

Morphology in 15 minutes



...or why you should
learn your roots!

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MORPH OLOGY

To Shape

To Study

Morphology is literally to "study" the "shape" of a word.

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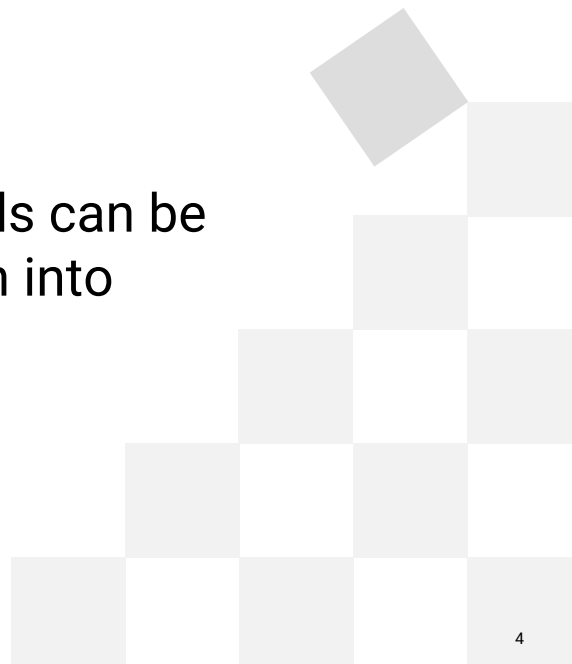
Morphology explains how words are formed.

And how you can make meaning from word parts.

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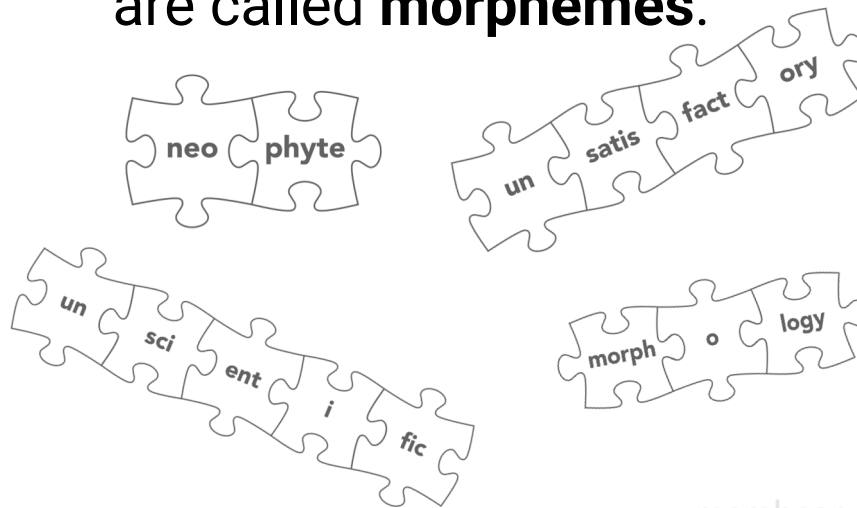
English words can be broken down into pieces.



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These broken-down pieces
are called **morphemes**.



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Consider these words:

CONFLUENCE

AFFLUENT

SUPERFLUOUS

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This is the **root** FLU

CON**FLU**ENCE
AFF**LU**ENT
SUPER**FLU**OUS

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Notice the pieces in front of **FLU**.

CONFLUENCE
AFFLUENT
SUPERFLUOUS

They are called **prefixes**.

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Finally, we have these pieces
at the back of **FLU**.

CONFLU**ENCE**
AFFLU**ENT**
SUPERFLU**OUS**

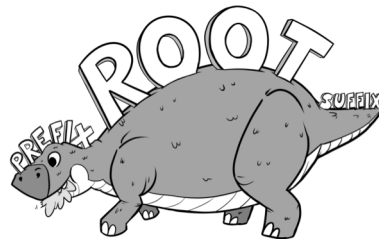
They are called **suffixes**.

