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READING IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL: HOW TO ADD WORDS TO YOUR VOCABULARY PART II

Kenneth VanderMeulen

PART II

Readers will remember that in the fall issue, Part I of “Adding Words to One’s Vocabulary” appeared. Editor Ken VanderMeulen continues this series with the transcripts of tapes 3 and 4 dealing with prefixes and roots. Prefixes, suffixes and root words are those word elements commonly best taught and understood by teachers and students alike. However, as is pointed out in the following transcripts their importance in vocabulary development, especially that of the less understood “word root” is greatly underestimated. As James F. Shepherd aptly states, “When teachers see a logical relation between the meanings of Latin or Greek roots and English vocabulary, they should communicate this information to their students.” (*INSIGHTS, INTO WHY AND HOW TO READ*, International Reading Association, 1976). Students and teachers alike will find these self-help tapes to be of value in understanding the word structure of our English language.

William L. Holladay
Associate Editor

Tape III

This is the third tape in the series concerned with ways to help one’s reading vocabulary grow. Let’s begin with a reasonable question—Why is more emphasis suddenly being put on learning Latin and Greek word parts in our modern English? The answer is equally reasonable; a larger and larger percentage of our everyday language is including technical words, and we no longer can say that American English is based on Anglo-Saxon. Seventy to eighty percent of the new words being added to our language each year are words put together from Greek and Latin parts. All inventions, discoveries, and developments in science—all new concepts and machines had to have names. In this country, ever since the industrial revolution first got underway, we have been taking word elements from the Classical Languages for these purposes, to explain, describe, and name the parts that made up our innovations.

In Norman Lewis' book *Word Power Made Easy* the statement is made that the invention of *radio* alone put 5,000 new words into the language. Every part had to be named; every concept, and every process had to have words to fit the ideas. Thus, *micro* and *phone* were joined to name the part that was sensitive to the human voice. *Amplifier* named the device to enlarge the sound for *transmission*, and so forth.

Radio was invented more than fifty years ago, and many other inventions have come on the scene since. Whole new scientific areas have opened up, and thousands of new words have come into our world of reading. Dr. James I. Brown of the University of Minnesota has done research work which concludes that sixty to seventy percent of American English today is made up of elements which come from Latin and Greek.

To help you demonstrate to yourself just how important those language word parts have become, I'd like to have you participate right now by taking a sheet of note paper on which to write some roots and prefixes. The directions are simple, but should be followed carefully. Write the following prefixes down the left side of the note paper, with their meanings:

First, write d-i-s, and put parentheses around the *s*, and follow the prefix with a hyphen. Below d-i-s, write the meaning—*apart*. Although *dis*, when used with verbs, takes on the meaning of "do the opposite," as in disown, discharge, disjoint; we are going to look at the prefix used with Latin roots. So, the meaning is apart, as we said before. The next prefix is r-e (hyphen), and the meaning on the next line should be *back* or *again*. Prefix number three is d-e (hyphen), and the meaning below it should be *down* or *away*. Number four is e-x (hyphen), and put the letter *x* in parentheses. Now put the meaning *out* below that. The parentheses merely show that sometimes the prefix is used as a complete unit, and sometimes the letter in parentheses is not used. Prefix number five is c-o-n (hyphen). The meaning is *together*, or *with*. And, the last prefix is a-d (hyphen), and put the *d* in parentheses. The meaning of a-d, *to* or *toward*.

Now, in order to show how these prefixes have multiple ways of combining with Latin root words to make a variety of fairly common English words, we need to put a set of roots in six columns across the note paper, one root at the head of each column. The first column, just to the right of the prefixes, should be headed by the root t-r-a-c-t, again with the meaning—pull or draw—above or below it, depending on where you have room.

