

Latin Lessons 3 and 4

The primary goals of Latin Lessons 3 and 4 are to introduce Latin prefixes and various linguistic processes related to prefixes — assimilation, euphony and vowel gradation — and to examine abbreviations and acronyms (acronyms are “pronounceable abbreviations” like scuba and NATO). Following that, in the audio discussion of these lessons, we’ll take an up-close look at the Latin prefixes you’ll be memorizing here, along with the bases contained in Lessons 3 and 4.

Let’s start with Lesson 3, a major goal of which is to begin your study of English prefixes which derive from Latin. We’ll cover the majority of them here and in Lesson 4, and we’ll finish up prefixes in Lesson 5.

What are prefixes? They’re one type of affix, so before we address prefixes, let’s first define the broader term “affix.” It’s “a collective term for prefixes, suffixes and infixes.” Usually affixes are one- or two-syllable units — some are just one letter — appended onto or into a base, but for our purposes, that’s only onto, in other words, before or after the base. In this course we won’t deal with infixes, that is, affixes which are inserted inside a base, though they do exist. Latin and Greek just didn’t hand English independently operating infixes, or even many words that contain infixes, so they’re really not worth our time here. All the same, let’s look at one Latinate word in English which contains all three types of affix, “intangible.” “Intangible” contains a base TAG-, a prefix *in-*, an infix *-n-* (the *-n-* that’s between the *-a-* and the *-g-* of the base) and a suffix *-ible*. All of those — *in-*, *-n-* and *-ible* — are affixes.

Now let’s talk about prefixes, one type of affix. A prefix is “one or more letters or syllables placed at the beginning of a word to modify its meaning.” The *pre-* on the front of the word “prefix” is a good example of a prefix.

Latin prefixes involve two important linguistic processes you need to be aware of: assimilation and vowel gradation. Assimilation is “the process by which adjacent sounds acquire similar or identical characteristics.” For our purposes, those sounds will almost always be consonants. Assimilation happens because it’s hard to say some consonant sounds together, for instance, /n/ and /l/. Especially when we’re speaking quickly, we tend to blur the /n/ and make it sound like the /l/ it’s next to, as in the word “illiterate” which is originally in-literate. The letters /b/ and /p/ can do the same, for example, “oppress” which is originally a combination of the prefix *ob-* and the base *-press*. To say “ob-press,” you have to stop your breath stream for a moment, which is annoying. So to make it easier to say, we “assimilate” the /b/ to the /p/, and the result is two p’s. That’s why there’s a double -pp- in “oppress.” This class is going to improve your spelling, I guarantee it.

That process of simplifying pronunciation has a name, euphony, “the tendency toward greater ease of pronunciation resulting in combinative changes, largely due to speed and economy of utterance,” which is anything but a euphonic definition. Still, I think you get the point. It’s simply more euphonic to say “alliteration” than “ad-literation,” so we blur the /d/ into the /l/. Why work hard when you can avoid it?

Let's look at some examples of assimilation and euphony. Please turn to page 40 of your textbook and look at exercise IV, beginning with number 1: ad- + lusion. What happens to ad- when it comes in front of -lusion? The /d/ changes to /l/ and the word becomes "allusion." Got it? Good! Now look at number 2: sub- + fuse. What happens to /b/ when it collides with /f/? That's right. It becomes /f/, suf-, and the word changes into "suffuse." You see how to do this? Okay. Pause this presentation please and do the rest of this exercise, numbers 3-10. When you're done, restart the presentation and I'll give you the answers. But one hint before you leave: not all consonant clusters have to assimilate. Sometimes consonant sounds can be easily pronounced together. In that case, there won't be any change. You'll see a few of those here. Now you can pause the presentation and I'll see you on the other side.

All done? Let's start with number 3: ad- + rogate. What happens to the prefix? It changes into ar- and the word becomes "arrogate" which means to seize something unjustly, so if you arrogate a lot, what are you? Arrogant! Next one, number 4: dis- + tract. Well, it's easy to say -str-, so no need to assimilate anything here: distraction. Number 5: ex- + fusive. While "ex-fusive" is not impossible to say, "effusive" is much easier and therefore the word exists in that assimilated form.

