



# High Frequency Prefixes in Context: "Un-"

A 10-exercise oral language workout for school students in Year 4 and above.

Includes: definitions, etymologies, pattern spotting, rewriting sentences, sentence formulation, divergent thinking for creativity, verbal reasoning, some general knowledge about the world, and creative writing.

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# WHAT'S IN THIS RESOURCE?

- Definition and etymology of “prefix”.
- Definition and etymology of the prefix, “un-”, for comprehension and spelling.
- Procedural learning writing activity.
- Auditory bombardment - listening to “un-” words in sentence context.
- Highlighting activity: spotting the prefix in sentences.
- Rewriting exercise: replacing “not [root word]” with “un- + [root word]” constructions.
- Sentence formulation exercise with semantic constraints: making original sentences using “un-” targets.
- Divergent naming exercise: creative thinking using words with “un-” prefixes.
- Verbal reasoning/persuasive writing exercise: generating pros and cons for “un-” words.
- Story-making exercise with “un-” words.

# Prefixes

- A prefix is a letter or group of letters that is added to the **start** of a word in order to make a different word.
- For example, the prefix "un-" is added to the word "healthy" to make "unhealthy".
- The word "prefix" has been used since the 1640s, back when [Charles I was the King of England](#).
- The word "prefix" comes from the Latin words "praefixum" and "praefigere". "Pre-" means "before" and "fix" means to "stick". We **stick** prefixes **before** words to make new words.
- In English, just [nine prefixes account for 75% of words that use a prefix](#).
- In this series of resources, we cover each of the **nine** most frequently used prefixes.

# Definition: “Un-” means “not” or “the opposite of”

- The prefix “un-” comes to us from the Old English “un-” and means “not”.
- “Un-” is one of the most common of English prefixes. It is sometimes confused with the Latin-prefix “in-” (which we cover in a separate resource).
- “Un-” can also be a prefix of reversal, deprivation, or removal, as in “undo” or “unbutton”.
- You can add “un-” to thousands of English words.

# “Un-” means “not” - complete this table

Word	Add “un-”	What it means	
able	unable	Not able	
happy	unhappy	Not happy	
certain	uncertain		
common			
employed			
equal			
natural			
wise			
wanted			
known			



## Listen to these sentences.

The coach's attitude was very unhelpful. (Not helpful)

The girl's behaviour was unacceptable. (Not acceptable)

The blogger's opinion was uninformed. (Not informed)

The kitten was unwanted. (Not wanted)

The cold weather was unwelcome. (Not welcome)

The movie was unusual. (Not usual)

The crowd was unsympathetic to the stand-up comedian. (Not sympathetic)

The robot dog toy was unavailable. (Not available)

The wait for the student's test results was unbearable. (Not bearable)

The man's suit was uncomfortable. (Not comfortable)

The rules of the game were unclear. (Not clear)

The actor's performance was unbelievable. (Not believable)

# Find and highlight the “un-” words

Once upon a time, in a land faraway, there lived twin brothers, Jack and Max.

Although they looked the same, they were very different:

Jack's speech was clear, but Max's speech was unclear.

Jack was healthy, but Max was unhealthy.

Jack was unhelpful, but Max was helpful.

Jack was married, but Max was unmarried.

Jack was unpopular, but Max was popular.

Jack was wise, but Max was unwise.

Jack was untidy, but Max was tidy.

Jack was unlucky, but Max was lucky.

Jack was unkind, but Max was kind.





# Rewrite these sentences with an “un-” word

The antique was not common. (The antique was uncommon.)

The sick man was not conscious.

The old man was not well.

The treasure coins were not countable.

The woman was not employed.

The boxers were not equal.

The game was not fair.

Dad is not fit.

The teenager was not grateful.

My sister is not reliable.

The petrol was not leaded.

The cubic zirconia was not natural.



## FOR EACH WORD PAIR, MAKE UP A SENTENCE USING BOTH WORDS

Unofficial. Results.

Uncover. Detective.

Ungrateful. Child.

Untrue. Newspaper.

Unplug. Sink.

Unprepared. Marathon.

Unwilling. Army.

Unwise. Car.

Unsteady. Dancer.

Unavoidable. Mistake.

Uncontrollable. Horse.

Undecided. Election.





## “Un-” can also be used for reversals - underline the “un-” words in the sentences below

The archaeologist uncovered the secret tomb.

After arriving in the hotel, the business woman unpacked her bag.

He undid the buckle and opened the bag.

The boy was too shy to undress in the change rooms.

The guest could not undo the damage she had done by insulting the host.

