

The 5 parts to Suffix and Prefix Teaching



By Lucia Smith www.pelican-talk.com

Suffixes and Prefixes are morphemes. They are units of sound that are “knocked on” to the start or end of other words or wordparts and they carry meaning. For example, the -s suffix means something is plural.

Some students are tuned into the sound structure of words and this is very important in the initial stages of learning to read and write. We call this *phonological awareness*. After the first year of schooling, however, we start drawing attention to common suffixes (**-ed**, **-s**, **-ing**). Students who are only thinking about the sound structure of words may write “carz” or “jump’t”, but students who are beginning to use *morphological awareness* (awareness of base words, suffixes and prefixes), will understand although we hear a /t/ sound at the end of “jumped”, the meaning of the word indicates that an **-ed** is being used.

Students’ spelling benefits greatly when they have been taught prefixes and suffixes using **Pelican Talk’s 5 parts to Suffix and Prefix Teaching**. Let us use the suffixes **-ed** and **-ous** as examples.

- 1. The Spelling:** Name the letters then pronounce the suffix in the way you would read it if it was unattached to a word: For example, “ed” (rhyming with *red*). With other suffixes you might discuss the spelling pattern further. For example, when teaching about **-ous** you might say that the spelling looks a bit like **-ouse** in *house*, but without the **e**.
- 2. How it Sounds:** This is a **very important** part of teaching and often missed. Don’t assume students will easily recognise the newly learnt morpheme in words. The **-ed** suffix can sound like /t/ (in *jumped, slipped, wiped, licked...*), like /d/ (in *rolled, fanned, named...*) and like /ed/ (in *flooded, painted, braided...*). It is often missed in spelling when it sounds like /t/ or a simple /d/. Now think about how **-ous** sounds on the end of words... It contains the unstressed vowel sound called the schwa. The schwa’s spelling cannot be determined from how it sounds. No wonder students write things like VENOMES or VENOMESS (Note that **MANY** suffixes and prefixes contain the non-descript schwa vowel. **BE SURE TO DISCUSS THIS!**)
- 3. The Meaning:** This is the other **extremely important** part of teaching that will help students move away from spelling phonetically and move towards considering the morphological structure of words. You can give students words and see if they can figure out the meaning of suffixes. For example, I JUMP. I JUMPED. What is the **-ed** doing? Also, RIP, RIPPED. What is the **-ed** doing? If you are unsure of the meaning of a suffix or prefix, simple Google it!

4. Any Rules? : Suffixes that start with a vowel and that are added to a single syllable word will usually result in the doubling of a final single consonant if there is only one vowel preceding it. For example, *pat* goes to *patted*, *rip* goes to *ripped*. See the One-One-One rule on the FREE page of the website. Also when adding a suffix that starts with a vowel to a word ending in the letter Y (that is not part of a digraph), the Y is changed to I. For example, *hurry* goes to *hurried*, *cry* goes to *cried*, but *play* goes to *played* (because the Y is part of the digraph AY). Similarly, *envy* goes to *envious*. Finally, when adding a suffix that begins with a vowel to a word that ends in a silent E, the E is usually dropped. *Name* goes to *named*. *Fame* goes to *famous*.

5. Don’t Confuse With... Many prefixes and suffixes sound like other common syllables or morphemes. For example, **-ed** sounds like the /t/ in words like *slept*, *crept*, *spelt* and has the same meaning, so these irregular past tense words using T spelling should be explored. The **-ous** suffix sounds like the suffix **-ice** in *notice*, *crevice*, *apprentice*. It sounds a little like **-ist** in *dentist* and **-ness** in *sweetness*. The best way to prevent confusion is to acknowledge the confusing words and to present the other words in contrast to the current words you are studying.

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