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## CAG 4

### WORDS AND MORPHEMES IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR

**What precisely is a word?** At first glance, you may find it easy to find many examples of what would unambiguously constitute a 'word', for instance: *you, the, those, some, hers, them, luck, irritation, large, conspicuously, hide, chemical, preference, of, at, from* and similar examples.

Are these English words?

- dilly-dally
- rose-tinted
- eavesdropper
- splendiferous

Once we start to think about words seriously, things don't look so clear!

Let's think for a moment about how words are put together. There are two major ways:

#### 1. Inflection

As soon as a new word comes into current use, it invariably takes over a whole range of other forms.

- *Microbe/ microbes*
- *House/ houses*
- *Large/ larger/ largest*
- *fit /fitter/ fittest*
- *progress/ progresses /progressed/ progressing*
- *qualify/ qualifies/ qualified / qualifying*

#### 2. Word formation

words can be joined in a number of different ways.

- *foot + ball = football*
- *fox + trot = foxtrot*
- *ham + burger = hamburger*
- *dress + maker = dressmaker*
- *house + husband = house-husband*



- *hyper + inflation = hyper-inflation*
- *in + flexible = inflexible*

The last example uses the word *in* to mean the opposite of the main noun. This is a very common way to produce a meaning that is the opposite of the base word.

- *in + excusable = inexcusable*
- *in + vertebrate = invertebrate*
- *in + experienced = inexperienced*

There are a very large range of these additions. When they are at the *front* of a word, they are called **prefixes**. When they are at the *end* of a word, they are called **suffixes**. Here are some examples of prefixes:

- defrost, defuse, deskill
- disapprove, disappear, dislike
- downsize, downturn, downtrodden
- endanger, enslave, enrich
- extraordinary, extra-curricular, extravagant
- handbag, handkerchief, hand-held
- improbable, impenetrable, imperfection
- illegitimate, illegible, illiterate
- lowlife, low-grade, low-level
- midnight , mid-term, mid-life
- misunderstood, misjudge, misplace
- newsworthy, newspaper, newsagent
- off-shoot, off-hand, off-colour
- outside, outrun, outclass
- post-war, post-haste, posthumous
- reply, recover, re-site
- unfair, unkind, unhealthy

There are just as many suffixes, if not more! Here are some of them:

- American, Mexican, Tanzanian



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- alcoholic, workaholic, chocoholic,
  - freedom, stardom, kingdom
  - audible, flexible, visible
  - breakdown, splashdown, comedown
  - carefree, interest-free, rent-free
  - clearly, sweetly, smoothly
  - fattish, lightish, boyish
  - hostess, authoress, stewardess (note: these are less common today)
  - largest, smallest, fattest
  - priesthood, brotherhood, neighbourhood
  - management, employment, development
  - muddle-headed, cool-headed, curly-headed
  - pregnancy, fluency, clemency
  - readable, dependable, portable
  - snowbound, outward-bound, housebound
  - started, ended, tumbled
  - tradecraft, witchcraft, stagecraft
  - trainee, trustee, employee
  - Watergate, Irangate, Blairgate (Note: a fairly new addition to the language)
  - weakness, lightness, kindness

But we not only add prefixes and suffixes, we also take things away.

Think about the original words:

- auto
- demo
- fridge
- lab
- phone
- pram
- TV



Just for good luck, we also make names into everyday words ( *Hoover* ), we borrow from other languages ( *bungalow* from Hindi) we join things together because they sound neat ( *easy-peasy* ) and if we can't do anything else, we just sit down and make up a new word ( *Internet* ).

**Morphemes** may be elements of a word which you have not met before. An example is probably the best way to introduce this concept. We will begin with the lexical item *nation* and develop the notion of morpheme from there.

- *nation*
- *nation-al*
- *inter-nation-al*
- *inter-nation-al-ise*
- *inter-nation-al-is-ation*

So, in the above example, *nation*, *-al*, *inter-*, *-ise*, and *-ation* are all morphemes. By adding small units of meaning to the base form, *nation*, we have created four new, but closely related, lexical items.

