

The Nifty Thrifty Fifty—50 Morphemic Key Words

(Adapted from Patricia M Cunningham, *Phonics They Use*, 7th. Ed.)

Because a limited number of prefixes, suffixes, and spelling changes can be found in thousands of multisyllabic words, everyone should have example words for those that are thoroughly familiar to them. What words could your students learn to read, spell, and analyze so that you could be sure they had examples for these common patterns? I created such a list by deciding which prefixes, suffixes, and spelling changes were most prevalent in the multisyllabic words students might encounter. I included all the prefixes and suffixes determined to be most common in the White, Sowell, and Yanagihara (1989) study. Because I wanted to create a list that would provide the maximum help with all three big-word tasks, I added prefixes and suffixes such as **con/com**, **per**, **ex**, and **ture** not included in that study because they were not considered helpful from a meaning standpoint. These prefixes are, however, useful spelling and pronunciation chunks.

Having created the list of “transferable chunks,” I then wanted to find the “most-apt-to-be-known” word containing each chunk. I consulted *The Living Word Vocabulary* (Dale & O’Rourke, 1981), which indicates for 44,000 words the grade level at which more than two-thirds of the students tested knew the meaning of the word. Because the test that determined whether students knew the meaning also required students to read the word, it can also be inferred that at least two-thirds of the students could decode and pronounce the word. The goal was to find words that two-thirds of fourth-graders could read and knew at least one meaning for. After much finagling, I had a list of 50 words that contains all the most useful prefixes, suffixes, and spelling changes. All but eight of these words were known by more than two-thirds of fourth-graders. Seven words—**antifreeze**, **classify**, **deodorize**, **impression**, **irresponsible**, **prehistoric**, and **semifinal**—were not known by two-thirds of fourth-graders but were known by two-thirds of sixth-graders. **International**, the most known word containing the prefix **inter**, was known by two-thirds of eighth-graders. Because the meanings of these 50 words are apt to be known by so many intermediate-age and older students, and because these words so economically represents all the important big-word parts, I named this list the “Nifty Thrifty Fifty.”

The Nifty Thrifty Fifty		
Key Word	Prefix	Suffix/Ending/ Spelling Change
antifreeze	anti (against)	
beautiful		ful (y-i) (full of)
classify		ify
communities	com (with or together)	es (y-i)

community	com (with or together)	
composer	com (with or together)	er (person or thing)
continuous	con	ous
conversation	con	tion
deodorize	de (take away)	ize
different		ent
discovery	dis (not or reverse)	y
dishonest	dis (not or reverse)	
electricity		ity
employee	em	ee (person)
encouragement	en (make or give)	ment
expensive	ex	ive
governor		or (person)
happiness		ness (y-i)
hopeless		less (without)
illegal	il (not or opposite)	
impossible	im (not or opposite)	
impression	im (in)	ion
independence	in (not or opposite)	ence

invasion	In (in)	ion
international	inter (between)	al
irresponsible	ir (not or opposite)	ible
midnight	mid (middle)	
misunderstood	mis (wrong or bad)	
musician		ian (person)
nonviolent	non (not)	
overpower	over (more than or too much)	
patiently		ly
performance	per	ance
prehistoric	pre (before)	ic
prettier		er (y-i) (more)
promotion	pro (for or in favor of)	tion
rearrange	re (back or again)	
replacement	re (back or again)	ment
richest		est (most)
semifinal	semi (half or partly)	
signature		ture
submarine	sub (under or below)	

supermarkets	super (really big)	
swimming		ing (double m)
transportation	trans (across or through)	tion
underweight	under	
unfinished	un (not or opposite)	ed
unpleasant	un (not or opposite)	ant
valuable		able (drop e)
written		en (double t)

There are endless possibilities for how the list might be used. First, however, students must learn to spell the words. You might want to start a word wall (see Chapter 7) of big words and add five words each week to the wall. Take a few minutes each day to chant the spelling of the words and talk about the parts of the word that could be applied to other words. This talking should be as “nonjargony” as possible. Rather than talking about the root word **freeze** and the prefix **anti**, the discussions should be about how antifreeze keeps your car’s engine from freezing up and, thus, it is protection against freezing. Students should be asked to think of other words that look and sound like **antifreeze** and then decide if the **anti** parts of those words could have anything to do with the notion of “against.”

