

Forming Adjectives in English

Today's post will deal with another aspect of word transformation (or word formation). In this case I will focus on how to form adjectives. Just as with other aspects of the English language, there are certain patterns that can be followed in order to **form new adjectives from existing words**. In this post, we'll take a closer look at **how to form adjectives in English**, with a focus on some of the most common patterns.

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What are adjectives?

Adjectives are words that modify and describe nouns. An adjective is a type of word that complements the noun and provides more information about it, either by specifying general qualities, detailing particular characteristics that are inherent to it, or by delimiting its scope.

How do we form adjectives?

Unfortunately, there isn't a general rule which you can follow to form adjectives. In many cases, in fact, these adjectives don't even derive from another word. For instance, adjectives like *red*, *small* or *flat*, are not formed through any particular [word formation process](#).

Therefore, in this post we will focus only on those which are formed through a process that can be explained; in this case: suffixation.

But firstly, let's take a look at the typical adjective suffixes and some examples:

SUFFIX	ADJECTIVES EXAMPLES
-able, -ible	comprehensible, understandable, comfortable, predictable, visible
-al, -ial	facial, commercial, industrial, comical, natural
-ful	beautiful, colourful, hopeful, healthful
-ic	classic, heroic, manic, robotic, strategic
-ical	classical, comical, philosophical, hysterical
-ish	girlish, selfish, yellowish, childish, Spanish
-ive, -ative	attractive, competitive, sensitive, creative, imperative
-less	childless, doubtless, questionless, priceless
-eous, -ious, -ous	outrageous, ferocious, adventurous, herbaceous
-y, -ly	angry, hungry, grumpy, corny, cloudy
-ent, -ant	confident, competent, efficient, dominant

Now, we'll see some adjectives (including some from above) and how they were formed. Please note how some spelling changes take place in many cases.

Forming Adjectives from Nouns

In the following table, you can see the different methods to form adjectives from nouns, including the suffixes, the inherent meaning of the suffix, the nouns and their transformation into adjectives.

SUFFIXES	MEANING	NOUNS	ADJECTIVES
-al, -ial	relating to	norm music industry	normal musical industrial
-ic, -ical	having the nature of caused by	class economy romance hero	classical economic/economical romantic heroic
-ful	full of	beauty harm peace	beautiful harmful peaceful
-less	without lacking	end motion speech	endless motionless speechless
-ish	origin nature the same features as	Britain Spain child yellow fool	British Spanish childish yellowish foolish
-eous, -ious, -ous	quality nature	adventure ambition anxiety danger	adventurous ambitious anxious dangerous
-y	like	anger wealth wind wit	angry wealthy windy witty

-ary	relating to quality or place	custom moment	customary momentary
-like	the same features as	child worm	childlike wormlike

Now let's see some examples of sentences with both noun and adjective forms:

NOUN	ADJECTIVE
<i>John loves going on <u>adventures</u>.</i>	<i>John's a very <u>adventurous</u> person.</i>
<i>You're behaving like a <u>child</u>!</i>	<i>Don't be so <u>childish</u>!</i>
<i>The creature had a body like a <u>worm</u>.</i>	<i>The creature had a <u>wormlike</u> body.</i>
<i>The list seemed to have no <u>end</u>.</i>	<i>The list seemed <u>endless</u>.</i>

Forming Adjectives from Verbs

Here's a cool table with the suffixes that some verbs take and their transformation into adjectives. I've also added the intrinsic meaning of the suffix, which helps to understand the meaning of the final adjective after the transformation.

SUFFIXES	MEANING	VERBS	ADJECTIVES
-ive	causing effect	act create talk attract	active creative talkative attractive
-able, -ible	able, can do	read speak break enjoy	readable speakeable breakable enjoyable
-ful	full	play	playful
-ent, -ant	performing agent	obey	obedient

		resist expect please	resistant expectant pleasant
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Now let's see some examples of sentences with both noun and adjective forms:

VERB	ADJECTIVE
<i>She obeys the teacher.</i>	<i>She is obedient to the teacher.</i>
<i>We enjoyed the weekend very much.</i>	<i>The weekend was very enjoyable.</i>
<i>Mary talks too much, doesn't she?</i>	<i>Mary's very talkative, isn't she?</i>

Forming Adjectives from Verbs with *-ed/-ing*

Another way to form adjectives from verbs is to use the past or present participles of the verbs, that is, their *-ed* or *-ing* forms. For instance:

VERB	ADJECTIVE -ED (PAST PARTICIPLE)	ADJECTIVE -ING (PRESENT PARTICIPLE)
<i>to amuse</i>	<i>amused</i>	<i>amusing</i>
<i>to interest</i>	<i>interested</i>	<i>interesting</i>
<i>to surprise</i>	<i>surprised</i>	<i>surprising</i>
<i>to bore</i>	<i>bored</i>	<i>boring</i>

Remember that adjectives ending in *-ed* are used when the subject feels some way, whereas *-ing* adjectives are used when the subject produces the feeling. For more info about these adjectives visit this previous post, where this point is explained in more depth.

Forming Adjectives from Other Adjectives

There are several possibilities to form adjectives from other adjectives. Let's see a couple of cases.

Comparatives and Superlatives (suffixation)

The most common way to form an adjective from another adjective is when we use [comparatives or superlatives](#) from one-syllable adjectives or two-syllable adjectives ending in -y.

Remember that the ending suffixes for these are -er and -est respectively, and that some spelling rules may apply (double the final consonant, change the -y for -i, etc.). For example:

This TV is very big, but mine's bigger.

He's extremely happy. He's probably the happiest person I know.

Prefixation

Also, adjectives can be modified by adding a prefix to them. For instance: *possible* → *impossible*, *regular* → *irregular*, *logical* → *illogical*, etc. However, we will see these in a future post, so keep an eye out for it.

Warning: Adjectives Ending in *-ic/-ical*

In the first table (Adjectives from Nouns), we have seen some adjectives that could have these two endings: *-ic* or *-ical*. However, it must be said that their meanings usually vary.

This difference is not the same for all of them, so whenever you come across a pair like economic/economical or historic/historical, make sure you learn the difference by looking them up in a dictionary. For the moment, I'm going to leave you with a couple of links so you learn some pairs:

- [Classic or Classical?](#)
- [Economic or Economical?](#)
- [Historic or Historical?](#)

I hope you found this post useful. If you did, don't forget to share with your friends and family. 😊

I'll see you in the next post. Until then, don't forget to keep smiling!

This post has been written by Luis Porrás Wadley. Luis is the creator of KSE Academy, an online academy based in Granada and an official Cambridge Exam Preparation Centre. As an English teacher, Luis has been preparing candidates for over 10 years. He has also published popular exam preparation books like Speaking First, Speaking CAE, Speaking CPE, Use of English C1, Writing C1 o The Ultimate B2 First Writing Guide.