Now, move one column to the right, and put the second root s-t-r-u-c-t at the head. The word *build* is the meaning. In the third column, write g-r-e-s-s at the head, and the meaning, *step*. In the fourth vertical column, write j-e-c-t, and the meaning *throw*. The fifth and sixth roots have two spellings and I'd like to have you put them both in. For the fifth, write c-e-d and the other spelling c-e-s-s, and the meaning for both spellings is *move* or *go*. And, at the top of the sixth column, write m-i-s and m-i-t. This root means *send* or *let go*.

I'm sure that you have been noticing the number of combinations you can make out of this little set of word elements. I suggest that you look at

just a couple with me now, and then take the paper along to fill in the remaining possible squares with the words. Let's look at the last vertical column, and start with the top prefix—first you have dismiss, next line down we see both remit and remiss—both good American words—when you see a bill marked “please remit” you know it still means what it meant some two thousand years ago—“send back.” Next prefix d-e-, used with *mis* and a final *e* means *died* today, can you see why? E-, used with *mit* or *mis* will give us *emit* (send out) or *emission*, the term as applied to modern cars—emission control system. The next, c-o-n-, becomes *com* when used with a root beginning with *m*, and we then have commit, or commission. And the sixth, admit, admission, as when we let someone into a movie or game, the ticket says admit one . . .

We might also note together a few of the combinations which can be made under the column headed by g-r-e-s-s, meaning *step*. D-i-, used with the root, becomes digress, or step apart—one digresses when he parts from his story or speech or routine. Regress, step back, which is the opposite of p-r-o-, meaning forward, which gives us progress. D-e is not combined with gress in a word. E- used with gress, gives us an old-fashioned word for outside door, *egress* might be said to be the counterpart of EXIT. The next combination we see is c-o-n and gress, and *congress* was taken seriously as a term for the concept of the representatives moving or stepping together. Congress has come to mean a few other things in more recent times.

The last one, a-d-, loses the *d* in pronunciation, we don't say aggression—instead, we say aggression, simply doubling the first letter of the root to take the place of the dropped *d*. I leave you to do the rest, and hope you will be impressed with the number of ways a few prefixes and roots give you many concepts for your reading vocabularies.

This is the end of cassette tape number three in the series ADDING WORDS TO ONE'S VOCABULARY. To use number four next, simply push Fast Forward and turn the cassette over when it stops.

Tape Four

This is the fourth in the series of cassette presentations called ADDING WORDS TO ONE'S VOCABULARY. Here again, you will want to have some notepaper and a pen handy. The purpose of this ten minute discussion is to offer you the opportunity to become acquainted with a basic set of word elements which we use in our everyday language, but generally are not recognized as having meanings by themselves.

In the last tape we demonstrated how many of our words are put together with a prefix which acts as a preposition, and a root which gives the action, and we listed a half dozen for your participation.

This time we will take some words which are defined in the various subject matter classes, but no one takes time to help students really attach those ideas in their minds. For instance, when you go to the person who is to check your eyes, what sign or title do you look for? There's the optometrist, there's the oculist, and the ophthalmologist. Since they're your eyes, you

should be told—the Ophthalmologist is specialized to the point of being called an eye surgeon, and you may not need him unless you're in serious trouble. The oculist must have a doctor's degree, the optometrist can only measure your vision. There is the first root, you should become well acquainted with it—metr, or meter, means measure wherever you see it, from barometer, thermometer, to perimeter, diameter and metric. Opto—well, simply means *vision*. Optometrist—vision measure. The letters o-c-u-l will always refer to eye. Thus, bi-(n)ocular means two eyes.

To give you a quick rundown on the roots and prefixes you should become familiar with over the next few months, I have turned to Professor James I. Brown's list, called the Fourteen Word Master Series. Since his research concluded that two-thirds of the total language is based on Latin and Greek, Dr. Brown next looked for the word elements that are most frequently used in modern English. He came out with a list of twenty prefixes and fourteen roots which, he said, are used in over fourteen thousand relatively common American words. He formed words with these word elements.

