



ESPERANTO LESSON

Esperanto Grammar 1 • Chapter 5

• Word-Building

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Chapter 5 · Word-Building

🔧 Word-Building — Vortfarado

This is where Esperanto saves you the most work. A few dozen small prefixes and suffixes can be attached to any root, and each keeps its meaning wherever it goes. Learn one root and you get a family of words for free. This chapter lists the most useful affixes, shows how compound words are joined, and ends with a method for reading a word you have never seen.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

A word is a **root** with optional **prefixes** before it and **suffixes** after it, then a grammatical ending (**-o**, **-a**, **-e**, **-i**, **-as** and so on). Every affix has one fixed meaning, so you can build and take apart words without a dictionary. In a compound, the main word comes last.

Prefixes

PREFIX	MEANING	EXAMPLE	ENGLISH
mal-	the opposite	mal bona · mal amiko	bad · enemy
re-	again, back	re legi · re veni	to re-read · to come back
ek-	the start of an action, a sudden action	ek kanti · ek dormi	to burst into song · to fall asleep
for-	away	for iri	to go away
dis-	apart, in all directions	dis doni	to hand out
mis-	wrongly	mis kompreni	to misunderstand
ge-	both sexes together	ge patroj · ge fratoj	parents · brothers and sisters

PREFIX	MEANING	EXAMPLE	ENGLISH
bo-	related by marriage	bopatro	father-in-law
eks-	former	eksedzo	ex-husband
pra-	remote in time or relation	praavo	great-grandparent

Suffixes

People, places and things

SUFFIX	MEANING	EXAMPLE	ENGLISH
-ul-	a person with the quality	bonulo · riĉulo	a good person · a rich person
-in-	female	patrino	mother
-ist-	a person with the profession	instruisto · kuracisto	teacher · doctor
-an-	member, inhabitant	eŭropano · edinburgano	a European · a resident of Edinburgh
-id-	young offspring	hundo · kato	puppy · kitten
-ej-	place for	lernejo · trinkejo	school · bar, pub
-ar-	a collection, group	arbaro · vortaro	forest · dictionary
-il-	tool, instrument	skribilo · komputilo	pen · computer
-uj-	container	monujo · sukerujo	purse · sugar bowl

Size, quality and feeling

SUFFIX	MEANING	EXAMPLE	ENGLISH
-et-	small, slight	dometo · rideti	little house · to smile

SUFFIX	MEANING	EXAMPLE	ENGLISH
-eg-	big, strong	dome go · vent ego	mansion · gale
-ec-	the quality itself	bone co · amike co	goodness · friendship
-ind-	worthy of	ŝat inda · vizit inda	likeable · worth visiting
-ebl-	can be done	lege bla · manĝe bla	legible · edible
-ad-	continued or repeated action	kant ado · parol adi	singing · to go on talking
-aĉ-	bad, contemptible	doma aĉo	hovel

Pet names with -ĉj- and -nj-

For affectionate short names, cut the name short and add **-ĉj-** (male) or **-nj-** (female): **Paĉjo** (Dad), **Panjo** (Mum), and for a name like Filipo, **Filĉjo** (check). They are as informal as English *Dad* or *Phil*.

Transitive and intransitive: -ig- and -iĝ-

Two suffixes make verbs. **-ig-** means *make, cause to be* and always takes an object. **-iĝ-** means *become* and takes none:

ROOT	-IG- (MAKE ...)	-IĜ- (BECOME ...)
bon-	bon igi to improve (make good)	boni ĝi to get better
ruĝ-	ruĝ igi to redden (something)	ruĝi ĝi to go red
fermi	Mi fermas la pordon. I close the door.	La pordo fermi ĝas . The door closes (by itself).
pur-	pur igi to clean	puri ĝi to become clean

This pair removes a whole family of English verbs that differ only in whether they take an object, such as *I break the cup* and *the cup breaks*. It is the same kind of switch as the Hungarian causative and passive suffixes.

Compound words

Two roots can be joined directly, and the **last** one is the main word. The grammatical ending goes at the very end:

PARTS	COMPOUND	ENGLISH
fero iron + vojo road	fervojo	railway
flugi fly + haveno harbour	flughaveno	airport
vorto word + libro book	vortlibro	dictionary (also vortaro)
bona good + gusto taste	bongusta	tasty
sun- sun + brili shine	sunbrili	to shine (of the sun)

Compare German (*Eisenbahn, Flughafen, Wörterbuch*), which builds words the same way; English prefers separate words and Latin loans. Most Esperanto roots come from Romance and Germanic languages, so many compounds are easy to recognise (check).