“What is an **antibiotic** against?”

“What is an **anti**aircraft weapon?”

For suffixes, the discussion should center around how the suffix changes how the word can be used in a sentence.

“A **musician** makes music. What does a **beautician**, **electrician**, **physician**, or **magician** do?”

“When you need to replace something, you get a **replacement**. What do you get when someone **encourages** you?”

“What do you call it when you **accomplish** something?”

Spelling changes should be noticed and applied to similar words.

“**Communities** is the plural of **community**. How would you spell **parties**? **Candies**? **Personalities**?”

“When we swim, we say we are **swimming**. How would you spell **swimmer**? **Drummed**?”

If this list is to become truly useful to students, they need to learn to spell the words gradually over time, and they need to be shown how the patterns found in these words can be useful in decoding, spelling, and figuring out meaning for lots of other words. Here is a sequence of lessons to teach these words gradually and the transfer words students should be able to decode, spell and explain based on the patterns in the words taught.

Teach the First Five Words

composer discovery encouragement impossible richest

1. Display the words, arranged by first letter, somewhere in the room.

Space and time are the two commodities no teacher ever has enough of. But if you want your students to learn to read and spell these critical key words, you will have to allot some of your classroom space and a few minutes of time each day to focus your student's attention on their words. If you have a bulletin board you can devote to these words, that is ideal. If not you will have to get creative. Sticky clips will allow you to attach these words to any wall surface—without defacing the wall when you remove them. You might also consider attaching a banner above the board in the front of your room and attaching the words to it. When considering where to put these words, you need to make sure that they are easily seen from wherever your students are writing. Using different color markers (or printing them in different colors) makes the words more appealing and the display more attractive. If you are working with an individual or a small group of students, you can add these words gradually to a personal word wall made from a file folder.

2. Analyze the patterns in the words.

Explain to your students that in English, many big words are just smaller words with "things"-- called prefixes and suffixes added to the word. Good spellers do not memorize the spelling of every new word they meet. Rather, they notice the patterns in words and these patterns include prefixes and suffixes and spelling changes that occur when these are added. Draw your students' attention to each word and help them analyze the word, talking about meaning and identifying roots, prefixes and suffixes. Be sure to note any spelling changes needed when suffixes are added.

composer--a composer is a person who composes something. Many other words such as *writer*, *reporter* and *teacher* are made up of a root word and the suffix *er* meaning a person or thing that does something. When *er* is added to a word that already has an *e*, the original *e* is dropped.

discovery--A discovery is something you discover. The prefix *dis* often adds the meaning of "not" or "reverse" to a word. To cover something can mean to hide it. When you discover it, it is no longer hidden. Other common words in which *dis* means "not" or "reverse" include *disobey*, *displease* and *dismount*. The suffix *y* often changes the part of speech of a word. What you discover is the discovery. *Discovery* is the root word *cover* with the added prefix *dis* and suffix *y*. There are no spelling changes.

encouragement--When you encourage someone, you give them courage. The prefix *en* often means "make" or "give." The suffix *ment* often changes a word into a noun. When you argue, you are having an argument. When you replace something, we call that a replacement. When you encourage someone, you are giving them encouragement. The root word for *encouragement* is *courage*. So,

encouragement is made up of the prefix *en*, the root word *courage* and the suffix *ment*. There are no spelling changes.

impossible--The root word *possible* with the suffix *im*. In many words, including *impatient* and *immature* the suffix *im* means “not” and changes the word to an opposite.

richest--The root word *rich* with the suffix *est*, meaning "the most."

3. Cheer the words.

Tell students that one way to practice words is to say the letters in them aloud in a rhythmic chanting fashion. Tell students that while this might seem silly, it really isn't because the brain responds to sound and rhythm. That is one of the reasons you can sing along with the words of a familiar song even though you couldn't say the words without singing the song and also why jingles and raps are easy to remember. Point to each word and have students say the word, cheer the letters three times and say the word again.

