

Suffixes · Free resource

Suffixes: **-tion, -sion, -ssion, -cian**

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

Origin: Latin *-tio / -tionis* via Old French *-tion / -sion*

What they mean

All four endings make nouns, usually meaning "the act of," "the state of," or "a person skilled in." They all make the /ʃən/ ("shun") sound.

The choice of spelling depends on the base word — see the decision tree below.

The decision tree

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Does the word mean a PERSON who is skilled in something?  
  YES → -cian (musician, magician, politician)  
  NO → Does the base verb end in -d, -de, -se, or is it after -n or -l?  
        YES → -sion (division, tension, extension)  
        NO → Does a short vowel come just before the ending?  
              YES → -ssion (discussion, permission, passion)  
              NO → -tion (station, fraction, mention) ← DEFAULT
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***-tion* examples**

The default — use this when no other rule applies.

Base	Noun	Meaning
<i>act</i>	action	the act of doing
<i>direct</i>	direction	the act of directing
<i>collect</i>	collection	a gathering
<i>invent</i>	invention	something invented
<i>attend</i> → <i>-tion</i>	attention	focused awareness
<i>inform</i>	information	communicated facts
<i>question</i>	question	an inquiry
<i>mention</i>	mention	a brief reference
<i>position</i>	position	a place or stance
<i>fraction</i>	fraction	a part of a whole
<i>station</i>	station	a stopping place
<i>nation</i>	nation	a country

***-sion* examples**

Use after base verbs ending in *-d*, *-de*, *-se*, or after *n* and *l*.

Base	Noun	Change
<i>divide</i>	division	<i>de</i> → <i>s</i>
<i>decide</i>	decision	<i>de</i> → <i>s</i>
<i>revise</i>	revision	<i>se</i> → <i>s</i>
<i>extend</i>	extension	<i>d</i> → <i>s</i>
<i>expand</i>	expansion	<i>d</i> → <i>s</i>
<i>suspend</i>	suspension	<i>d</i> → <i>s</i>
<i>tense</i>	tension	<i>se</i> → <i>s</i>
<i>compel</i>	compulsion	<i>l</i> → <i>ls</i>
<i>comprehend</i>	comprehension	<i>d</i> → <i>s</i>
<i>dimension</i>	dimension	<i>n</i> + <i>-sion</i>
<i>mansion</i>	mansion	<i>n</i> + <i>-sion</i>
<i>pension</i>	pension	<i>n</i> + <i>-sion</i>

-ssion examples

Use when a short vowel precedes the ending, or when the base ends in *-ss* or *-mit*.

Base	Noun	Pattern
<i>discuss</i>	discussion	<i>ss</i> in base
<i>permit</i>	permission	<i>mit</i> → <i>miss</i>
<i>admit</i>	admission	<i>mit</i> → <i>miss</i>
<i>omit</i>	omission	<i>mit</i> → <i>miss</i>
<i>transmit</i>	transmission	<i>mit</i> → <i>miss</i>
<i>confess</i>	confession	<i>ss</i> in base
<i>possess</i>	possession	<i>ss</i> in base
<i>passion</i>	passion	short vowel before ending
<i>mission</i>	mission	short vowel
<i>session</i>	session	short vowel

-cian examples

Always means a **person** skilled in a subject — especially when the subject ends in *-ic* or *-ics*.

Field	Person	Pattern
<i>music</i>	musician	<i>music</i> → <i>musici-</i> + <i>an</i>
<i>magic</i>	magician	<i>magic</i> → <i>magici-</i> + <i>an</i>
<i>electric</i>	electrician	<i>electric</i> + <i>ian</i>
<i>politics</i>	politician	<i>politic</i> + <i>ian</i>
<i>mathematics</i>	mathematician	<i>mathematic</i> + <i>ian</i>
<i>physics</i>	physician	<i>physic</i> + <i>ian</i>
<i>optics</i>	optician	<i>optic</i> + <i>ian</i>
<i>diet</i>	dietician	<i>dietetic</i> + <i>ian</i>
<i>beauty</i>	beautician	<i>beautific</i> + <i>ian</i>
<i>technic</i>	technician	<i>technic</i> + <i>ian</i>

Morpheme family

act generates a powerful morpheme family:

act → action → active → actively → activate → activation → inactive → inaction → reactor → transaction → interaction

Teaching *act* (Latin *actum* = done) unlocks all of these.

Word sort

Use the decision tree. Sort by ending.

Words: station · division · musician · discussion · question · revision · electrician · tension · passion · mention · permission · magician · position · extension · session · politician · action · suspension · possession · fraction

-tion	-sion	-ssion	-cian

Dictation sentences

The **musician's position** on **stage** caused some **tension** and **discussion**.

She made her **decision** after a long **session** of careful **revision**.

The **politician** had a **passion** for **education** and **action** on every **occasion**.

After much **deliberation**, she gave her **permission** and the **mission** began.

The **electrician** fixed the **connection** with great **precision** and **attention** to **detail**.

Source: DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013). Etymology: Latin -tio / -tionis.