

Prefixes · Free resource

Prefix: *dis-*

Source: DfE, *English Appendix 1: Spelling* (2013) — Years 3–4 statutory prefix

Origin: Latin *dis-*, meaning "not," "away," or "apart"

What it means

dis- has three related meanings:

Not (negation): *dishonest* = not honest

Away / apart: *disappear* = go away, *dismiss* = send away

Reversal: *disagree* = reverse of agreeing, *disconnect* = reverse of connecting

Where it comes from

dis- came into English from Latin via French after 1066. It is more formal than *un-* and attaches mainly to words of Latin or French origin. Where *un-* sounds native and everyday (*unhappy*, *unkind*), *dis-* sounds more academic and formal (*discourage*, *disillusion*).

Statutory examples (Appendix 1, Y3/4)

Word	Meaning
disagree	not agree
disappear	go away; cease to be visible
disappoint	fail to fulfil expectations
disobey	not obey
dislike	not like
dishonest	not honest
discover	uncover; find out
discomfort	lack of comfort
disconnect	break a connection
disqualify	remove from a competition

The double letter trap

When *dis-* is added to a word beginning with *s*, you get **double s**:

dis- + *satisfy* = **dissatisfy**

dis- + *service* = **disservice**

dis- + *similar* = **dissimilar**

dis- + *solve* = **dissolve**

dis- + *suade* = **dissuade**

But most *dis-* words do NOT have double *s* — only when the base starts with *s*:

dis- + *appear* = **disappear** (one *s*, *appear* starts with *a*)

dis- + *obey* = **disobey** (one *s*, *obey* starts with *o*)

The test: does the base word start with *s*? If yes → double *s*. If no → single *s*.

Morpheme matrix

	dis-	(nothing)
-agree	disagree	agree
-appear	disappear	appear
-obey	disobey	obey
-like	dislike	like
-honest	dishonest	honest
-connect	disconnect	connect
-qualify	disqualify	qualify
-solve	dissolve	solve
-satisfy	dissatisfy	satisfy
-cover	discover	cover

Word family

disallow · disbelieve · discard · disclose · discount · discourage · disgrace · disguise · disillusion ·
disinfect · dismiss · disorder · display · displace · disrupt · distance · distract · disturb

Dictation sentences

She **disappeared** around the corner before anyone could **disagree** with her plan.

He was **disappointed** and **dishonest** about why he had chosen to **disobey**.

The team was **disqualified** after a **disagreement** about the rules.

She began to **discover** that the **disorder** was harder to **dissolve** than she had thought.

Disconnect the cable carefully — any **disturbance** could cause a **disruption**.

Source: DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013). Etymology: Latin dis-, from Proto-Indo-European.