallest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative verb inflection -n’t</td>
<td>I can’t; they won’t</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inflection also sometimes occurs through internal vowel or consonant change.

**Examples of inflection through vowel or consonant change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>goose</th>
<th>geese</th>
<th>plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hang</td>
<td>hung</td>
<td>past tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>far</td>
<td>further</td>
<td>comparative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advise</td>
<td>advice</td>
<td>verb to noun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sometimes an inflected form is identical to its non-inflected form (for example, where the singular and plural have the same form). This is called syncretism.

**Examples of syncretism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>deer</th>
<th>deer</th>
<th>plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>set</td>
<td>set</td>
<td>past tense, -ed participle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sometimes, an alternative word is used for a particular inflectional meaning, a process known as suppletion.

**Examples of suppletion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>be</th>
<th>am, are, is</th>
<th>present tense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>go</td>
<td>went</td>
<td>past tense</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inflections do not change the meaning of a word. *Walk* and *walked* have the same lexical meaning; they are forms of the same lexeme. *Responsible* and *irresponsible* have different meanings; they are different lexemes.
Present-day English has four main processes of word formation: prefixation, suffixation, conversion and compounding.

**Prefixation**
Prefixation involves adding a prefix to a base or stem:

- *ante-natal, anteroom*
- *de-criminalise, de-form*
- *post-1945, post-graduate*
- *pro-life, pro-Europe*
- *un-tydy, un-happiness, un-usual, un-democratic*

**Suffixation**
Suffixation involves adding a suffix to a base or stem:

- *age-ism, terror-ism*
- *king-dom, free-dom*
- *iden-tify*
- *re-as-on-able, un-profit-able*
- *un-hap-pily, slow-ly*

**Conversion**
Conversion involves the change of a word from one word class to another. For example, the verbs *to screen* and *to fax* are formed from the nouns *screen* and *fax*. The verb *to narrow* is formed from the adjective *narrow*; the noun *love* from the verb *to love*:

- *The film is an absolute must for all lovers of Westerns.*
  (noun from verb)
- *Can we microwave it?*
  (verb from noun)
- *Internet downloads can be expensive.*
  (noun from verb)
- *They decided that they had to broaden his appeal.*
  (verb from adjective)

Less often, internal vowel change or one form replacing another (suppletion) may indicate a change in word class or sub-class.

**Examples of change in word class through vowel change and suppletion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>New Form</th>
<th>Type of Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>hot</em></td>
<td><em>heat</em></td>
<td>adjective → noun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>rise</em></td>
<td><em>raise</em></td>
<td>intransitive verb → transitive verb (change in sub-class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>deep</em></td>
<td><em>depth</em></td>
<td>adjective → noun (plus suffix; similarly, <em>wide</em> → <em>width</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>mouth</em></td>
<td><em>oral</em></td>
<td>noun → adjective (suppletion)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some words can change class by a shift in stress from one syllable to another. Typically, the stress is on the first syllable when the word is a noun and on the second syllable when the word is a verb, e.g. *record* (noun, with stress on the first syllable) becomes *record* (verb, with stress on the second syllable).
Compounding

Compounding involves linking together two or more bases to create a new word. Normally, the first item identifies a key feature of the second word. For example, the two bases head and ache can combine to form the compound word headache:

- award-winning
- helpline
- house-proud
- input
- long-running
- postcard

266 Hyphenation

In addition to the main processes, English allows words to be formed by abbreviation (which includes clipping, acronyms and blends) (267a), and back-formation (267b).