“richest r-i-c-h-e-s-t; r-i-c-h-e-s-t; r-i-c-h-e-s-t richest”

“encouragement e-n-c-o-u-r-a-g-e-m-e-n-t; e-n-c-o-u-r-a-g-e-m-e-n-t;
e-n-c-o-u-r-a-g-e-m-e-n-t; encouragement

“discovery d-i-s-c-o-v-e-r-y; d-i-s-c-o-v-e-r-y; d-i-s-c-o-v-e-r-y discovery”

“composer c-o-m-p-o-s-e-r; c-o-m-p-o-s-e-r; c-o-m-p-o-s-e-r composer”

“impossible i-m-p-o-s-s-i-b-l-e; i-m-p-o-s-s-i-b-l-e; i-m-p-o-s-s-i-b-l-e
impossible”

4. Write the words.

Once you have analyzed the components of each word, pointed out other words that work in a similar way and cheered for each word, have students write each word. Writing the word with careful attention to each letter and the sequence of each letter helps students use another mode to practice the word. (Do not however assign students to copy words five times each. They just do this "mechanically" and often do not focus on the letters.). Students enjoy writing the words more and focus better on the word if you make it a riddle or game. You can do this simply by having them number from one to five and then giving clues to the word you want them to write such as:

1. Number 1 has the root word *courage*.
2. For number 2, write what you are if you play music but you also make up the songs you play.
3. Number 3 is a word that describes something you cannot possibly do.
4. For number 4, write the word that has *cover* for the root word.
5. Number 5 is what you are if you have the most money of any of your friends.

After writing the words, have students check their own papers by once more chanting the letters aloud underlining each letter as they say it.

5. Practice the words.

For the next week or two, use the cheering and writing activities (with different clues) when you have a few minutes of down time to practice the words. As you are cheering and writing the spelling of each word, ask students to identify roots, prefixes and suffixes and talk about how these affect the meaning of the root word.

6. Spell new words using the patterns from Nifty Thrifty Fifty words.

Once students can automatically, quickly and correctly spell all five words and explain to you how they are composed, it is time to help them see how these words can help them decode and spell other words. Remind students that good spellers do not memorize the spelling of each word. Rather they use words they know and combine, roots, suffixes and prefixes to figure out how to spell lots of other words. Have the students spell the following words using the five key words as models. Have each word used in a sentence and talk about the meaning relationships when appropriate

compose pose dispose discover cover encourage courage discourage
discouragement possible rich enrich enrichment

Add Five More Words

hopeless musician patiently transportation unfinished

1. Add these words to the display in your room or to the portable word walls
2. Analyze the patterns in the words.

Remind students that in English, many big words are just smaller words with prefixes and suffixes added to root words and that sometimes adding these parts requires spelling or pronunciation changes. Good spellers do not memorize the spelling of every new word they meet. Rather, they notice the patterns in words and these patterns include prefixes and suffixes and spelling changes that occur when these are added. Lead students to analyze the words, talking about meanings and identifying roots, prefixes and suffixes and noting any spelling changes.

hopeless--Students should identify the root word *hope* and the suffix *less*. The suffix *less* often means "none" or "without." If you think a situation is hopeless, you have no hope it will turn out well. Other similar words are *painless* and *homeless*. There are no spelling changes.

musician-- a musician is a person who makes music. A beautician helps make you beautiful and a magician makes magic. *Musician* has the root word *music* with the suffix *ian* which sometimes indicates the person who does something. There are no spelling changes but the pronunciation changes. Have students say the words *music* and *musician*, *magic* and *magician* and notice how the pronunciation changes.

patiently--When you are patient, you are calm and do not get annoyed when something takes a long time. Patiently tell how you do things when you are patient. Mothers watch patiently as their children learn to walk. It is often hard to wait patiently for your turn to play or talk. Many other words such as *eager*, *eagerly*; *careful*, *carefully*; *safe*, *safely* follow this same pattern. The root word for *patiently* is *patient*. So, *patiently* is made up of the suffix *ly* and the root word *patient*. There are no spelling changes.

transportation-- Students will probably see the word *transport* with the suffix *tion*. Help them to also see the word *port* which means "bring or carry". Students can relate the meaning of *port* to *export* in which you carry out, *import* in which you bring in and *report* in which you bring some information back. When you carry things across some place, you transport them. Other words in which *trans* means "across or through" include *transplant*, *transfusion* and *transatlantic*. Transportation has the root *port* the prefix *trans* and the suffix *tion*.

unfinished--Students should notice the root word *finish* with the prefix *un* and the *ed* ending. The prefix *un* often changes a word to its opposite meaning as in *unfriendly* and *unhappy*.

