

Teacher's Guide to Suffixes: Understanding and Teaching Word Endings

This A4 handout provides a concise, classroom-ready reference for common English suffixes. Each card focuses on one suffix: its meaning, examples, and a short teaching note. Use these pages as posters, quick-reference cards, or prompts for activities that build vocabulary and morphological awareness.

Suffix Teaching Progression by Year Group

Year Group	Suffixes Taught/Introduced	Notes/Examples & Curriculum Link
Year 1	-ed, -ing, -er, -est	Inflectional: adding to root words with no change (e.g. helping, helped, helper, quicker, quickest). Rules for adding where no doubling/drop needed.
Year 2	-er/-or, -ly, -ful, -less, -ness, -ment, -ed, -ing, -er/-est (revision)	Derivational: adjectives (-ful, -less), nouns (-ness, -ment), adverbs (-ly), agent nouns (-er). Revision of Year 1 inflections with rules (e.g. drop -e, double consonant).
Years 3-4	-able/-ible, -tion/-sion/-ion, -ist (introduction), -er/-or (consolidation), -al (basic), plus revision of earlier suffixes	Further suffixes and rules for adding (e.g. vowel beginnings, stress patterns). -tion/-sion common noun endings; -able/-ible adjective patterns. Morphology focus.
Years 5-6	-ous, -ance/-ence, -ant/-ent, -ive, -al, -cian, -ist (consolidation), plus deeper work on -tion/-sion, -able/-ible, etc.	Advanced derivational suffixes (Latin/French roots): adjectives (-ous, -ive, -al, -ant/-ent), nouns (-ance/-ence, -cian professions). Etymology/morphology; spelling patterns and exceptions.

Suffix: -ed

Meaning: Past tense or past participle of verbs; also forms adjectives meaning 'having' or 'characterised by'.



walked

past tense of walk



painted

past tense of paint



excited

feeling or showing excitement



played

past tense of play



jumped

past tense of jump



wanted

past tense of want



looked

past tense of look



cleaned

past tense of clean



started

past tense of start



helped

past tense of help



cooked

past tense of cook



visited

past tense of visit

Teaching tip: The pronunciation of -ed depends on the final sound of the root word. Explain these three rules to help students master reading and spelling words with this suffix:

- **/t/ sound:** When the root word ends in voiceless consonants (e.g., p, k, f, s, sh, ch, x).
Examples: walked, jumped, looked
- **/d/ sound:** When the root word ends in voiced sounds (vowels or voiced consonants like b, g, v, z, m, n, l, r).
Examples: played, cleaned, buzzed
- **/ɪd/ sound:** When the root word ends in 't' or 'd'.
Examples: wanted, needed, painted

Practice sorting words by their -ed sound to reinforce learning!

Suffix: -ing

Meaning: Present participle of verbs (continuous action); also forms nouns (gerunds) and adjectives.



running

continuous action of run



swimming

the activity of swim



jumping

continuous action of jump



playing

continuous action of play



reading

continuous action of read



singing

continuous action of sing



dancing

continuous action of dance



writing

continuous action of write

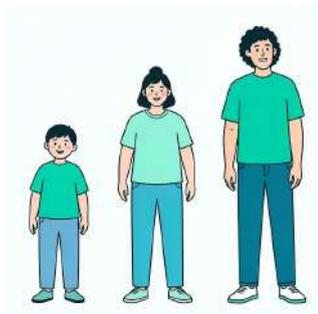
Teaching tip: Spelling Rules for Adding -ing

1. **Just add -ing** - For most words, simply add -ing to the root word
Examples: play → playing, read → reading, help → helping
2. **Drop the 'e'** - When a word ends in 'e', drop the 'e' before adding -ing
Examples: make → making, come → coming, write → writing
3. **Double the final consonant** - For short words ending in a single vowel + consonant, double the final consonant before adding -ing
Examples: run → running, sit → sitting, hop → hopping

Practice identifying which rule applies before adding -ing to build spelling confidence!