The main prefixes used in English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>prefix</th>
<th>meaning</th>
<th>examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a-</td>
<td>(i) in a particular way or condition</td>
<td>(i) awake, asleep (first syllable pronounced /ə/)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) without (note different pronunciation)</td>
<td>(ii) atypical, amoral (first syllable pronounced /ə/)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anti-</td>
<td>against or opposed to</td>
<td>antibiotic, anticlimax, anti-nuclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ante-</td>
<td>before</td>
<td>antenatal, antechamber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>auto-</td>
<td>self</td>
<td>autobiography, autograph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de-</td>
<td>to reverse, to alter</td>
<td>decommission, deform, destabilise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dis-</td>
<td>to reverse, to remove</td>
<td>disarm, disagree, dismantle, disqualify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>down-</td>
<td>to lower, to reduce</td>
<td>downsize, downgrade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dys-</td>
<td>not regular or normal</td>
<td>dyslexia, dysfunctional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extra-</td>
<td>beyond</td>
<td>extramural, extraordinary, extraterrestrial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>half</td>
<td>one of two equal parts</td>
<td>halfway, half-moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hyper-</td>
<td>extreme</td>
<td>hyperactive, hyperinflation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hypo-</td>
<td>less than usual, too little</td>
<td>hypothermia, hypotension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>il-, im-, in-, ir-</td>
<td>not</td>
<td>illegal, impossible, intolerant, irresponsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inter-</td>
<td>between</td>
<td>interactive, intercontinental, international</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intra-</td>
<td>within</td>
<td>intra-departmental, intramural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intro-</td>
<td>directed within</td>
<td>introvert, introspection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mega-</td>
<td>very big, important</td>
<td>megabyte, megastar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mid-</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>midday, mid-September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mis-</td>
<td>incorrectly, badly</td>
<td>misinterpret, misunderstand, misinform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-</td>
<td>not</td>
<td>non-smoker, non-stick, non-believer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over-</td>
<td>too much</td>
<td>overeat, overindulgent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

continued overleaf

539 Glossary for any unfamiliar terms
Prefixes which change the class of a word

Prefixes do not typically change the class of a word. One example is the prefix be-, which can change a noun into a verb (e.g. bewitch, besiege), or an adjective into a verb (e.g. belittle, becalm). Similarly, the prefixes em- and en- can create a verb from a noun or adjective (e.g. embitter, embolden, encode, endanger, enlarge, enlighten).

Suffixes which form nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>suffix</th>
<th>examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-age</td>
<td>(count to non-count noun) baggage, mileage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-al</td>
<td>(verb to noun) arrival, burial, withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ant/-ent</td>
<td>assistant, coolant, deodorant, student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ance/-ence</td>
<td>(verb to noun) defiance, insistence, pretence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-arium/-orium</td>
<td>aquarium, crematorium, sanatorium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-dom</td>
<td>boredom, freedom, stardom, wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ee</td>
<td>absentee, devotee, trainee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ar/-er/-or</td>
<td>(verb to noun) registrar, singer, indicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ie/-y</td>
<td>kiddie, daddy, puppy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-hood</td>
<td>childhood, motherhood, knighthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ism</td>
<td>defeatism, Marxism, pacifism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ist</td>
<td>Buddhist, exhibitionist, impressionist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ity/-ty</td>
<td>deity, rarity, similarity, cruelty, casualty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Suffixes which form adjectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>suffix</th>
<th>examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-ble</td>
<td>(verb to adjective) readable, workable, responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-al</td>
<td>informal, criminal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ed</td>
<td>(noun to adjective) bearded, long-sighted, short-tailed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-en</td>
<td>(noun to adjective) woollen, golden, wooden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ese</td>
<td>(noun to adjective) Japanese, Taiwanese, Vietnamese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ful</td>
<td>grateful, helpful, mindful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-i</td>
<td>(noun to adjective) Pakistani, Iraqi, Omani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ic(al)</td>
<td>(noun to adjective) heroic, poetic, historic(al)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ish</td>
<td>(noun to adjective) foolish, Danish, Polish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ive</td>
<td>(verb to adjective) adhesive, offensive, productive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ian</td>
<td>(noun to adjective) Brazilian, Christian, Iranian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-less</td>
<td>childless, priceless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-like</td>
<td>business-like, rubber-like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ly</td>
<td>(noun to adjective) monthly, yearly, manly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ous</td>
<td>enormous, famous, nervous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-type</td>
<td>A-type, Hollywood-type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-y</td>
<td>windy, shaky, frosty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Suffixes which form verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>suffix</th>
<th>examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-ate</td>
<td>dominate, irritate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-en</td>
<td>(adjective to verb) harden, lengthen, stiffen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ify</td>
<td>identify, magnify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ise/-ize</td>
<td>caramelise, Americanize</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Suffixes which form adverbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>suffix</th>
<th>examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-ly</td>
<td>slowly, aggressively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ward(s)</td>
<td>backwards, homeward(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-wise</td>
<td>clockwise, edgewise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Very occasionally, non-suffixed and suffixed forms may be used more or less synonymously (e.g. disorient/disorientate; transport/transportation).
**Change of sub-class**

Occasionally a suffix may change a word to a sub-class of the same word class. For example, *gun* and *gunner* are both nouns but one is inanimate, the other animate. Compare also *cook* (person) ➔ *cooker* (thing), *Berlin* (place) ➔ *Berliner* (person), *mathematics* (thing) ➔ *mathematician* (person).