Okay, let's speed this up. What's the answer to number 6? Occlusion. Number 7? Irruption, which is the opposite of an eruption. Eruptions are when things burst "out"; irruptions are when they burst "in," as they can do underground, or so geologists say. Number 8? Admonition. No express need for assimilation here so it doesn't happen. 9? Obtrusive. Another case where assimilation is unnecessary. And finally 10? Corrosive. The /n/ becomes /r/. Got it? You'll see a lot of assimilation with Latin prefixes so be sure you understand this principle.

Now let's discuss the other important linguistic process associated with Latin prefixes, vowel gradation, which is "a change in the internal vowel of a base, often when the base is prefixed." So, for instance, the base CAPT- frequently changes to CEPT- if it has a prefix. Thus, "caption" becomes "reception" when the prefix *re-* is added to CAPT-. Similarly HAB- ("have") becomes HIB- if it has a prefix like *in-*, as in "inhibition." The reason for this vowel gradation goes back to Latin itself. When an additional syllable was added to the front of a word and deflected away some of the force normally applied to the base in pronunciation, the Romans preferred to use a less colorful vowel, that is, one that has a weaker sound. For instance, /a/ sounds stronger than /e/ or /i/. If that doesn't make sense, don't worry about it. You don't need to know why vowel gradation happens, only that it does and that it will result in many variant forms.

You should know, too, that vowel gradation happens for other reasons, not just because there's a prefix. The base POND-, for example, which means "heavy" and gives us words like "ponderous" meaning "bulky, slow-moving," has another form PEND- which uses a different vowel and has a slightly different meaning "hang." From PEND- we get words like "pendant, pendulum." Note that the vowel here gradates — that is, changes — from /o/ to /e/ but not because a prefix has been added. The point is, vowel gradation is a broadly occurring phenomenon in language which in this course we will see mainly with prefixes in Latin but not only with them. And that's it for the linguistics in Lesson 3.

In Lesson 4, the textbook discusses another set of linguistic phenomena: abbreviations and acronyms. I'm going to focus on the latter here (acronyms) because they create words, and words are what this class is all about. I'm just going to assume you know what an abbreviation is (a shortened form of a word or words). All I want you to know is those abbreviations Mr. Ayers lists in this chapter, in particular, those in Exercise V on page 46. Let's turn to that page now. You should be able to find all of the abbreviations listed here and their meanings in your dictionary, so I'll leave it to you to do that, but please note that some of these abbreviations have a number of meanings. For instance, "q." (number 6 in this exercise) can mean "quart, quarter, queen, question" and several other things. Really all I'm requiring of you here is to recognize that something like "Skt." or "KGB" is an abbreviation. I won't test you on any of their meanings, except some of the ones in the second column but we'll talk about those later.

Acronyms, on the other hand, are far more pertinent here because they straddle the line between abbreviations and words. An acronym is "an abbreviation that spells a word or pronounceable unit," and thus becomes a word in and of itself. It's one of the more important ways new words are introduced into English today. Often people are unaware that a word was originally an acronym. For instance, the "zip" in "zip code," that number you put on a letter to show the area where you live, it comes originally from an abbreviation for "Zone Improvement Plan." "Yuppies" are "young urban professionals." "Scuba" originated as "a self-contained underwater breathing apparatus." What about NIMBY? Do you know what that acronym stands for? "Not in my backyard," meaning "Don't build that prison or power plant next door to me!" "Snafu," meaning "a big problem," goes back to World War II where it denoted "Situation Normal All ... Fouled Up," or a different F-word, one that a soldier might feel comfortable saying. It's worth noting that all these acronyms and the ones listed in the textbook have been coined in the last century or so, for the most part after World War II when American military language which favors acronyms began to permeate colloquial speech. There is very little evidence for widespread use of acronyms before the 1940's, all but none before the nineteenth century.