As dictionary publishers never tire of reminding us, our language is growing. Not content with the million or so words they already have at their disposal, English speakers are adding new ones at the rate of around 1,000 a year. Recent dictionary debutants include *blog*, *crowdfunding*, *hackathon*, *airball*, *e-marketing*, *sudoku*, *twerk* and *Brexit*.

But these represent just a sliver of the tip of the iceberg. According to Global Language Monitor, around 5,400 new words are created every year; it's only the 1,000 or so deemed to be in sufficiently widespread use that make it into print.

Let's again revise the terminology of the examples that we just saw above, on how new words are formed:

### 1 Derivation

The commonest method of creating a new word is to add a prefix or suffix to an existing one.

### 2 Back formation

The inverse of the above: the creation of a new root word by the removal of a phantom affix. The noun *sleaze*, for example, was back-formed from "sleazy". A similar process brought about *enthuse*, *aggress* and *donate*.

### 3 Compounding

The juxtaposition of two existing words. Typically, compound words begin life as separate entities, then get hitched with a hyphen, and eventually become a single unit. It's mostly nouns that are formed this way



(claptrap, carbon dating, bailout), but words from other classes can be smooshed together too: into (preposition), nobody (pronoun), daydream (verb), awe-inspiring, environmentally friendly (adjectives).

#### 4 Repurposing

Taking a word from one context and applying it to another. Thus the *crane*, meaning lifting machine, got its name from the long-necked bird, and the *computer mouse* was named after the long-tailed animal.

#### 5 Conversion

Taking a word from one word class and transplanting it to another. The word *giant* was for a long time just a noun, meaning a creature of enormous size, until the early 15th century, when people began using it as an adjective.

#### 6 Eponyms

Words named after a person or place. You may recognise Alzheimer's, atlas, alsatian, diesel, sandwich, mentor, wellington boot and boycott as eponyms .

#### 7 Abbreviations

An increasingly popular method. Some words that you might not have known started out longer are pram (perambulator), taxi/cab (both from taximeter cabriolet), goodbye (God be with you), rifle (rifled pistol), curio (curiosity), van (caravan), sport (disport), wig (periwig), laser (light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation), scuba (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus),etc.

#### 8 Loanwords

Foreign speakers often complain that their language is being overrun with borrowings from English. But the fact is, English itself is a voracious word thief; Most words are borrowed from French, Latin and Greek. eg. Tahitian (tattoo), Russian (mammoth), Mayan (shark), Gaelic (slogan), Japanese (tycoon), etc.

#### 9 Onomatopoeia

The creation of a word by imitation of the sound it is supposed to make. Plop, ow, barf, cuckoo, bunch, bump and buzz all originated this way.

#### 10 Reduplication

The repetition, or near-repetition, of a word or sound. To this method we owe the likes of flip-flop, goody-goody, boo-boo, helter-skelter, picnic, hanky-panky, lovey-dovey, pom-pom, hip hop , etc.

#### 11 Error

Misspellings, mishearings, mispronunciations and mistranscriptions rarely produce new words in their own right, but often lead to new forms in conjunction with other mechanisms. Scramble, for example, seems to have originated as a variant of scrabble; but over time, the two forms have taken on different meanings, so one word has now become two.



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## 12 Portmanteaus

Compounding with a twist. Take one word, remove an arbitrary portion of it, then put in its place either a whole word, or a similarly clipped one. Thus were born sitcom, paratroops, internet, podcast etc.

Some words came about via a **combination of methods**:

- Yuppie is the result of initialism ((y)oung and (up)wardly mobile) plus derivation (+ -ie).
- Cop, in the sense of police officer, is an abbreviation of a derivation (copper derives from the northern British dialect verb cop, meaning to catch)

For long periods, borrowings from French were *in vogue*. In the 19th century, loanwords from Indian languages bungalow, cot, juggernaut, jungle, loot, shampoo, thug were included.

## VARIOUS KINDS OF WORDS

### 1. antonym

NOUN

A word that means the opposite of another word.

Like : day-night, up-down

### 2. argot

NOUN

Words that are used by a particular group of people, especially that functions out of the law.eg: pirates, robbers,etc. sometimes its secretive also, so that others can't understand.

