

Morphology Made Simple: A Parent's Guide

Morphology

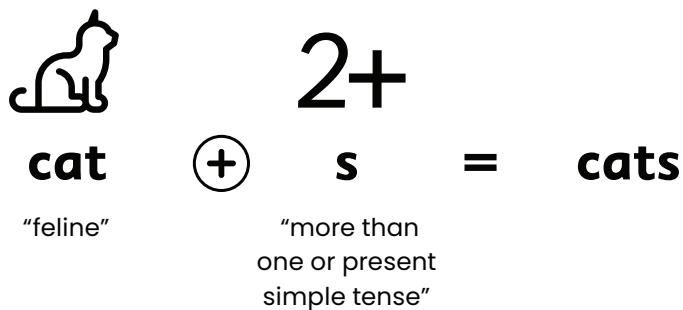
Morphology is the system for understanding how words are built from small structural units called morphemes, which combine in different ways to build and change meaning. By helping children understand how words are built, they learn to notice morphemes, connect spelling with meaning, and become stronger readers, spellers and vocabulary learners.



Morphemes

A morpheme is the **smallest part of a word that contributes to meaning**.

For example, **cats** has two morphemes:



The base **cat** refers to a **"feline"**, and suffix **-s** shows there is **"more than one"**.



In the word **unkind**, the prefix **un-** means **"not or reverse"**, and the base **kind** carries the meaning **"friendly and good"**.

When children spot familiar morphemes, unfamiliar words become easier to understand.

Affixes

Affixes are morphemes that can be added to a base. A **prefix** is a type of affix that comes before a base and changes its meaning, such as prefix **re-** in the word **redo** or prefix **un-** in the word **unfair**. A **suffix** is a type of affix that comes after a base and can change a word's tense or role, such as the suffix **-ed** in the word **pushed** or suffix **-ing** in the word **cooking**. Knowing affixes helps children to understand and decode bigger words.

Bases

A base gives a word its main meaning, and by adding prefixes and suffixes, that same base can build many related words. For example, **play**:

play + **ing** = **playing**

play + **ed** = **played**

play + **ful** = **playful**

re + **play** = **replay**

Bases that make sense on their own, without combining with other morphemes, are **free bases**.

Bases that need to combine with other morphemes to make a complete word are **bound bases**, many of which come from ancient languages like Latin or Greek. For example, the Latin base **spect**, which means “**watch**”, is a bound base. Words that share a base belong to the same word family, so the family for base **spect** includes words like **inspect**, **respect**, and **spectator**. When children recognise the same base in different words, they can connect and understand new vocabulary even before it has been taught to them.

Morphology helps children **read**, **spell**, and **understand words** more easily.

By breaking words into meaningful parts, they can spell and decode longer words, learn new vocabulary faster, and improve overall reading comprehension.