Let's look at some more acronyms. Please go to Exercise VI on page 46 of your textbook. There you'll find a list of six acronyms: flak, laser, loran, radar, rem and SEATO. Just as with abbreviations, I'm not expecting you to know what these words mean, only that they are acronyms, but knowing their definitions can help you remember that. And besides, getting at the real truth behind words, their "etymology" in the original sense of the word, is always fun, isn't it? So get out your dictionary and give it a try. Then start listening for acronyms in the world around you. You'll find lots of them.

And that's the end of this video presentation about the linguistic principles in Lessons 3 and 4. Next you should listen to the audio presentation on the prefixes and bases in Lessons 3 and 4. You'll find a link to the audio presentation on the course web site. Happy Etymologizing!

ASSIGNMENT

This is the audio presentation covering the assignments in Latin Lessons 3 and 4. Please open your textbook to page 37 where Mr. Ayers begins the list of Latin prefixes you need to memorize in Lesson 3. As I will do always when we cover new forms to memorize, I'm not going to

mention all the prefixes here, just the ones about which I have something to note. But you are responsible for knowing all of them, including those I add to Ayers' list.

The first prefix is *ab-*, which can show up also as *a-* or *abs-*. It means "away, from, away from." It's important to note that this prefix never assimilates, whereas its close cousin *ad-*, the next prefix, often does. *Ad-* means "to, toward," to which you should add the meanings "at, very, very much." This highly assimilating prefix can show up as *ac-*, *af-*, *ag-*, *al-*, *an-*, *ap-* and in several other assimilated forms, so remember this: if you see a Latinate word beginning with *a-* and two identical consonants — *acc-*, *agg-* and so on — then the prefix is really *ad-* ("to"), only very rarely *ab-* ("from"). And in general you should note that *ad-* is much more common than *ab-* in the derivatives we get from Latin.

The next prefix is *ambi-* meaning "around" which you should note can also show up as just *amb-* without the *-i-*. About the next two prefixes, *ante-* and *circum-*, I have nothing to add, other than memorize them. However, there's one thing worth thinking about with *ante-*. It means "before." It doesn't mean "against." There is another English prefix *anti-* which does mean "against," but that prefix comes from Greek and is attached to Greek bases, or it should be. We'll study *anti-* later in the class.

The next prefix on the list, *con-*, is an important one. Put a star by it. You'll see it a lot. Note that *con-* often assimilates, showing up as *col-*, *cor-* and *com-*, and even just *co-*. Its basic meaning is "with, together," but it can also just intensify the base it's attached to, which is why Ayers adds the meaning "very," that is, "very much." We'll discuss later why some prefixes have this intensive sense. For the moment just note that *con-* does this, as does *ad-*.

Contra- is the next prefix. I have nothing to add about it either, so onto the following one: *de-*. Its basic meaning is "down" as in "descend," but it often carries the connotation "off, away from." It can also convey a sense of removal (as in dehumidify, decontaminate) or negation (i.e. "not," as in demerit, de-emphasize). Like *ad-* and *con-* it also sometimes just denotes emphasis, which is why Ayers adds the meaning "thoroughly," in other words, "very much."

Finally, the last prefix in this lesson is *dis-*, which can assimilate to *dif-* or just *di-*. Its basic meaning is "apart, in different directions." Think "disunion" or "dispel." Words like those make it easy to remember the meaning of this prefix and will help you not confuse it with the prefix we just learned *de-* which means "down": *dis-* "apart"; *de-* "down." Remember that! And like *de-*, *dis-* can also sometimes convey a sense of negation ("not"), as in "disable."

Since we're doing Lessons 3 and 4 here, let's jump ahead to Lesson 4 and its prefixes so we can finish up all the prefixes in these two lessons. Then we'll come back to Lesson 3 and look at the bases to be memorized there. After Lessons 3 and 4, there is one more lesson of prefixes (Lesson 5). We'll cover the prefixes there in the next presentation.

