

What is morphology? Morphology is the study of **meaningful word parts (morphemes)** — prefixes, bases, and suffixes. Teaching students to notice and use these parts unlocks the meaning of thousands of academic words across every content area.

The 5-Step Morphology Teaching Routine

Notice the Word

- 1 Pull a challenging word directly from authentic text students are reading.

WHY: Students encounter morphologically complex words constantly in academic texts. Anchoring the routine in real reading builds relevance and motivation.

Example words to notice:

predicting • misconduct • transformation • irresponsible • collaborative

Break It Apart

- 2 Guide students to identify the prefix, base, and suffix.

WHY: Many students try to decode long words phoneme-by-phoneme. Teaching them to chunk by morpheme dramatically reduces cognitive load.

PREFIX <i>Comes before the base Changes or adds meaning</i>	BASE <i>The root of the word Carries the core meaning</i>	SUFFIX <i>Comes after the base Often signals word type</i>
un-, re-, dis-, pre-, mis-, in-, trans-	struct, dict, port, scrib, vis, rupt, ject	-tion, -ful, -able, -ment, -ive, -ous, -ly

Try it: "transformation" → **trans** + **form** + **ation**

Define Each Part

- 3 Look at each morpheme and discuss its meaning.

WHY: This is where meaning-making happens. Students connect new parts to words they already know.

Morpheme	Meaning	Known Words
trans-	across / through	transport, translate, transmit
form	shape / structure	reform, format, uniform
-ation	act or process of	creation, migration, exploration

Classroom tip: Ask students, "What other words have this part? What do they share in meaning?"

Rebuild the Meaning

4 Combine the part meanings to construct a definition.

WHY: Building a definition from parts is more durable than rote memorisation. The process itself is the learning.

"trans" (across) + "form" (shape) + "ation" (process) →

"transformation" = the process of changing shape or form across a state

Compare to dictionary: a marked change in form, nature, or appearance

Classroom tip: Student-built definitions don't need to be perfect — they need to be close enough to be useful. Celebrate approximations.

Apply to New Words

5 Generate other words that use the same morphemes.

WHY: Transfer is the goal. Students who can apply a morpheme to unfamiliar words have truly learned it — not just memorized one word.

Same Prefix (trans–)	Same Base (form)	Same Suffix (–ation)
transport transmit translate transparent transition	reform uniform platform inform formula	migration creation exploration examination celebration

Quick Reference: High-Frequency Morphemes

Common Prefixes

un–	not	<i>unhappy, unclear</i>
re–	again / back	<i>rewrite, return</i>
dis–	not / opposite	<i>disagree, disorder</i>
pre–	before	<i>preview, predict</i>
mis–	wrongly	<i>misread, mislead</i>
trans–	across	<i>transport, translate</i>
inter–	between	<i>interact, interrupt</i>
sub–	under / below	<i>submarine, subtext</i>

Common Suffixes

–tion / –sion	act / process	<i>motion, tension</i>
–ful	full of	<i>careful, grateful</i>
–able / –ible	can be done	<i>readable, visible</i>
–ment	state / result	<i>movement, payment</i>
–ive	tending to	<i>creative, active</i>
–ous	having quality of	<i>curious, dangerous</i>
–ness	state of being	<i>kindness, darkness</i>
–ly	in a manner of	<i>quickly, softly</i>

High-Value Base Words (Latin & Greek Roots)

struct	to build	<i>construct, instruct, destruction</i>
dict	to say / speak	<i>predict, contradict, dictate</i>
port	to carry	<i>transport, portable, export</i>
scrib / script	to write	<i>describe, manuscript, prescribe</i>
vis / vid	to see	<i>visible, video, revise</i>
rupt	to break	<i>disrupt, interrupt, erupt</i>
ject	to throw	<i>project, reject, inject</i>
aud	to hear	<i>audience, audible, auditorium</i>

Classroom Tips for Maximum Impact

✓ DO

- Pull words from the texts students are actually reading
- Keep sessions short — 5 to 10 minutes daily beats one long weekly lesson
- Celebrate approximations — a close student-built definition is a win
- Connect to content: science, ELA, and social studies all share morphemes
- Display a growing class morpheme wall students can reference
- Revisit morphemes across weeks — spaced repetition cements learning

✓ AVOID

- Avoiding words that don't break perfectly — use them as teaching moments
- Treating morphology as a separate unit — weave it into daily instruction
- Expecting students to memorize lists without context or application
- Moving on after one exposure — revisit the same morpheme across texts
- Correcting students harshly when they guess — wrong guesses show thinking
- Skipping the Apply step — transfer is where the learning becomes permanent

Practice Prompts & Discussion Starters

Use these questions to guide student thinking during the routine:

Notice the Word: "What's a tricky word on this page? Let's look at it together."

Break It Apart: "Can you spot a prefix or suffix? What's left when you remove it?"

Define Each Part: "What other words do you know with that part? What do they share?"

Rebuild the Meaning: "If we put those meanings together, what might this word mean?"

Apply to New Words: "What other words use this same part? What do they tell you?"