

Prefixes · Free resource

Prefixes: *sub-*, *inter-*, *super-*, *anti-*, *auto-*

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

Origins: Latin (*sub-*, *inter-*, *super-*) and Greek (*anti-*, *auto-*)

sub- – under, below, less than

Origin: Latin *sub* (under, below)

Word	Meaning
submarine	under the sea (<i>sub-</i> + <i>marine</i>)
submerge	go under water (<i>sub-</i> + <i>merge</i>)
subtitle	text under an image or foreign film
subway	an underground passage (<i>sub-</i> + <i>way</i>)
subheading	a heading below the main heading
substandard	below the expected standard
subset	a group within a larger group
subtract	take away (<i>sub-</i> + <i>tract</i> = pull away)
substitution	something put in place of another
subdivision	a division within a division

Classroom hook: *sub-* words all involve being underneath or below. A **submarine** travels under the sea. A **subway** goes under the road. A **subtitle** sits under the pictures. Once children know *sub-* = under, they can decode unfamiliar words.

***inter-* – between, among**

Origin: Latin *inter* (between, among)

Word	Meaning
interact	act between/with others
intercity	between cities (<i>intercity</i> trains)
international	between nations
interfere	come between; meddle
interval	a gap between events
interrupt	break in between (<i>inter-</i> + <i>rupt</i> = break)
interlink	connect between
internet	a network between networks
interview	a meeting between people
interchange	exchange between two sides

Etymology note on *internet*: *inter* (between) + *net* (network) = a network connecting other networks. Useful for showing children that even new technology words often use ancient Latin prefixes.

***super-* – above, beyond, greater than**

Origin: Latin *super* (above, over, beyond)

Word	Meaning
supermarket	a large market (above ordinary)
superstar	a person above ordinary star status
supernatural	above the natural world
superhuman	beyond ordinary human ability
superior	above in quality or rank
superimpose	place one thing above another
supervise	watch over from above (<i>super-</i> + <i>vise</i> = see)
superficial	on the surface; above the deep level
superpower	a power above ordinary
supersede	sit above; replace something

Classroom hook: *super-* heroes are *above* ordinary people. *supermarkets* are *above* ordinary markets (in size). Every *super-* word involves being bigger, better, or above something else.

anti- – against, opposing

Origin: Greek *anti* (against, opposite)

Word	Meaning
anticlockwise	opposite to the direction of a clock
antiseptic	against infection (<i>anti-</i> + <i>septic</i>)
antifreeze	against freezing
antidote	against poison (<i>anti-</i> + <i>dote</i> = gift)
antibody	against foreign bodies in the bloodstream
antibiotic	against living organisms (<i>anti-</i> + <i>bio</i> = life)
antisocial	against social behaviour
anticlimax	the opposite of a climax
antivirus	against computer viruses
anticipate	act against what's coming; prepare in advance

Classroom hook: *anti-* words are always about opposition. An **antibiotic** fights bacteria. An **antidote** fights poison. An **antihero** is the opposite of a hero. Once children know *anti-* = against, they can make sense of unfamiliar words independently.

auto- – self, by oneself

Origin: Greek *autos* (self)

Word	Meaning
autobiography	a book about your own life (<i>auto-</i> + <i>bio</i> + <i>graph</i>)
autograph	your own signature (<i>auto-</i> + <i>graph</i> = write)
automatic	self-operating
automobile	a self-moving vehicle (<i>auto-</i> + <i>mobile</i>)
autopilot	self-guiding pilot system
autocorrect	self-correcting system
autonomy	self-rule (<i>auto-</i> + <i>nomos</i> = law)
autocomplete	self-completing
autofocus	self-focusing camera lens
autodidact	a self-taught person

Classroom hook: everything *auto-* does by itself. An **automatic** door opens by itself. An **autobiography** is the story of yourself, written by yourself. A car that drives itself would be an **autonomous** vehicle.

The five prefixes – summary

Prefix	Meaning	Origin
<i>sub-</i>	under; below	Latin
<i>inter-</i>	between; among	Latin
<i>super-</i>	above; beyond	Latin
<i>anti-</i>	against; opposing	Greek
<i>auto-</i>	self; by itself	Greek

Combined morpheme matrix

	sub-	inter-	super-	anti-
-marine	submarine	–	–	–
-national	–	international	supernatural	–
-natural	–	–	supernatural	–
-social	–	–	–	antisocial
-market	–	–	supermarket	–
-city	–	intercity	–	–

Word sort

Match each word to its prefix.

Words: submarine · anticlockwise · autobiography · international · supermarket · submerge · antiseptic · automatic · intercity · supernatural · subtitle · antidote · autopilot · subway

<i>sub-</i>	<i>inter-</i>	<i>super-</i>	<i>anti-</i>	<i>auto-</i>

Dictation sentences

The **submarine** travelled **underwater** using an **automatic** guidance system.

The **international** team used an **antiseptic** spray before the **supernatural** investigation.

She took the **subway** to the **supermarket** because the **intercity** train was late.

The **autobiography** was signed with his **autograph** on the **subtitle** page.

An **antidote** was the only solution — the **antibiotic** had been **substandard**.

Source: DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013). Etymology verified against Oxford English Dictionary.