
Using Greek and Latin Prefixes, Suffixes, and Roots

Some biology terms may be hard to understand the first time you encounter them. However, knowing some Greek and Latin terms will allow you to understand parts of the words. Then you can make an educated guess about the meaning.

Looking at parts of words to help you figure out the meanings of whole words will help you comprehend scientific material. Let's look at the word "centrifugation." This word has its roots in two Latin words. They are *centrum*, which means "center," and *fugere*, which means "to flee." From that, you might guess that "centrifugation" has something to do with fleeing from the center—and you would be right. Centrifugation separates substances by whirling them in a circle at high speed. The heavier substances are separated from the lighter ones in this process.

You can understand many words, scientific and otherwise, if you understand their parts. Approximately 80 percent of the words in an English dictionary are formed from Greek and Latin parts. Knowledge of these will help you break down unfamiliar words and remember their meanings.

Below is a list of some common prefixes, roots, and suffixes that you may find handy. In addition, Appendix B in your textbook gives some useful biological word parts. Use the list for the exercise that follows.

a-, ab-	from, from off, away, down, down from
anti-	against
arterio-	having to do with arteries
bi-	twice, two
bio-	life
calor-	heat
centi-	one-hundredth
centro-	center
cephal-	head
chromo-	color
deca-	ten
deci-	one-tenth
dent-, -dont	teeth
dissect	cut
electro-	referring to electricity
endo-	within, inside
exo-	without, outside
-fuge	something that drives away or out
-graph	write or draw
hemi-	half
hexa-	six
hyper-	over, above, excessive
hypo-	under, beneath, below, less than
inter-	between, among
intra-	within, inside of
-itis	inflammation

(over)