On page 43, Ayers' second list of prefixes begins with *ex-*, which can show up as *ef-* or just *e-*. Its basic meaning "out, out of, from" leads to a number of secondary connotations: (1) "undo," as in "emancipate" (i.e. "un-enslave"); (2) "past, former, formerly," as in "ex-president"; (3) "bad, badly," as in "exasperate"; and finally (4), like *ad-*, *con-* and *de-*, *ex-* can also just convey a sense

of “very much, completely,” as in “eloquent.” To this could be added the senses “beyond” and “without” but I think the list of meanings for *ex-* is long enough already. One last thing to note about *ex-* is that sometimes the letter *-x-* at the end of the prefix absorbs the *S-* at the beginning of certain bases. So, for instance, the base *SPECT-* loses its initial *S-* in our word “expect.” The same is true of “execute” where the base *SECUT-* drops its initial *S-*. Watch out for this!

The next prefix, *extra-*, is an extension of *ex-* which explains its meaning “outside, beyond.”

The next two prefixes use the same form, *in-*, but have very different meanings. The first *in-* means “not,” as in “ineffective.” The second has a basic meaning of “in,” as in “inject,” but also conveys all sorts of secondary connotations: “within, on, into, against, completely.” Because these two prefixes are identical in form, it’s hard sometimes to tell them apart. But it’s possible. Here’s how to do it. First, look for a negative sense in the “in-” word you’re etymologizing. Can you hear the basic negativity in words like “inaccurate, incapable, inappropriate”? If you can hear an obvious “not,” then it’s a good guess the prefix is the negative *in-*. Conversely, if you can hear an “in” sense in the word — “inject, intrude, indent” — then the word is likely using the *in-* prefix that means “in.”

There’s another tendency which can help you make this distinction. If there’s a second prefix after *in-* — yes, Latinate words in English can have two, even three prefixes — that is, if a word has *in-* plus another prefix like “indefinite” (*in-* + *de-*), the *in-* always means “not.” If, on the other hand, the *in-* is followed directly by a base that has a verb sense — e.g. induce (literally, “lead in”) — then the *in-* most likely means “in.” But this second principle (*in-* + a verb base) is only a tendency, not a rule. Still, it helps!

Finally, be aware that both these prefixes assimilate frequently. Both *in-*’s will often change into *im-*, *il-* or *ir-*, as in “impel, illicit, irreverent.” There are some differences between these prefixes, however. The “not” *in-* prefix assimilates to *ig-* sometimes (as in “ignorant, ignoble”), where the “in” *in-* prefix doesn’t. Conversely, the “in” *in-* prefix has French forms *en-/em-* (as in “endure, embrace”) which the “not” *in-* prefix doesn’t.

The next prefixes I want to comment on — I’m skipping *infra-* here, but you still need to learn it! — are *inter-* and *intra-*. Be careful to distinguish these. They look alike but they mean very different things. *Inter-* means “between, among”; *intra-* means “within.” “Interscholastic” denotes activities which take place “between different universities.” “Intramural” sports occur “within” the same university.

At this point I want to add a prefix, *juxta-*, which means “near, near to, next to, beside.” From this we get words like “juxtapose” meaning “put next to.”

Besides the negating prefix *in-*, Latin also gave us a number of other ways to append “not” to the front of a word. One is *non-* — Mr. Ayers includes that one in his list — but he neglects another, *ne-* which is another prefix I want to add to his list. *Ne-* is not very common but it shows up in some important words like “nefarious, nescient, neuter.” Learn it!

The next-to-last prefix in Lesson 4 is another big assimilator, *ob-*, which can show up as *of-*, *op-*, *os-*, *oc-* and even sometimes just *o-* (as in “omit”). Its basic meaning is “face-to-face,” which naturally conveys a sense of confrontation giving it the additional senses “toward, against, in the way (as in ‘obstruct’).” So it often has a negative sense as in “oppress” — this is a process called “degeneration” which we’ll talk about later — but not always. “Offer,” for instance, literally “bring toward,” is neutral in sense. Finally, like *ad-*, *con-*, *de-* and a few other prefixes, *ob-* can simply intensify the sense of the base, which is why it also has the connotation “completely.”

