Why Study Word Roots, Prefixes, Why Study Word Roots, Prefixes,and Suffixes? and Suffixes? and Suffixes?

Knowing the "building blocks" of the English language - prefixes, suffixes and root words - helps you to understand a word's meaning and spelling convention.

English is a living language, and it is growing all the time. One way that new words come into the language is when words are borrowed from other languages. New words are also created when words or word elements, such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes, are combined in new ways.

Many English words and word elements can be traced back to Latin and Greek. Often you can guess the meaning of an unfamiliar word if you know the meaning.

A **word root** is a part of a word. It contains the core meaning of the word, but it cannot stand alone.

A **prefix** is also a word part that cannot stand alone. It is placed at the beginning of a word to change its meaning.

A **suffix** is a word part that is placed at the end of a word to change its meaning.

Often you can guess the meaning of an unfamiliar word if you know the meaning of its parts; that is, the root and any prefixes or suffixes that are attached to it.

Latin was the language spoken by the ancient Romans. As the Romans conquered most of Europe, the Latin language spread throughout the region. Over time, the Latin spoken in different areas developed into separate languages, including Italian, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. These languages are considered “sisters,” as they all descended from Latin, their “mother” language.

In 1066 England was conquered by William, duke of Normandy, which is in northern France. For several hundred years after the Norman invasion, French was the language of court and polite society in England. It was during this period that many French words were borrowed into English. Linguists estimate that some 60% of our common everyday vocabulary today comes from French. Thus many Latin words came into English indirectly through French.

Many Latin words came into English directly, though, too. Monks from Rome brought religious vocabulary as well as Christianity to England beginning in the 6th century. From the Middle Ages onward many scientific, scholarly, and legal terms were borrowed from Latin.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, dictionary writers and grammarians generally felt that English was an imperfect language whereas Latin was perfect. In order to improve the language, they deliberately made up a lot of English words from Latin words. For example, fraternity, from Latin fraternitas, was thought to be better than the native English word brotherhood.

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