### -ish and -y in informal contexts

The *-ish* suffix is used widely in informal spoken English to soften or hedge numbers and quantities when precise reference is not necessary or is inappropriate:

- *So we’re meeting at eleven, well elevenish.*
- *I think she’s thirtyish but she looks a lot younger.*

*-ish* may occasionally be used on its own in informal conversation. It functions to make something deliberately vague and is not used only to refer to numbers and quantities:

A: Did you say you’ll be here at five?
B: Well, *-ish*. It depends on the traffic.
A: Are you hungry?
B: *-ish*. What about you?

Although *-ish* is most commonly used with numbers, dates, times and quantities, it is a productive suffix and speakers creatively attach it to a wide range of words from different word classes.

Though not as frequent as *-ish*, the *-y* suffix functions in similar ways in informal contexts. It is especially used with colours:

- [the speaker is talking about a blouse and is trying to decide what to wear]
  *But I mean I love the collar and the short turn-up sleeves. You may see them in there in your one pink deep pink and er this beautiful bu**uey** turquoise and a beigey colour which I can’t wear. If they’d had white I might have tried. Well it still would have stuck out.*
  *It has a sort of woody taste, doesn’t it?*
- [the speakers here are deciding about the colour of a pair of cushions]
  A: *What’s that plasticky thing sticking out there?*
  B: Yeah.
  A: *Or is it a reddy orange?*
  B: It’s not a reddy orange.
  A: *Orangey red.*
  C: *Or reddish.*

Note also the changes in spelling which are sometimes necessary with these suffixes (*red* ➔ *reddish* ➔ *reddy*, *plastic* ➔ *plasticky*)
Conversion involves changing a word from one word class to another but without adding any affix. For example, when the adjective *solid* is turned into the verb *to solidify*, the suffix *-ify* is added. When the adjective *dry* is turned into the verb *to dry* or when the noun *fax* is turned into the verb *to fax*, no affix is added and the process is one of conversion. Most examples involve the conversion of verbs into nouns or nouns into verbs. The main types of conversion are:

- **Verbs converted into nouns:**
  - *cure, drink, doubt, laugh, smoke, stop* (as in *bus stop*), *walk, work*

- **Nouns converted into verbs:**
  - *to bottle, to bully, to elbow, to email, to glue, to group, to head, to ship, to ski, to skin, to tutor*

- **Adjectives converted into verbs (including comparatives):**
  - *to better, to calm, to clean, to dry, to empty, to faint, to lower, to smooth, to tidy, to wet*

- **Nouns converted into adjectives:**
  - *junk food, a rubbish explanation* (common in spoken English)

Conversion is a process which continues to produce new forms constantly. For example, conversion has most recently produced forms such as *to email, to impact, to text, a download.*

Less commonly, other word classes are involved in conversion:

*That kind of remark only ups the stress for everyone.*
(verb from preposition)

*Seeing that play is an absolute must.*
(noun from modal verb)

*That’s a very big if.*
(noun from conjunction)

*You get both ups and downs.*
(nouns from prepositions)

The conversion of a sub-class of proper noun to common noun is also possible:

*Has anybody seen my Galsworthy?*
(copy of a book by Galsworthy)

*He has two Ferraris.*
( a car manufactured by Ferrari)

Whole phrases may also be converted, most commonly into adjective compounds:

*I really fancy one of those four-wheel-drive cars.*
Why don’t you have a word with that good-for-nothing brother of his?
It was a fly-on-the-wall documentary.

**COMPOUNDS**

**General**

Compounds are lexemes formed from more than one base. Compounds are found in all word classes:

- **nouns:** pop group, car park
- **adjectives:** heartbreaking, guilt-ridden, homesick
- **verbs:** babysit, dry-clean
- **adverbs:** good-naturedly, nevertheless, nowadays
- **pronouns:** anyone, everything, nobody
- **numerals:** forty-seven, two-thirds
- **prepositions:** into, onto
- **conjunctions:** although, whenever

Compounds which have entered the language more recently tend to be nouns, adjectives or verbs (e.g. answerphone (n), hyperactive (adj), downsize (v)).