The last prefix here is *per-*. “Through” is its basis sense. It never assimilates. It’s perfect, not “peffect”! But it’s worth noting that it does have a number of extenuating connotations based on “through”: (1) “wrongly, to the bad,” as in “pervert, perfidious” — the implication seems to be that going all the way “through” something leads you into bad places — and (2) like so many of its peers, *per-* can also mean “thoroughly, completely.” And now we’re “through” with that! A thorough job!

To end this presentation, let’s look at the bases in Lessons 3 and 4. As with prefixes, I won’t talk about every one of them, only those which I have something to comment on.

So please turn back to page 38. There, the first base is CED-/CESS-. To that, add the form CEED-. This form you’ll see in words like “proceed, exceed.”

Jumping down the list to LEV-, add the forms [LIEF-/LIEV-] which is the way this base occurs in words like “relief, relieve.”

The base LOQU- is cognate — remember what “cognate” means, that two words are closely related linguistically? — LOQU- comes from the same Indo-European root as (and thus is cognate with) our word “talk.” The root was originally something like **tlk-*, which you have to admit is fairly unpronounceable. Where the Romans solved that problem by creating LOQU- — they dropped the initial *t-* and added an *-o-* between the *-l-* and *-k-* which they changed from /*k/* to /*kw/* (spelled *qu-*) — we inserted an *-a-* to separate the *-t-* and *-l-* and created “talk.” If knowing that works, use it to help you remember that LOQU- means “speak.” If not, forget it. Moving on, ...

PREC-, which means “request, beg, prayer,” has a homonym, another base that looks exactly the same but has a completely different meaning, “price.” From this second “price” PREC- base we get the word “appreciate,” literally “to put a price on something.” Mr. Ayers nowhere includes this “price” PREC- base in his textbook, so you are not responsible for memorizing it, though it can’t hurt to learn it.

Finally, the last base in Lesson 3, VEN-/VENT-/VENU- has another form you should be aware of, VENI-, seen in words like “convenience.” You should add that form to this base.

Now let’s look at the bases in Lesson 4. Please turn to page 44. As always, I’ll comment on only those bases about which I have something to say, but remember you need to memorize them all.

The first base, CRUC-, has another form you should know: CRUX- which is seen in our Latin derivative “crux,” a word for the central focus of something, usually a problem.

Put stars by the following three bases: HAB-/AB-/HIB-, SENT-/SENS- and VERT-/VERS-. These bases show up in a lot of English derivatives. Make sure you commit them to memory.

I have only one more comment to make here, about the base TURB- which Ayers defines as “disturb,” but defining TURB- as “disturb” breaks his own rule that a definition shouldn’t contain the word itself, so let’s add the meanings “upset, stir.”

And that’s it for this presentation. Please work on memorizing the prefixes and bases introduced here. Don’t forget that there are on-line drills to help you quiz yourself. Then please do the sentence exercises in Lessons 3 and 4 on pages 39-40 and 44-46. The answers to those exercises are available on the course web site.

Oh, and one last thing before I sign off. If you find that you’re having trouble remembering the meaning of some form, here’s one solution. Create a “hook-word,” a quick way of reminding yourself what the form means. If, for instance, you can’t seem to remember that the base GREG- means “flock, herd,” find something that helps you recall the definition. It can be a real derivative like “congregation,” literally “the act of flocking together” — and if that works, use it! — but the hook-word doesn’t have to be something valid etymologically. It can be personal, even silly. Say you have a friend named Greg. When you see the base GREG-, say to yourself “Last night I ‘heard’ from my friend Greg.” Or “Have you ‘heard’ from Greg lately?” “Heard”? GREG-? Get it? Use the hook-words “I heard Greg” to help you remember that GREG- means “herd.” Hook-words don’t have to be logical or dignified. They just have to work long enough for you to remember a definition automatically.

And that’s the end of this audio presentation. Happy etymologizing!