Like : claws for hands, fangs for teeth.



### 3. back formation

NOUN

A new word that is formed by removing a part of another word. In English, 'burgle' is a back formation from 'burglar'.

### 4. buzzword

NOUN

A word that has become very popular, especially a word relating to a particular activity or subject. Eg: Saifeena, yolo

### 5. capitonym

NOUN

A word that changes its meaning, and sometimes its pronunciation, when the first letter is capitalized. for example Polish and polish

### 6. catchword

NOUN

A word used for representing a particular idea, usually one that is popular for a short time. Eg: Y2K.

### 7. cognate

NOUN

A word in a language that has the same origin as a word in a different language. Eg : *central* in English means similar to *central* in Spanish, chocolate, etc.

### 8. collocate

NOUN

- A word that is often used with another word. Eg: Deep: Deep feeling, deep pockets, deep sleep, deep trouble.



### **9. conjunct**

NOUN

A word or phrase such as 'however' or 'what's more' that links what has already been said or written to what follows. Conjuncts are also called linkers.

### **10. conjunctive**

ADJECTIVE

Relating to or acting as a conjunction. e.g. but, and, yet, or, because, nor, although, since, unless, while, where etc

### **11. connective**

NOUN

A word that is used to join other words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. For example 'and', 'because', and 'but'.

### **12. content word**

NOUN

A word that carries meaning in speech and writing. Content words are words that name objects of reality and their qualities. They signify actual living things, family members, natural phenomena common actions, characteristics, etc.

### **13. contraction**

NOUN

A word made by leaving out a letter or letters of a word or words. For example 'can't' is a contraction of the word 'cannot'.

### **14. demonym**

NOUN

A name used for a person who lives in or comes from a particular place, such as Parisian for a person from Paris.





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### 15. derivation

NOUN

A word that comes from another language. Eg: cycle, cigarette

### 16. diminutive

NOUN

A word formed by adding a diminutive (small) suffix. Eg: booklet, duckling, etc.

### 17. discourse marker

NOUN

A word or phrase that is used to indicate that one stage or topic in a conversation has finished and a new one is beginning. For example, 'OK', 'so', 'right', and 'anyway' are often used as discourse markers. In the sentence 'Anyway, let's think about the cost of all this', 'anyway' signals that one stage of the conversation is over. Discourse markers often indicate a change of speaker.

### 18. eponym

NOUN

A person that a place, discovery, era or invention is named after, for example 'Elizabethan' or 'braille'.

### 19. eponym

NOUN

A product name that is frequently used to replace a particular item, such as 'aspirin' for painkiller or 'hoover' for vacuum cleaner.

### 20. false friend

NOUN

a word in a language that has a different meaning from a similar-sounding word in another language, for example the English 'actual' and the German 'aktuell' (right now).

These similarities can confuse language learners and often cause errors.



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### 21. function word

NOUN

A word used mainly for expressing relationships between other words in a sentence, for example a conjunction like 'but' or a preposition like 'with'.

### 22. homograph

NOUN

a word that is spelled the same as another word but has a different meaning and sometimes a different pronunciation. Eg: minute, row, etc.

### 23. homonym

NOUN

a word that is spelled the same or sounds the same as another word but has a different meaning. eg: address, bark, etc.

### 24. homophone

NOUN

a word that sounds the same as another word but has its own spelling, meaning, and origin. Eg: flower and flour, ate and eight, etc.

### 25. hypernym

NOUN

A *hypernym* is a word whose meaning includes the meanings of other words. For instance, *flower* is a hypernym of *daisy* and *rose*.

### 26. hyponym

NOUN

A word with a more specific meaning than another more general word of which it is an example. For example, 'potato' is a hyponym of 'vegetable'.



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### 27. keyword

NOUN

A word that represents the main feature or idea of something. Eg: brownies : vanilla ice cream, chocolate, fudgy, walnut, etc.

### 28. legalism

NOUN

A word or phrase used in law. eg: bar, code, etc.