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Prefixes are always at the head of a word
and suffixes are at the tail.

CONFLU**ENCE**
AFFLU**ENT**
SUPERFLU**OUS**



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Most of the meaning of a word comes from its root.

CONFLUENCE
AFFLUENT
SUPERFLUOUS

↓
Flu means **“flow”**

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Suffixes, on the other hand, contribute relatively little to word meaning.

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So we won't be learning suffixes.

CONFLUENCE
AFFLUENT
SUPERFLUOUS

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To illustrate:
Let's add a suffix to the root **SCI**
which means "know."

know state or condition

SCIENCE

root

suffix

So "science" means the "state or condition" of
"knowing" something.

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Let's add a few more suffixes to the root SCI and make more words:

SCI	{	ENCE	science
		ENTIST	scientist
		ENCY	sciency
		ENTIFIC	scientific

suffix

From the **root SCI alone**, we know that each of these words has something to do with "knowing."

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So the suffix isn't as important for word meaning.

Suffixes don't change meaning, so we won't learn them.

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Prefixes, on the other hand,
attach to the front of words
and **can change meaning**.

not know

UN SCIENTIFIC
prefix

An unscientific person is “not” in a state of
“knowing”; they don’t know much.

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Here is another example:

thoroughly know

CONSCIENCE
prefix

So this word means the “thorough knowing” of
right and wrong inside your mind.

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Prefixes can build on each other.

CONSCIENCE

UNSCIENTIFIC

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not thoroughly known

UNCONSCIONABLE

prefix

prefix

root

“Not” what is “thoroughly known” to be the right thing to do; hence, something that’s really wrong to do.

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un con sci ion able

You've seen how this large juicy word is built from its parts.

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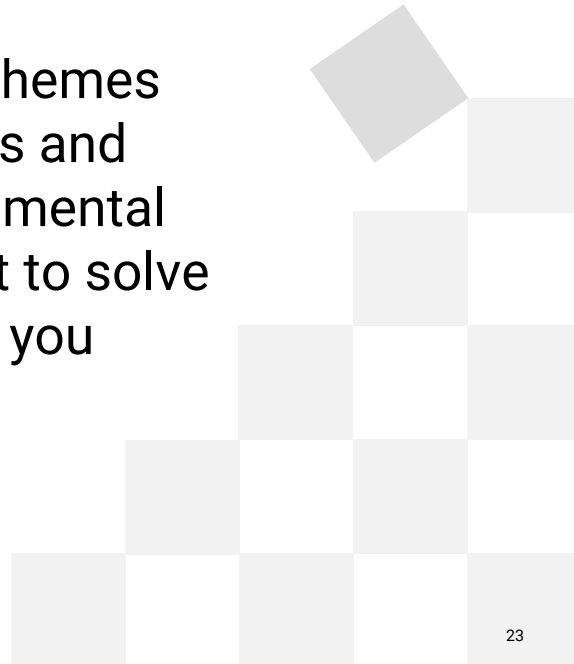
It's important to remember that roots will NOT always directly give you the meaning of a word.

But they will serve as effective memory triggers!

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Think of morphemes
(prefixes, roots and
suffixes) as a mental
puzzle you get to solve
for each word you
encounter.



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Puzzle #1

Can you figure out the meaning?

honey

flow

MELLIFLUOUS

Ans: A mellifluous voice "flows" sweetly like "honey" – it's nice to listen to.

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Puzzle #2

Can you figure out the meaning?

new plant

NEOPHYTE

Ans: A neophyte is a person who is like a "new plant." They are new at something and are just beginning to learn (like a beginner in chess).

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Puzzle #3

Can you figure out the meaning?

say act of doing place for

DICTIONARY

Ans: A dictionary is a place for saying words. "Dictionaries" were originally made to tell people how to pronounce a word.

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Puzzle #4
Can you figure out the meaning?

hand make act
MANUFACTURE

Ans: The "act" of "making" by "hand." Originally all manufacturing was done by hand instead of by machines.