He unloaded the trailer.

He unlocked the cage and released the Kraken.

He unplugged the sink and watched the water swirl away.

Try as he may, the boy cannot untie the knots in his shoelaces.

The small girl unwrapped her birthday presents.

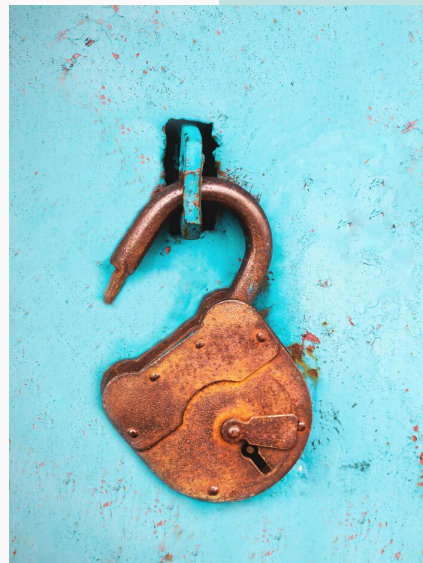
He untethered the horse from the fence post.

She unscrewed the bottle top and drank the mineral water.

## “UN-” CAN ALSO BE USED FOR REVERSALS - DIVERGENT NAMING TASK

Name 3 things you can:

- unlock
- untie
- unload
- uncover
- unscrew
- unplug
- undo
- unpack
- unwind
- unzip



# Verbal reasoning: List arguments for and against this statement:

**“It’s better for leaders to be unpopular than unjust.”**



Positives (Pros)

1.

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2. 

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3.

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4.

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Negatives (Cons)

1.

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2.

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2.

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4.

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Conclusion:

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# Did you know...? Choose one and investigate!

1. Zombies and vampires are sometimes called the **“undead”**.
2. The common law (judge-made law) is sometimes called **unwritten law** to distinguish it from laws made by written statute or legislation.
3. Back in the olden days, some high status people called the so-called “lower classes” the “Great **Unwashed**”, referring to their supposed poor hygiene. (What snobs!)
4. Ethelred II, King of England (978-1016 AD) was known in the 13th Century as “Ethelred the **Unready**”.
5. In 19th Century England, some people called trousers, pantaloons and breeches **“unmentionables”**!
6. Many countries, including England, have a “Tomb of the **Unknown** Warrior” to commemorate the sacrifice of men and women lost in wars, some of whom could not be identified.

# USING THE STORY BUILDER ON THE NEXT PAGE, WRITE A STORY ABOUT THIS PICTURE USING ALL THESE WORDS:

- Unhealthy
- Unsuitable
- Undecided
- Unfit
- Unwise
- Unwell
- Unreasonable
- Unlucky
- Unwanted
- Unwilling
- Unwind



# Story Builder

## (1) Setting



Whereabouts does the story happen?



When? (year, season, time of day/night)

## (2) Main character



Who is the story about? Is the main character a:

- ▶ person
- ▶ animal
- ▶ made-up creature (e.g. alien, ghost)

What does he/she/it look like?

Personality? Likes/dislikes?

## (3) Kick-off event



What happens?

e.g. Suddenly...  
One day...

## (4) What does kick-off event do to the main character?



What does the main character want? (goal)

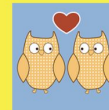
What gets in the main character's way? e.g. other people, nature, main character's weaknesses/fears?

## (5) Solution



How does the main character solve the problem to get what he/she/it wants?

## (6) Resolution



Did they all live happily ever after or did something sad happen?

How does the main character feel at the end of the story?



# Further reading

Morphological awareness:

<https://www.banterspeech.com.au/what-else-helps-struggling-readers-the-evidence-for-morphological-awareness-training/>

Teaching tips for the classroom:

<https://www.banterspeech.com.au/24-practical-ways-to-help-school-aged-children-cope-with-language-and-reading-problems-at-school-and-home/>

Spelling:

<https://www.banterspeech.com.au/should-we-spend-time-teaching-our-kids-to-spell-if-so-how-and-what-should-we-teach-them/>

Reading:

<https://www.banterspeech.com.au/is-your-child-struggling-to-read-heres-what-works/>

<https://www.banterspeech.com.au/too-many-children-cant-read-we-know-what-to-do-but-how-should-we-do-it/>

# Additional reading

Collins COBUILD dictionary: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/cobuild/>

Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable:

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199990009.001.0001/acref-9780199990009>

Etymonline: <https://www.etymonline.com/>

Five from Five's excellent overview of morphology: <https://fivefromfive.com.au/morpheme>

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