Suffix: -er / -est

Meaning: Comparative (-er) and superlative (-est) forms of adjectives — used to compare two or more things.



tall

taller: comparative form

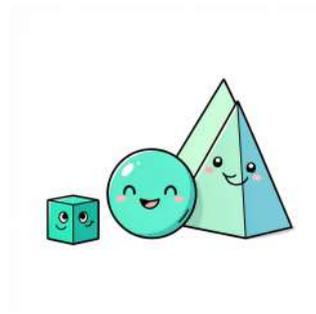
tallest: superlative form



fast

faster: comparative form

fastest: superlative form



big

bigger: comparative form

biggest: superlative form



small

smaller: comparative form

smallest: superlative form



happy

happier: comparative form

happiest: superlative form



funny

funnier: comparative form

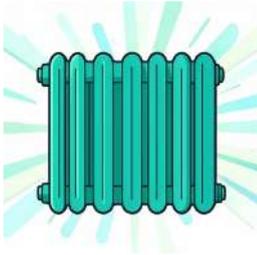
funniest: superlative form

❏ Teaching tip: Spelling Rules for Adding -er and -est

1. **Just add -er/-est** - For most adjectives, simply add the suffix
Examples: tall → taller → tallest, fast → faster → fastest
2. **Drop the 'e'** - When an adjective ends in 'e', drop the 'e' before adding -er/-est
Examples: nice → nicer → nicest, large → larger → largest
3. **Change 'y' to 'i'** - When an adjective ends in a consonant + 'y', change 'y' to 'i' before adding -er/-est
Examples: happy → happier → happiest, funny → funnier → funniest
4. **Double the final consonant** - For short adjectives ending in a single vowel + consonant, double the final consonant
Examples: big → bigger → biggest, hot → hotter → hottest

Suffix: -er / -or

Meaning: A person or thing that performs an action (actor, driver) or an agent/role (creator, inventor).



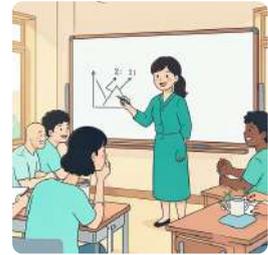
heater

Thing that heats.



mixer

Thing that mixes.



teacher

Person who teaches.



painter

Person who paints.

Activity: People vs. Things Sort

Give students verbs (teach, heat, paint, mix, build, clean). Add -er/-or to create nouns. Sort into "People" and "Things" columns.

Note: Some words can be both! (cleaner = person OR product)

Example: People: teacher, painter | Things: heater, mixer

Suffix: -ly

Meaning: In the manner of — commonly used to form adverbs from adjectives, describing how an action is performed.

- quickly — in a quick manner
- happily — in a happy way
- softly — in a soft manner
- loudly — with great volume

Teaching tip: Converting Adjectives to Adverbs with -ly

Explain the concept:

- Adjectives describe nouns (e.g., "The quick fox")
- Adverbs describe verbs, telling HOW an action is done (e.g., "The fox ran quickly")
- Most adverbs are formed by adding -ly to adjectives

Teaching steps:

1. Start with familiar adjectives (quick, happy, soft, loud)
2. Show how adding -ly changes them to adverbs
3. Practise with verb + adverb pairs in sentences

Example sentences:

- The happy child played happily in the park
- She spoke softly to the baby
- The music played loudly at the party

Spelling note: When an adjective ends in 'y', change 'y' to 'i' before adding -ly (happy → happily, angry → angrily)

Activity idea: Give students action verbs and ask them to add adverbs to describe HOW the action happens (e.g., walk slowly, sing beautifully, work carefully)



Suffix: -ful

Meaning: It denotes having an abundance of a specific quality.

- joyful — full of joy
- helpful — offering help
- careful — showing care
- beautiful — full of beauty



playful — full of play



colourful — full of colour



peaceful — full of peace



powerful — full of power



thankful — full of thanks



cheerful — full of cheer

Teaching tip: Contrast -ful and -less with paired examples to clarify opposites.

Suffix: -less

Meaning: Without. Creates adjectives that indicate absence of something.



spotless

Without spots; perfectly clean.



fearless

Without fear.



breathless

Without breath; out of breath from exertion.



homeless

Without a home.



harmless

Without harm.



endless

Without end.

Activity: Provide base words and ask pupils to add -less or -ful and discuss the change in meaning.

Suffix: -ness

Meaning: State or quality of being. Adds a noun form expressing condition or quality.