Compounds have a structure similar to the basic phrase classes such as noun or verb phrases; the final element may be seen as the head, which is modified or complemented:

- **daydream**
  (modifier-type: dream during the day)
- **guilt-ridden**
  (complement-type: ridden with guilt)

Some compounds involve identical or near identical or rhyming bases. Such compounds are called reduplicative and are often very informal in usage or are used in affectionate talk with and by children. For example, bow-wow (dog), clever-clever, easy-peasy, goody-goody, lovey-dovey, olde-worlde, super-duper, tick-tock (clock).

**Compound nouns**

Compound nouns involve a range of different grammatical relationships. The pre-head item is typically a noun, a verb or a word derived from a verb, or an adjective:

- **noun:** screwdriver
- **verb base form:** answerphone
- **verb -ing form:** chewing gum
- **adjective:** happy hour
The typical (unmarked) stress pattern is with stress on the first item (e.g. 
*screwdriver, happy hour*), which helps to distinguish noun compounds from noun 
modifier + head structures, where stress is on the noun head (e.g. *university 
degree, government report*).

There is a wide range of possible semantic relationships between the pre-head 
item and the head. These include:

**subject + verb:** *headache* (head that aches), *rainfall* (rain that falls)

**verb + subject:** *warning sign* (sign that warns)

**verb + object:** *know-all* (a person who thinks they know all), *killjoy* (‘kills joy’, 
someone who spoils the enjoyment of others)

**object + verb:** *carpet-shampoo* (shampoos carpets), *risk-taking* (takes risks),
*hair-dryer* (dries hair)

**predicative complement + subject:** *junk food* (the food is junk), *girlfriend*

**prepositional complement:** *raincoat* (the coat is for rain), *ashtray*

**complement + noun:** *chairleg, fingertip* (the tip of the finger)

### Compound adjectives

Most compound adjectives end in an adjective (e.g. *air-sick*), or in an -ing or -ed 
adjective form (e.g. *heart-breaking, short-sighted, white-washed*). The main 
relationships between the parts of compound adjectives are as follows:

- **object + -ing/-ed:** *English-speaking* (speaks English), *confidence-boosting* 
  (boosts confidence), *heart-broken* (the heart is broken by somebody)

- **verb complement + -ing/-ed:** *far-reaching* (reaches far), *home-made* (made at 
  home)

- **subject + predicative complement:** *top-heavy* (the top is heavy) (A is B)

- **comparative:** *paper-thin* (as thin as paper) (as B as A)

- **adjective + complement:** *fat-free* (free of fat), *user-friendly* (friendly to the user)

- **adjective + adjective head:** *royal-blue, light-green, bitter-sweet*

Note also that some adjective compounds are formed by adding an -ed inflection 
to an existing adjective + noun: *right-angled* (formed from *right-angle*), *left-
headed* (formed from *left hand*).

### Compound verbs

Compound verbs are far less frequent than compound nouns or adjectives. They 
may be derived by conversion from another word class, normally an already 
existing noun compound (e.g. *to daydream, to blackmail, to wait-list*). They may 
also be derived by a process of back-formation (→ *267b below*) by the removal of 
a suffix (e.g. *shoplift from shoplifting or shoplifter; babysit from babysitting or 
babysitter*). Examples include: *chain-smoke, dry-clean, housekeep, sight-see, 
spring-clean.*
The use of hyphens in compounds and complex words involves a number of different rules, and practice is changing, with fewer hyphens present in contemporary usage. For example, compound words may be written as separate words (post box), hyphenated (post-box) or written as one word (postbox). However, in certain forms the rules governing the use of hyphens are more regular.

Particular prefixes regularly involve a hyphen (e.g. ex-minister, post-war, self-interest, quasi-public).

When a compound premodifies a noun head, a hyphen is normally inserted to indicate which words are compounded (e.g. a well-known entertainer, twentieth-century Danish architecture).

Hyphens are normally used in compounds in which the pre-head item is a single capital letter (e.g. U-turn, X-ray), and hyphens are sometimes needed to disambiguate different words (e.g. re-form = form again, reform = change radically).

In numerically modified adjectives, all modifying elements are hyphenated. Note that these forms are only used attributively (e.g. an eighteen-year-old girl, a twenty-ton truck, a twenty-four-hour flight).

