Word Structure

Purpose
As students move into the upper grades, there is a shift from Phonics to Word Structure. Phonology is the study of the sounds that make up words. In the early grades, students learn to map sounds with spellings to read words. However, as students move into the upper grades and encounter more complex and longer words, the understanding of morphology and the morphological units that make up words is important for fluent reading, vocabulary development, and comprehension.

Morphology is the study of Word Structure. Word Structure activities support the development of fluency as students learn to identify and read meaningful chunks of words rather than individual spellings. Word Structure also supports the development of vocabulary as students learn how inflectional endings change a word’s tense, number, and so on and how affixes can be added to a base word to create or derive a new but related meaning.

Morphemes are the smallest units that have semantic meaning. Morphemes may be free or bound. A free morpheme can stand alone, such as the words dog, man, or woman. A bound morpheme, on the other hand, is a unit of meaning that must be combined with another morpheme to make a meaningful word. For example, in rewrite the prefix re- means to do again, and in dogs the -s changes the meaning to plural. Both re- and -s are bound morphemes because they must combine with other words to create new words.

Learning about word structure helps the reader at several levels. Being able to identify key-word parts not only helps with the pronunciation of longer, unfamiliar words but it also helps with meaning. In Word Structure, students learn how to deconstruct words—to identify the root of the word as well as the affixes. When affixes occur at the beginning of a word, they are called prefixes, and when they occur at the end of a word they are called suffixes. The prefix, root word, and suffix are all morphemes.

In the word restatement, there are three morphemes: the prefix re-, the root state and the suffix -ment.

Prefix root suffix
re- state- ment

Suffixes, in particular, can impact the root word in different ways. Suffixes such as -s and -ed can change the tense of a verb; suffixes such as -s can change the number of a noun to make it a plural. Derivational morphemes, in contrast, can be added to words to create or derive another word, for example the addition of -ness to sad creates the new word sadness, or the addition of -ly to an adjective to make it an adverb, sadly.

Word structure includes the study of the following:

- **Compound words** are made of two words that combine to form a new word. Compounds can be open or closed.
- **Root words** focus on learning about the basic element of words. Root words are the foundations upon which the meaning of a word is formed. A root may be a real word as in audita, meaning “sound,” but it can also used with a suffix to become audible; changing the noun to an adjective. Although audible can have other elements, it does not need other elements to be complete. Most roots, however, do need other elements. Roots such as duct, anthop, and cred require affixes to form the words deduct, anthropology, and incredible, respectively. Knowledge of root words and affixes provides students with critical tools for understanding derived words.
- **Prefixes** include any morpheme that is attached to the beginning of a root or word and changes the meaning of that word. Prefixes do not change the form of the word, only the meaning. Common prefixes include: con-, com-, ad-, de-, di-, dis-, per-, re-, sub-, hyper-, un-, and so on as well as numbers (bi-, tri-, uni-, mono-, octo-, and so on.)
- **Suffixes** include any morpheme that is attached to the end of a word or root and that changes the meaning of that word. Suffixes often change the function of the word and often require a spelling change in the root as well. For example, the addition of -ial to colony changes a noun to an adjective.
Word Structure, continued

Other examples of suffixes that change the word form include the following:
- **Noun suffixes:** -age, -al, -ance, -ant, -ate, -ee, -ence, -ent, -er, -or, -es, -ess, -hood, -ice, -isn, -ist, -ment, -ness, -sion, -tain, -tion, -ure
- **Suffixes that form adjectives:** -able, -al, -er, -est, -ette, -et, -f, -fully, -ible, -ic, -ical, -ish, -ive, -less, -ous, -some, -worthy
- **Suffixes that form adverbs:** -ly, -wards, -ways, -wide, -wise
- **Inflectional endings:** -ing, -es
- **Prefixes and suffixes are separate syllables.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Break into Syllables</th>
<th>Syllable Generalizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Puppet</td>
<td>Pup-pet</td>
<td>Closed. If a word has two consonants in the middle, divide the word between the two consonants. The first syllable is closed, and the vowel pronunciation is short.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Mu-sic</td>
<td>Open. If a word has a VCV pattern, break the syllables before the consonant, which makes the first syllable an open syllable and the first vowel long.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closet</td>
<td>Clos-et</td>
<td>Some VCV patterns have the break after the consonant, which makes the first syllable a closed syllable and the vowel pronunciation short.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hundred</td>
<td>Hun-dred</td>
<td>When there is a VCCV pattern, the break is usually between the consonants. The first syllable is closed, and the vowel pronunciation is short.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coward</td>
<td>Cow-ard</td>
<td>When there are two diphthongs, the syllable break comes between them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chaos</td>
<td>Cha-os</td>
<td>When there is a child pattern, the syllable break comes between the vowels, and the first vowel is usually long.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handle</td>
<td>Hand-le</td>
<td>Consonant plus -le. If a word has an -le (or -el) at the end, it usually forms a separate syllable and is pronounced /ә/ /l/.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excitement Reform</td>
<td>Ex-cite-ment Re-form</td>
<td>Prefixes and suffixes are separate syllables.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertain Hurdle</td>
<td>En-ter-tain Hur-dle</td>
<td>R-controlled vowels. In most syllables where the vowel is followed by an r, the vowel sound is r-controlled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Com-plete</td>
<td>Final e. When there is a vowel, consonant, and then an e at the end, the vowel before the consonant is pronounced long, and the e is silent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Developing Vocabulary

