Prefixes

Guidelines:

- **A prefix is a group of letters that appears at the front of a word.** A prefix affects the meaning of the root (base) word to which it is attached. To determine whether or not a group of letters is a prefix, remove them from the word. The letters are a prefix if a known word remains. For example, remove the letters *un* from the following words: *unhappy, untie, uncle, uninterested.* In which word are the letters *un* <u>not</u> a prefix? Yes, these letters are not a prefix in the word *uncle*.

- **Make students aware of the following warnings about prefixes.**

    1. Most prefixes have more than one meaning. For example, the prefix *un* can mean "not" as in *unhappy*, or "do the opposite of" as in *untie.* Teach the multiple meanings of the most common prefixes, and use careful language during lessons such as, "the prefix *un* <u>sometimes</u> means not."

    2. Be careful of letter clusters that look like prefixes, but aren't. For example, when the letters *un* are removed from *uncle*, no recognizable root word is left. In addition, when the letters *in* are removed from *invented*, the word that remains has no relation to the whole word. The prefixes that cause the most difficulty are *re, in,* and *dis.*

    3. Don't rely solely on word-part clues to determine meaning. Use context clues as well to verify a word's meaning. For example, you might think the word *unassuming* means "not assuming/not supposing" instead of its actual meaning "modest." It is estimated that about 15 to 20% of the prefixed words students will encounter share this complexity (White et al., 1989).

- **Teach only the most common prefixes.** The chart that follows shows the most common based on a count of prefixed words appearing in the *Word Frequency Book* (Carroll, Davies, and Richman, 1971). The prefix *un* alone accounts for almost one-third of the total. The top three on the list account for over half.

Rank	Prefix	%
1.	un (not, opposite of)	26
2.	re (again)	14
3.	in, im, ir, il (not)	11
4.	dis (not, opposite of)	7
5.	en, em (cause to)	4
6.	non (not)	4
7.	in, im (in or into)	4
8.	over (too much)	3
9.	mis (wrongly)	3
10.	sub (under)	3

Rank	Prefix	%
11.	pre (before)	3
12.	inter (between, among)	3
13.	fore (before)	3
14.	de (opposite of)	2
15.	trans (across)	2
16.	super (above)	1
17.	semi (half)	1
18.	anti (against)	1
19.	mid (middle)	1
20.	under (too little)	1

All other prefixes (about 100) accounted for only 3% of the words.

Prefixes

Word Study

Key Concept: Explain that a prefix is a group of letters added to the beginning of a word, changing its meaning.

Teacher Model: Write the word *unhappy* on the chalkboard. Don't say the word, but give students time to examine its parts. Then model how to use knowledge of prefixes to decode the word and figure out its meaning.

Think-Aloud: I know that sometimes a base word contains parts added to it, such as a prefix. In this word I see the prefix *un,* meaning not. The rest of the word is *happy*. I can put the two word parts together to get the word *unhappy*. Since *un* means not, this word means "not happy." Looking for common word parts, such as prefixes, is a good way to read an unfamiliar word and figure out its meaning.

Blending Practice: Write the following words on the chalkboard. Have students chorally read each word. Provide modeling as necessary.

unafraid	**uncover**	**unheard**
unpleasant	**unprotected**	**unhurt**
unreal	**unroll**	**uneven**
unstuck	**uncap**	**unwrap**

Point Out Non-Examples: Explain to students that just because a word begins with the letters *un* (or any other letters for a prefix) doesn't mean it's a prefix. They must look at what's left over when removing the prefix to see if it's a real word. For example, write the words *unable, unplug, uncle,* and *under* on the chalkboard. Ask students to identify which words begin with a prefix and why.