

SUFFIX QUIZ

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One characteristic of the English language is its extensive use of affixes, and of suffixes in particular. Indeed, a dictionary count shows that some 45 per cent of the words listed are suffixed, including 2 per cent that are double-suffixed (nothingness, particularize, etc.).

Suffixes can change a noun to an adjective, an adjective to a noun, and either to a verb or an adverb. Suffixes can determine number, gender, tense, or degree, and characterize chemical compounds.

Is it any wonder that such a prolific language can produce paradoxes? For example:

1. There are many suffixes that convert normally masculine nouns to their feminine equivalents: princESS, massEUSE, herolNE, etc. What suffix converts a normally feminine noun to its masculine equivalent?
2. The suffix -S added to a noun usually converts it from singular to plural. Give an example when it converts a plural noun to a singular one.
3. An aviatrix is a female aviator; an executrix is a female executor; a mediatrix is a female mediator. What is a directrix?
4. Strictly speaking, -SITE is a combining form rather than a suffix, although the distinction between the two is somewhat vague. It indicates location. A townsite is the location of a town; a homesite is the location of a home. Is a wellsite the location of a well?
5. The suffix -STER can indicate a masculine operator as in teamster, a neuter operator as in gagster, or a common operator such as roadster. Can you come up with a female -STER operator?
6. The suffix -CIDE means "killing". Suicide is "killing oneself", fratricide is "killing one's brother". What is barmecide?

Answers can be found in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.