The suffix -ness can be used to describe both a condition or state, and a quality or characteristic.

Condition/State:



weakness

The state of being weak.



sickness

The state of being sick.



sleepiness

The state of being sleepy.

Quality:



kindness

The quality of being kind.



cleverness

The quality of being clever.



softness

The quality of being soft.

- Classroom prompt: Have pupils convert adjectives into -ness nouns and use them in short sentences.

Suffix: -ment

Meaning: The action or result of — forms nouns that describe processes, states, or results.



enjoyment

The result or feeling of enjoying something.



movement

The action of moving; progress or change.



development

The process of developing or improving.



achievement

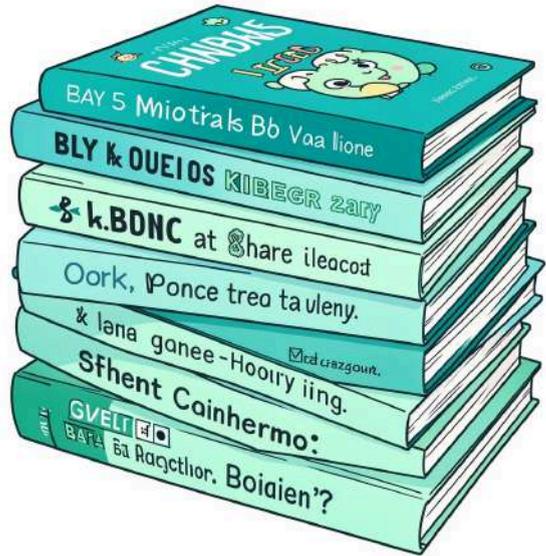
The result of achieving something through effort.

- Teaching Idea:** Create a classroom story where students identify and collect -ment words. For example: 'The government made an announcement about the new development in the park. This brought excitement and amazement to the community. The improvement and enhancement of the playground equipment led to great enjoyment and contentment. Parents showed their encouragement and commitment to the project, which was a real achievement for everyone involved. The arrangement and placement of new benches created an environment of relaxation and fulfilment.'

Suffix: -able / -ible

Meaning: Capable of; able to be. Use these suffixes to form adjectives that describe possibility or suitability.

- readable — easy to read
- enjoyable — gives pleasure
- visible — able to be seen
- possible — able to happen
- comfortable — providing ease and relaxation
- reliable — able to be trusted
- flexible — able to bend or adapt
- washable — able to be washed
- sensible — showing good judgment
- reversible — able to be turned inside out
- edible — safe to eat
- incredible — difficult to believe; extraordinary



Spelling Rules:

- Use -able when the root is a complete word (enjoy → enjoyable, read → readable)
- Use -able after hard 'c' or 'g' sounds (applicable, navigable)
- Use -ible when the root is not a complete word (vis → visible, poss → possible)
- Use -ible after soft 'c' or 'g' sounds (forcible, legible)
- Drop silent 'e' before adding -able (love → lovable, use → usable)

Teaching Tip: Have students identify the root word first to determine which suffix to use.

Suffix: -tion / -sion / -ion

Meaning: The act, process, or result of — common noun-forming suffixes often creating abstract nouns from verbs.

celebration	the act of celebrating
decision	the result of deciding
action	the process of acting
tension	a state resulting from strain
education	the process of educating
invention	the result of inventing
confusion	the state of being confused
permission	the act of permitting
discussion	the process of discussing
explosion	the result of exploding

Classroom idea: Create a sort activity where pupils match verbs to their -tion/-sion/-ion nouns, noting spelling changes.

Teaching Activity: Suffix Transformation Game

1. Divide students into pairs and give each pair a set of verb cards (celebrate, decide, act, educate, invent, confuse, permit, discuss, explode, etc.)
2. Students race to transform each verb into its -tion/-sion/-ion noun form
3. They must identify which suffix to use and explain any spelling changes (e.g., dropping 'e', changing 't' to 'ss')
4. Award points for correct transformations and bonus points for identifying the spelling rule applied
5. Extension: Students create sentences using both the verb and noun forms to show understanding of meaning changes

Suffix: -ist

Meaning: A person who does something or specialises in something.



scientist

Someone who studies or works in science.



pianist

A person who plays the piano professionally or skilfully.



cyclist

Someone who rides a bicycle, often competitively.



artist

A person who creates art or works in the arts.



dentist

Someone who specialises in dental care and treatment.



journalist

A person who writes or reports news for media.



biologist

Someone who studies living organisms and life.



chemist

A person who specialises in chemistry or works in a pharmacy.



tourist

Someone who travels for pleasure or sightseeing.



florist

A person who arranges and sells flowers.



novelist

Someone who writes novels or long fiction works.



therapist

A person who provides therapy or treatment for health conditions.

