



Prefixes in English

This table, taken from *Using English for Academic Purposes* (www.uefap.com), shows the most common English prefixes and their meanings. This is for verbs only, but the same prefixes can also be applied to adjectives and nouns.

Prefix	Meaning	Examples
<i>re-</i>	again or back	restructure, revisit, reappear, rebuild, refinance
<i>dis-</i>	reverses the meaning of the verb	disappear, disallow, disarm, disconnect, discontinue
<i>over-</i>	too much	overbook, oversleep, overwork
<i>un-</i>	reverses the meaning of the verb	unbend, uncouple, unfasten
<i>mis-</i>	badly or wrongly	mislead, misinform, misidentify
<i>out-</i>	more or better than others	outperform, outbid
<i>be-</i>	make or cause	befriend, belittle
<i>co-</i>	together	co-exist, co-operate, co-own
<i>de-</i>	do the opposite of	devalue, deselect
<i>fore-</i>	earlier, before	foreclose, foresee
<i>inter-</i>	between	interact, intermix, interface
<i>pre-</i>	before	pre-expose, prejudge, pretest
<i>sub-</i>	under/below	subcontract, subdivide
<i>trans-</i>	across, over	transform, transcribe, transplant
<i>under-</i>	not enough	underfund, undersell, undervalue, underdevelop

But you cannot always guess the meaning of a verb that begins with one of these syllables:

Word	Meaning	Comment
<i>rely</i>	to be able to depend on someone or something	the origin is French <i>relier</i> , which is related to <i>religion</i> and means <i>to bind</i>
<i>overhear</i>	to accidentally listen to other people talking	here, <i>over</i> means <i>above</i> ; the German word is <i>mithören</i>
<i>cope</i>	to be able to deal with something difficult	<i>co</i> is not a prefix here; the word comes from French <i>couper</i> (<i>to strike</i> or <i>to cut</i>)
<i>decrease</i>	to go down (value etc.)	there is a verb <i>crease</i> , but it has nothing to do with <i>increase</i> and <i>decrease</i>
<i>pretend</i>	to act as if something were the case while in fact it is not	<i>pre</i> and <i>tend</i> , in combination, do not suggest this meaning