



Literacy at Hartford Public High School

September 12, 2005
Volume 3 Number 2

Roots and Prefixes

The English language has its roots in several languages, including Greek, Latin, and older forms of English, German, and French. Learning to recognize common roots and affixes (prefixes and suffixes) will help students build their vocabulary and improve their ability to make educated guesses about unknown words they encounter in reading and test-taking situations. Good dictionaries will give students information about the origins of words. Whenever they look up a new word, make a point of encouraging them to read this information. *Some* of the roots and affixes appear in a large number of words that are frequently used in English. Learning these will enhance students' ability to comprehend course readings and learn new terminology.

Prefixes: a prefix is an affix, such as *dis* in "disbelieve." It is attached to the front of a word to create a derivative word. A prefix cannot be used as a separate word. Its function is to change to meaning of the base word.

Some common prefixes are:

Pre	before
Post	after
Super	above
Sub	under
Pro	forward
A / an	not, without
Dis	apart
Un, ir, im, il	not
Bi	two
Tri	three
Uni, mono	one
Poly	many
Mis	wrong

Roots: a root is the element that carries the main component of meaning in a word and provides the basis from which a word is derived by adding affixes or inflectional endings or by phonetic change. A root is the building block of a word. It is the core of the word's meaning.

Some common roots are:

Am	love
Ann	year
Aud	hear
Bio	life

Cap	head
Chron	time
Corp	body
Dic	say, tell
Duc	lead
Ego	self
Frat	brother
Geo	earth
Graph	write
Loc	place
Luc	light
Mit	send
Mort	death
Omni	all
Phobia	fear, dislike
Scrib	write
Spec	see, look
Vert	turn
Vis	see

Suggestions for Teaching Roots and Prefixes

1. Require students to keep a notebook with the word of the day; include not only the word and its root or prefix but also other related words.
2. Point out in class readings words that contain common roots and prefixes.
3. Demonstrate to students what happens to a word when the word being studied is given a different prefix or suffix. Ask them to think about what these new words might mean and how they might be used.
4. Ask students to create wall posters with common word parts and their meanings.
5. Create flash cards with common roots and prefixes. Put the word element on one side and the meaning on the other.
6. Include on tests and quizzes questions that deal with words containing roots and prefixes.
7. Challenge students by giving them unfamiliar words that contain the elements that were presented in class; ask students to identify the elements and make an educated guess about the approximate meaning of the word.
8. Point out to students how knowing roots and prefixes helps with spelling words correctly (e.g., mis + step = *misstep*, not *mistep*).