For students to develop a deeper understanding of words, they should have multiple experiences with them. There are any number of activities that students can do to help them use words and internalize their meanings. The following activities can be used with the whole class or in small groups during Workshop.
- Give a word, and ask the student to find it in the line and to give a definition.
- Give a word, and ask the student to add a prefix or a suffix and to tell the meaning of the new word and the new part of speech.

Sometimes students are intimidated by longer words. Understanding syllable breaks helps when reading these longer words. The following chart includes information on syllable “generalizations.” These may help your students when reading longer words during Word Structure activities and in the reading.

Teaching Word Structure

- Have students read the words in a line.
- Tell students that words can be made of several individual parts.
- Examine the words in each line for meaningful parts, cores, and affixes.
- Identify the root or base word, and discuss the meaning.
- Underline and discuss the meaning of the prefix or suffix or both. If there is a prefix and a suffix, begin with the prefix. Tell students a prefix is a group of letters that is attached to the beginning of a base or root word. These letters have a specific meaning. For example, un- means “not” or “the opposite of;” non- means “not,” and re- means “again.” A suffix is a group of letters that comes at the end of the base or root word and changes the meaning of the word. For example, -er changes a verb to a noun or the person doing the action as in sing and singer, or -al or -ial change nouns to adjectives as in colony and colonial.
- Reassemble the word, thinking about the meaning of the word parts.
- Say the word.
- Use the word in a sentence.

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and homophones. This gets students to use the vocabulary and do the thinking. Point to two words, and have students tell how they are alike and different. For example, *history, historical,* and *historian* all have the same roots. All three words have a common root, but *history* and *historian* are nouns, and *historical* is an adjective.

- Give students a word, and have them point to the word. If it is a singular noun, have them change it to a plural or vice versa. If it is a verb, have students change the tense, or if it is an adjective, change it into an adverb if appropriate. In all cases, be sure that students spell the new word.
- Give students a word, have them point to and read the word, and then give the part of speech.
- Give a student a word, and have him or her use the word in a sentence. Have the class decide if the sentence truly shows the meaning of the word. For example, if the word is *camouflage,* and the student says, “Animals use camouflage,” have the class add to the sentence to show the meaning: “Animals use camouflage to protect themselves from predators.”
- Give students a word with a base word, and ask them to point to the word and read it and then to tell the root of the word.

- Give students a word with a Greek or Latin root. Have them point to and read the word, and then have them identify the root word. Challenge students to think of other words that have the same root word.
- Give students a word with a prefix or suffix. Have a student point to and read the word and then identify the prefix or suffix and tell the meaning of the affix. Then, if appropriate, have the student or a different student replace the affix with a different one and tell the meaning of the new word.
- When appropriate, give students a word, and have them give a synonym or antonym. When appropriate, work on gradations of words. For example, if the word is *hot* then the opposite is *cold.* Gradations would be *hot, warm, tepid, cool, cold.* These kinds of activities expand vocabulary.
- Give two words that are connected in some way, for example, *colony* and *colonial.* Have students come to the board, point to the words, and read them. Then have them tell why or how the words are connected.
- Have students find other words that follow comparable patterns to those taught in the lesson. If *colony, colonial, colonist* is a line in Word Knowledge, many students could find related nouns and use them with affixes, (*history, historical, historian*). Challenge students to think more about words.

**Tip**

- Be sure students understand the limits of structural analysis. The *un-* in *unhappy* is a prefix, but the *un* in *under* and *uncle* is not.
- Help students realize that many words are related and that using their knowledge of a word can help them understand related words.
- Encourage students to use their knowledge of word structure during all reading to clarify unfamiliar words.