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Fill out your worksheets regularly. A small time investment in learning roots will give you a better grasp on English words and their meanings!

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- 1 Why is learning roots important?**
 - a) Roots can help you remember definitions of words.
 - b) Roots can help you make an informed guess as to what a word means.
 - c) Roots can help you group similar words together, allowing you to make interesting connections.
 - d) All of the above.

- 2 What are broken-down pieces of words called?**
 - a) morphemes
 - b) syllables
 - c) consonants
 - d) definitions

- 3 Which is not a morpheme?**
 - a) root
 - b) prefix
 - c) verb
 - d) suffix

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- 4 In the word "superfluous," what is the root?**
 - a) super
 - b) flu
 - c) ous
 - d) superflu

- 5 In the word "confluent," what is the prefix?**
 - a) con
 - b) ent
 - c) flu
 - d) conflu

- 6 In the word "affluence," what is the suffix?**
 - a) flu
 - b) af
 - c) ence
 - d) afflu

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- 7** Where is the prefix of a word found?
- a) at the beginning
 - b) at the end
 - c) in the middle
 - d) sometimes at the end or at the beginning
- 8** What does the root “sci” mean in “science?”
- a) smart
 - b) investigator
 - c) class
 - d) know
- 9** Can there be a string of prefixes in a word?
- a) No
 - b) Are you kidding?
 - c) Yes
 - d) If there are two ways to spell a word

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- 10** Is it probable that there is more than one prefix in the word “pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis?”
- a) Yes
 - b) Probably not
 - c) No
 - d) It depends
- 11** If the prefix “pre-” means “before” and the root “fract” means “broken,” what is a probable meaning of “prefracted?”
- a) Something that used to be broken.
 - b) Something that cannot be broken.
 - c) Something that’s already broken.
 - d) Something that’s made beforehand.
- 12** If the prefix “in-” means “not,” the prefix “circum-” means “around,” and the root “saltat” means “dance,” would your math teacher want you “incircumsaltating” in class?
- a) No—at all times during class
 - b) No—but only while taking a test
 - c) Yes—at all times during class
 - d) None of the above.

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1. *d*
2. *a*
3. *c* — “verb” is a part of speech that shows an action; it’s not a part of word
4. *b* — “flu” is the root because it provides the main meaning of the word—in this case “flow”—and is sandwiched between the prefix “super-” and the suffix “-ous.” The general order of a word’s morphemes is prefix, root, suffix—if the word has a prefix, that is, as not all do.
5. *a* — recall that the prefix is the first part of a word, coming before the root. There is even a prefix in the word “prefix” which is “pre-” meaning “before,” which makes sense because the “prefix” is “fixed” “before” the root.

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6. *c* — recall that the suffix lies at the end of the word. Not all words have suffixes; in fact, the word “suffix” does ironically NOT have a suffix, unlike the word “prefix,” which has a prefix!
7. *a* — recall that a prefix always comes at the beginning of a word before the root.
8. *d* — the root “sci” gives us many words, including: **science**, **scientist**, **conscious**, **conscience**, **conscientious**, **omniscient**, **prescient**, **plebiscite**, et al.
9. *c* — for example, the word “incontrovertible” has two prefixes: in- and contr-, whereas the word “antidisestablishmentarianism” has three prefixes: anti-, dis-, and e-; interestingly enough, it also has five suffixes!

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10. *a* — there are three: pneumono-lung, ultra-beyond, and micro-small

11. *c* — since the morphemes of “prefracted” include a prefix which means “before” and a root which means “broken,” both of those meanings would figure into the definition, that is, something that is “broken beforehand,” which means that it’s “already broken.” By the bye, this is a made-up word—morphemes are very handy for doing that!).

12. *c* — so, “incircumsaltating” would mean: “not” “dancing” “around”—your math teacher would want you “not dancing around” in class! That said, you would want to “circumsaltate” in dance class!