Reading an unknown word

When you meet a word you do not know, take it apart from the right: strip the grammatical ending, then the suffixes, then the prefix, and read the root. Take **malsanulejo**:

PIECE	MEANING
-o	noun
-ej-	a place for
-ul-	people who are ...
san-	healthy
mal-	the opposite

Put it back together: *a place for unhealthy people*, which is a hospital. Whether the result is a real word is a separate question, and the dictionary is the final judge, but for common roots the logic nearly always works.

Watch out: build, but do not invent too freely

Affixes are productive, but some combinations have settled into a particular meaning, and others sound odd. If you are not sure that a combination is used, look it up or use a simpler wording. For example, **libraro** is a collection of books, and the usual word for a library is **biblioteko** (check). Likewise **mal-** follows the rule (**malkara**, not dear, means cheap), but check whether a ready-made word exists before you build one.

In Use — En uzo

Read each exchange aloud, then take the longer words apart.

① At work

A:

Kion vi faras?

What do you do?

B:

Mi estas kuracisto en malsanulejo.

Kaj vi?

I'm a doctor in a hospital. And you?

A:

Mi estas instruisto en lernejo.

I'm a teacher in a school.

② Why are you smiling?

A:

Kial vi ridetas?

Why are you smiling?

B:

Ĉar la kuko estas bongusta!

Because the cake is tasty!

③ What does it mean?

A:

Kion signifas "librejo"?

What does "librejo" mean?

B:

Libro plus -ejo: loko por libroj. Ĝi estas vendejo de libroj.

Book plus -ejo: a place for books. It's a shop for books.



Quick Reference — Rapida referenco

KIND	AFFIXES
Prefixes	mal- re- ek- for- dis- mis- ge- bo- eks- pra-
People	-ul- -in- -ist- -an- -id-
Places, groups, tools	-ej- -ar- -il- -uj-
Size, quality	-et- -eg- -ec- -ind- -ebl- -ad- -aĉ-
Make / become	-ig- / -iĝ-
Compounds	main word last, ending at the end



Try It Yourself — Ekzercoj

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Make the opposite of *granda*.

▼ Show answer

malgranda.

2. How do you say "to read again"?

▼ Show answer

relegi.

3. Make "parents" and "father-in-law" from *patro*.

▼ Show answer

gepatroj and **bopatro**.

4. What is a "place for learning" (*lerni*)?

▼ Show answer

lernejo, a school.

5. Make "friendship" from *amiko*.

▼ Show answer

amikeco.

6. Take apart *fervojo* and say what it means.

▼ Show answer

fer- (iron) + **voj-** (road) + **-o**: a railway.

7. Choose *-ig-* or *-iĝ-*: *La pordo ferm___as*. (The door closes by itself.)

▼ Show answer

La pordo fermiĝas. *-iĝ-* means become, with no object.

8. Say "a resident of Edinburgh" and "a little house".

▼ Show answer

edinburgano and **dometo**.

9. What does *vizitinda* mean, and how is it built?

▼ Show answer

Worth visiting: **vizit-** + **-ind-** (worthy of) + **-a** (adjective).

10. Which word is "someone who teaches": *instruisto* or *instruejo*?

▼ Show answer

instruisto, with *-ist-* for the person. *instruejo* would be a place for teaching.

Words used in this chapter

mal- opposite · **re-** again · **ek-** start of · **for-** away · **ge-** both sexes · **-ul-** person · **-ist-** profession · **-ej-** place · **-ar-** group · **-et-** small · **-eg-** big · **-ec-** quality · **-ig-** make · **-iĝ-** become · **-ebl-** can be · **-ind-** worthy · **-il-** tool · **sana** healthy · **lerni** learn · **instrui** teach · **kuraci** treat · **legi** read · **kanti** sing · **fermi** close · **pordo** door · **vojo** road · **fero** iron · **vorto** word · **kuko** cake · **kial** why · **ĉar** because · **signifi** mean · **vendi** sell · **loko** place · **por** for

Coming up in Chapter 6: The Correlatives. Forty-five little words built from a grid: **kio**, **tio**, **io**, **ĉio**, **nenio**, and all their relatives.