Abbreviation 267a

Abbreviation involves shortening a word. This can be done by means of three main processes: clipping, acronyms and blends.

Clipping

Clipping is a type of abbreviation in which a word is shortened when one or more syllables are omitted or ‘clipped’. Proper names for people are commonly clipped:

- ad: advertisement, advert
- decaf: decaffeinated
- medic: medical student, doctor
- memo: memorandum
- lab: laboratory
- Liz: Elizabeth

Acronyms

Acronyms are a type of abbreviation formed when the initial letters of two or more words are combined in a way that produces consonant and vowel sequences found in words. Acronyms are pronounced as words:

- RAM: Random Access Memory
- NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation /ˈneɪtrəʊ/ 
- Laser: light amplification (by) stimulated emission (of) radiation
Initials are similar to acronyms but are pronounced as sets of letters, not as words:

- **BBC:** British Broadcasting Corporation
- **PC:** personal computer, or politically correct
- **CD:** compact disc

**Blends**
Blends are a type of abbreviation in which parts of existing words are combined to form a new word. The process is a notable recent phenomenon:

- **camcorder:** blend of camera and recorder
- **fanzine:** blend of fan and magazine
- **heliport:** blend of helicopter and airport
- **netiquette:** blend of internet and etiquette
- **smog:** blend of smoke and fog

**Back-formation**
Back-formation is a process of word formation in which what is thought to be a suffix (and occasionally a prefix) is removed. It applies in particular to the process of forming verbs from nouns. The two major sources are nouns and compound nouns ending in -tion, or -ion and in -ar, -er, -or, -ing. But there is also a large miscellaneous group which occasionally includes back-formation from adjectives:

- **emote:** derived from emotion
- **intuit:** derived from intuition
- **legislate:** derived from legislation
- **televise:** derived from television
- **air-condition:** derived from air-conditioner
- **commentate:** derived from commentator
- **brainwash:** derived from brainwashing
- **sightsee:** derived from sightseeing
- **enthuse:** derived from enthusiasm
- **diagnose:** derived from diagnosis
- **legitimise:** derived from the adjective legitimate

**Other types**
Occasionally the formation of words may occur by utilising sounds from words with similar associations. For example, words ending in -ump such as dump, thump, lump can generate invented words with similar sound patterns and associations of heaviness and hardness (e.g. whump, bubump, kerbump).

Words can be formed from proper names. Examples include: braille, caesarian, platonic, sadist, sandwich (words formed, respectively, from the names of Louis Braille, Julius Caesar, Plato, the Marquis de Sade and the Earl of Sandwich).
Sometimes the names of products can be taken over into general use. For example *hoover* and *Mac* are both the names of a company and the general name applied to the object (*Mac* refers to the name of Apple-MacIntosh computers):

*I’m just going to hoover the lounge before we go out.*

*I’m sorry I’ve got a Mac and can’t use those files.*

It is very rare for new words to be formed without parts of existing words being in some way involved. An exception to this rule is loan words. These are words that are borrowed from other languages. Relatively recent loan words from the domain of food include: *pizza, salsa, tapas, chapatti*. Loan words are most typically nouns and are not normally subject to any of the processes of word formation, though they may be inflected if they are singular count nouns (*pizzas, chapattis*).

### PRODUCTIVITY

Not all prefixes and suffixes are equally productive. Some are frequently used to create new words, while others are rarely, if ever, utilised in present-day word formation.

The suffix *-ion* is particularly productive in English and is used to form a large number of high-frequency nouns, e.g. *reunion, confusion, extension, explosion, direction, infection, inflation, intuition, relation, resignation*.

The adjectival suffix *-al* produces a large number of high-frequency adjectives, e.g. *critical, crucial, dental, frontal, typical, vital*.

Prefixes such as *un-* and *de-* and the *-er/-or* suffix are highly productive, with new words constantly being formed.

Rare suffixes such as *-ose* (as in *verbose, jocose*) and *-dom* are rarely used to form new words.

Conversion and compounding are productive in modern English, and new forms occur regularly, especially in technical domains such as computing and in the sciences in general. Almost any noun may potentially combine with any other noun to form new noun compounds.

Acronyms, back-formations and loan words only account for a small amount of the new vocabulary to appear each year in English, but the processes in themselves are productive.

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*Cambridge Grammar of English*