### 29. linker

NOUN

A word or phrase such as 'however' or 'what's more' that links what has already been said or written to what follows. Linkers are also called conjuncts.

### 30. loanword

NOUN

A word from one language that is used in another language without being changed. Eg: guru (Sanskrit), anonymous (Greek), wanderlust (German), etc.

### 31. malapropism

NOUN

A word that is used wrongly but sounds like the word that you should have used, especially one that creates a funny change of meaning. eg: *tantrum bicycle* instead of *tandem bicycle*, *upsetting the apple tart* instead of *upsetting the apple cart*, etc.

### 32. metonym

NOUN

A word or phrase used to refer to something else that it is closely related to. For example, 'Delhi' is often used as a metonym for the Indian government.



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### 33. monosyllable

NOUN

A word with only one syllable. The words 'yes' and 'no' are monosyllables.

### 34. nonce word

NOUN

A word that someone invents for a particular purpose or occasion. Eg: hangry (hungry+angry).

### 35. the operative word

PHRASE

Used for referring to the most important word in a sentence. Eg: he *was* (in the past) a painter.

### 36. part of speech

NOUN

One of the main grammatical groups that a particular word belongs to according to the way it is used in a sentence, for example noun, verb, adjective, or adverb.

### 37. polysyllable

NOUN

A word that has more than two syllables. Eg: windmill, children, etc.

### 38. portmanteau word

NOUN

A word that combines the sound and meaning of two words, for example 'smog', a combination of 'smoke' and 'fog'

### 39. postmodifier

NOUN



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The part of a noun group, adjective group, or verb group that comes after the most important word (the head) and adds information about it. For example in the noun group ‘the rules of the game’, the prepositional phrase ‘of the game’ is a postmodifier.

#### **40. premodifier**

NOUN

The part of a noun group, adjective group, or verb group that comes before the most important word (the head), and adds information about it. For example in the noun group ‘the best people’, ‘the’ and ‘best’ are premodifiers.

#### **41. pro-form**

NOUN

A word, usually a pronoun, that is used in place of another word to avoid repeating it. Eg: he, you, here, there, etc.

#### **42. rhyme**

NOUN

A word that ends with the same sound as another word. Eg : Slay – play, whine - nine, ten – pen, etc.

#### **43. synonym**

NOUN

A word that has the same meaning as another word. For example ‘scared’ is a synonym for ‘afraid’.

#### **44. variant**

NOUN

A different form, spelling, or pronunciation of a word. Watch, watched, watching, etc.

#### **45. weasel word**

NOUN



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A word that someone uses to avoid saying what they really mean. Eg: somewhat, in most respects, it seems like... etc.

## Word Classes

Modern grammars normally recognise four major word classes (verb, noun, adjective, adverb) and five other word classes (determiners, preposition, pronoun, conjunction, interjection), making nine word classes (or parts of speech) in total. But note that some grammarians use different systems and may recognise eight or ten different word classes.

### Verbs

Verbs are action or state words like: *run, work, study, be, seem*

### Nouns

Nouns are words for people, places or things like: *mother, town, Rome, car, dog*

### Adjectives

Adjectives are words that describe nouns, like: *kind, clever, expensive*

### Adverbs

Adverbs are words that modify verbs, adjectives or other adverbs, like: *quickly, back, ever, badly, away generally, completely*

### Prepositions

Prepositions are words usually in front of a noun or pronoun and expressing a relation to another word or element, like: *after, down, near, of, plus, round, to*

### Pronouns

Pronouns are words that take the place of nouns, like: *me, you, his, it, this, that, mine, yours, who, what*

### Interjections

Interjections have no grammatical value - words like: *ah, hey, oh, ouch, um, well*

## Word Forms

### Prefixes

List of prefixes with examples: *non-, inter-, post-*



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### Suffixes

Lists of suffixes and examples in use: *-ation, -al, -ize*

### Words starting with *mono-* and *poly-*

Lists of words starting with the combining forms *mono-* and *poly-*

### Contractions

Shortened forms of words and phrases, common in speech: *I'm, aren't, here's, gonna*

### WH Question Words

The words we use to make question word questions: *Who, What, How*

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