Your instructor may at this time give you copies of the Master series, for you to use in noting meanings and examples. Stop the cassette while this is done.

Root one in the word precept is *cept*, and another spelling which you should add is c-a-p-t. The meaning is take, or seize, in the sense of grab. The idea in this lesson is to underline the root and add the other spelling. Under a middle column, write the meaning, and in the third column, some examples of the use of that root in other words. Examples of this root might be—intercept, capture, reception, and captive.

We're skipping the prefixes, remember, because they can be looked up, and because we only have time for the roots today.

The root in number two is t-a-i-n, and the other spelling t-e-n. The meaning is hold or have. You know many uses for *tain*, retain (hold back), contain (hold together), obtain, and pertain. The other spelling of *ten*, is found in the word *tenure*, which means the time one holds a position, and lieutenant, one who holds his job in lieu of the captain, and one who holds a building by contract—the *tenant*.

Number three we had before—mit and the other spelling mis, meaning send or let go. Examples are permit and admit, with the other spelling yielding such words as mission, missile, as well as words with prefixes, commission, admission—even the word *promise* (general idea—to send a pledge forward in time).

Root number four is f-e-r, means to carry or bear (that's b-e-a-r) a verb. The verb is given meaning with its prefix—so we have refer (carry back), confer, defer, inference, prefer, interfere, and the word *difference* also comes from this.

S-i-s-t is number five, and the other spelling is s-t-a. The meaning is stand or stay. Common words formed with prefixe, are subsist, resist, persist, and desist. The other spelling, static, standing still; status, our standing in a group. Other words are thermostat, statue, pedestal, and the word staple.

Number six is g-r-a-p-h. Meaning—write or record. The examples are many; and we need only mention geography, telegraph, biography, and demography.

Number seven is l-o-g, and the meaning is *word*. There are other meanings for the word element in other settings, so we will just mention the two examples prologue, a word before, and epilogue, a word on or about the work.

Number eight is s-p-e-c-t, which means look. You can probably begin your example list by yourself, but a few reminders—inspect, respect, spectacle, and spectator.

The next root is spelled p-l-i-c and originally meant fold. We find some change in the idea today, and we see the root in such words as duplicate, implicate, and triplicate. You see, that word element took the meaning that the users wanted it to—now, duplicate and triplicate mean two and three copies.

The combination of t-e-n-d means stretch, and the best example is tendon. Another spelling of that is tens, and we find tense and tension—meaning stretch.

Number eleven had d-u-c-t, or just d-u-c. The meaning is lead, as in the sense of channel. Everyday examples of this use are conduct, reduce, produce, induction, and even the word educate! If you remember that *e*, without the *x* still means *out*, added to duc, meaning lead—we have the idea that education is a leading out of ignorance to knowledge. At least we can hope!

Number twelve, the root is pos, and you should add the second spelling, pon. The meanings are put, or place, for these roots. You use them both in such words as propose, impose, expose, depose, repose, and compose. For the other spelling, component, proponent, exponent, opponent. The prefixes give direction to put or place.

Thirteen has three spellings, fic, fac, fect. The meaning, to do, make, or cause. When a story is made up, we call it fiction. When a company makes commodities for sale, the place is called a factory. When something is made or done wrong, we call it a *defect*. Other words are fictitious, factual, infection.

The last word in the fourteen word master series is mistranscribe, and the root, of course, is s-c-r-i-b; the alternate spelling is s-c-r-i-p-t. The meaning simply write, w-r-i-t-e. Once more, the prefixes are the cues to what is written. Write in or into, you have inscribe, inscription.

A doctor writes ahead for drugs or medicine, that's *prescription*.

If I sign my name *below* or *under* an order, that's a *subscription*.

We'll take up more prefixes another time. Right now, this is the end of *adding words to your vocabulary*, part four. Please push Fast Forward to the end of this tape, so that Number Three part will be ready for use again.