 Teaching tip: Ask pupils to list professions ending in -ist and discuss what specialisation each implies.

Suffix: -al

Meaning: Relating to; characterised by — forms adjectives from nouns, indicating connection or relationship.



- musical — relating to music
- natural — relating to nature
- personal — relating to a person
- national — relating to a nation

Nouns ending in -al

- arrival
- refusal
- proposal
- removal
- approval
- dismissal
- rehearsal
- withdrawal
- survival
- betrayal
- renewal
- retrieval
- recital

Adjectives ending in -al

- musical
- natural
- personal
- national
- cultural
- emotional
- traditional
- seasonal
- global
- local
- royal
- vital
- final

Teaching tip: Point out that -al can also form nouns (arrival, refusal). Practice identifying whether -al words are adjectives or nouns in context.

Suffix: -ous

Meaning: Full of; having the quality of — forms adjectives describing characteristics or qualities.



dangerous

full of danger



famous

having fame



curious

full of curiosity



generous

showing generosity



nervous

feeling nervousness



mysterious

full of mystery



poisonous

containing poison



courageous

having courage



jealous

feeling jealousy



marvellous

causing marvel or wonder

- Teaching tip: Note spelling variations: -ious (glorious), -eous (gorgeous). Practise identifying root words before adding -ous.

Suffix: -ance / -ence

Meaning: State or quality of; the act of — forms nouns expressing conditions, states, or actions.

importance	the state of being important
performance	the act of performing
confidence	the state of being confident
difference	the quality of being different
appearance	the way something looks or appears
existence	the state of existing
patience	the quality of being patient
silence	the state of being silent
intelligence	the quality of being intelligent
independence	the state of being independent
evidence	information that proves something
obedience	the act of obeying

📌 Spelling Patterns & Teaching Tips:

- Use -ance after root words ending in -ant (important → importance, tolerant → tolerance, distant → distance)
- Use -ence after root words ending in -ent (confident → confidence, patient → patience, silent → silence)
- Use -ance after hard 'c' or 'g' sounds (significance, elegance, arrogance)
- Use -ence after soft 'c' or 'g' sounds (innocence, intelligence, negligence)

Teaching Activity: Create word family chains where students transform adjectives ending in -ant/-ent into nouns ending in -ance/-ence. Have them identify the spelling pattern rule that applies to each transformation. Use colour coding to highlight the suffix pairs (-ant/-ance in one colour, -ent/-ence in another) to reinforce visual memory of the patterns.

Suffix: -ant / -ent

Meaning: Performing an action or being in a state — forms adjectives and nouns describing agents or qualities.

- important — having importance
- different — not the same
- assistant — one who assists
- distant — far away
- relevant — connected to the matter
- observant — paying close attention
- pleasant — giving pleasure
- confident — having confidence
- student — one who studies
- patient — able to wait calmly
- silent — making no sound
- excellent — extremely good

Teaching Tip:

Explicitly teach the -ant/-ent to -ance/-ence transformation pattern. Create paired word cards where students match adjectives to their noun forms (important/importance, confident/confidence, patient/patience). Have students notice that the suffix ending stays consistent within each word family.

Activity:

Give students sentences with blanks and ask them to choose whether to use the adjective (-ant/-ent) or noun (-ance/-ence) form based on context. For example: 'The student showed great ____ (confident/confidence) during the presentation.' This reinforces both spelling patterns and grammatical understanding of when to use adjectives versus nouns.

Suffix: -ive

Meaning: Having the nature of; tending to — forms adjectives indicating qualities or tendencies.



active

engaged in action



creative

having creativity



attractive

pleasing or appealing



positive

showing optimism or affirmation



protective

providing protection



supportive

giving support or encouragement



effective

producing desired results

Teaching Activity: The -ive Transformation Challenge

Step 1: Word Sorting (10 minutes)

Provide students with a mixed list of verbs and -ive adjectives (act/active, create/creative, protect/protective, support/supportive, attract/attractive, effect/effective, etc.). Students work in pairs to match each verb with its -ive adjective form and identify any spelling changes that occur during transformation.

Step 2: Pattern Discovery (10 minutes)

Guide students to discover patterns: some verbs simply add -ive (attract → attractive), whilst others require spelling modifications (create → creative, where the 'e' is retained). Create a class chart documenting these patterns with student-generated examples.

Step 3: Sentence Transformation (15 minutes)

Give students sentences using verbs and ask them to rewrite using the -ive adjective form. For example: 'The medicine will protect you' becomes 'The medicine is protective.' This reinforces understanding of how word class changes affect sentence structure.

Step 4: Creative Application (15 minutes)

Students write a short paragraph (5-7 sentences) describing a person, place, or thing using at least five different -ive adjectives. They must underline each -ive word and identify its root verb. This demonstrates mastery of both the suffix pattern and contextual usage.

Assessment: Students can identify the root verb, explain any spelling changes, and use -ive adjectives appropriately in context.

Suffix: -cian

Meaning: A person skilled in or practising a particular art, science, or profession.



musician

person who plays music



magician

person who performs magic



electrician

person skilled in electrical work



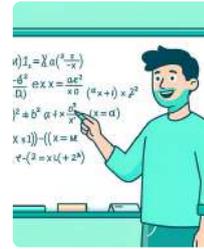
technician

person skilled in technical work



politician

person involved in politics



mathematician

person skilled in mathematics



physician

person who practises medicine; a doctor



beautician

person who provides beauty treatments



optician

person who fits and sells glasses and contact lenses

Teaching Activity: Profession Investigation Project

Step 1: Word Collection and Categorisation (15 minutes)

Students work in small groups to brainstorm -cian professions and categorise them by field: Arts (musician, magician), Science/Medicine (physician, technician, optician), Trades (electrician, beautician), and Society (politician, mathematician). Each group creates a visual chart showing their categories with examples.

Step 2: Suffix Comparison Analysis (20 minutes)

Provide students with parallel lists of -cian, -ist, and -er/-or professions. Guide them to discover patterns: -cian often indicates skilled professions requiring formal training or certification (electrician, physician, technician), whilst -ist may indicate specialisation or study (scientist, artist), and -er/-or often shows simpler action-based roles (teacher, actor). Students create a Venn diagram comparing these three suffix groups.

Step 3: Career Research Task (25 minutes)

Each student selects one -cian profession to research. They must discover: required qualifications, typical daily tasks, skills needed, and why this profession uses -cian rather than another suffix. Students present findings in a one-minute talk or poster.

Step 4: Creative Writing Application (20 minutes)

Students write a short narrative (150-200 words) featuring at least three different -cian professionals working together to solve a problem. For example: 'The electrician, technician, and musician collaborated to fix the concert hall's sound system.' This demonstrates understanding of both the suffix meaning and real-world professional contexts.

Extension: Students interview a family member or community member whose profession ends in -cian, -ist, or -er, comparing their training and role to the suffix patterns discovered in class.

Suffix: -en

Meaning: Made of (material); to make or become (verb suffix).

Adjectives ending in -en (made of)	Verbs ending in -en (to make/become)
wooden — made of wood	strengthen — to make or become strong
golden — made of gold	brighten — to make or become bright
woollen — made of wool	darken — to make or become dark
silken — made of silk	soften — to make or become soft
earthen — made of earth or clay	harden — to make or become hard
leaden — made of lead; heavy	lengthen — to make or become longer
waxen — made of wax	shorten — to make or become shorter
ashen — made of ash; pale grey	widen — to make or become wider
oaken — made of oak wood	deepen — to make or become deeper
molten — melted; made liquid by heat	weaken — to make or become weak

- wooden — made of wood
- golden — made of gold or gold-coloured
- strengthen — to make strong
- brighten — to make bright

 Teaching tip: Distinguish between -en as adjective (wooden) and -en as verb (strengthen). Practice converting adjectives to verbs.