3. Point to each word and have students cheer it three times with you.

"musician m-u-s-i-c-i-a-n; m-u-s-i-c-i-a-n; m-u-s-i-c-i-a-n musician"

"patiently p-a-t-i-e-n-t-l-y; p-a-t-i-e-n-t-l-y; p-a-t-i-e-n-t-l-y patiently"

"hopeless h-o-p-e-l-e-s-s; h-o-p-e-l-e-s-s; h-o-p-e-l-e-s-s hopeless"

"unfinished u-n-f-i-n-i-s-h-e-d; u-n-f-i-n-i-s-h-e-d; u-n-f-i-n-i-s-h-e-d;
unfinished"

"transportation t-r-a-n-s-p-o-r-t-a-t-i-o-n; t-r-a-n-s-p-o-r-t-a-t-i-o-n; t-r-a-n-s-p-o-r-t-a-t-i-o-n; transportation"

4. Write the words.

Once you have noticed the composition for each word, helped students see other words that work in a similar way and cheered for each word, have students write each word.

Students enjoy writing the words more and focus better on the word if you make it a riddle or game. Use the five new words and two from the five introduced early. Have your students number from one to seven and then give clues to the word you want them to write. Be sure that your clues distinguish the words from one another.

1. Number 1 is the opposite of finished.
2. Number 2 is how you need to wait when you are in a long line.
3. Number 3 is the opposite of *hopeful*.
4. For number 4, write the word that tells what you are if you play the guitar.
5. For number 5, write the word that contains the root word *port* meaning "bring or carry."
6. Number 6 is the word that is the opposite of *possible*.
7. Number 7 is the word that is the opposite of discouragement.

After writing the words, have students check their own papers by once more chanting the letters aloud underlining each letter as they say it.

5. Practice the words.

For the next week or two, use the cheering and writing activities (with different clues) when you have a few minutes of down time to practice the words. As you are cheering and writing words, ask students to identify roots, prefixes and suffixes and talk about how these affect the meaning of the root word. Include all 10 words in your activities but only seven or eight words on any one day.

6. Spell new words using the patterns from Nifty Thrifty Fifty words

Once students can automatically, quickly and correctly spell all 10 words and explain to you how the words are composed, it is time to help them see how these words can help them decode and spell other words. Remind students that good spellers do not memorize the spelling of each word. Rather they use words they know and combine, roots, suffixes and prefixes to figure out how to spell lots of other words. Have the students spell the following words using the 10 key words as models. Have each word used in a sentence and talk about the meaning relationships when appropriate.

patient impatient impatiently richly possibly impossibly music transport
port transported finish finished composed posed discovered covered encouraged
discouraged uncover uncovered hope hoped hopelessly

Continue to Add Words

As each word is added, lead students to analyze the words, talk about meanings, identify roots, prefixes and suffixes and note any spelling changes.

expensive--The word *expense* with the suffix *ive* added and the *e* in *expense* dropped. Another related word which students might not know is *expend*. You might be able to make the *expend-expense-expensive* relationship clear to them by using the commonly-used sports terms *defend-defense-defensive*; *offend-offense-offensive*.

governor--Like *er*, the suffix *or* often signifies the person that does something. The governor governs; the donor donates; the actor acts. *Governor* is made up of the root word *govern* and the suffix, *or*.

impression--Students will notice the word *impress* with the suffix *ion* added. Because *press* is such a common root, help them to see that *press* actually means "press." When you walk in snow, your footprints press in the snow and make an impression. The impression your attitude makes on people is pressed into their minds. Related words are *depress/depression* in which things are pressed down and *compress/compression* in which things are pressed together. *Impression* is made up of the root word *press*, the prefix *im* meaning "in" and the suffix *ion*.

independence--The root word *depend* with the prefix *in* and the suffix *ence*. Help students see that *independence* is the opposite of *dependence*. In addition to meaning "in", the prefix *in* often signals an opposite relationship as in *inactive* and *inconvenient*. The suffix *ence* often changes the part of speech of a word. When you depend on someone, we call this dependence. When things differ, we call it a difference. When we are patient, we are showing patience. *Independence* contains the root *depend*, the prefix *in* and the suffix, *ence*.

submarine--The root word *marine* with the prefix *sub*. A submarine goes under water. Other *sub* words in which the *sub* means "under" or "below" include *subfreezing*, *submerge* and *subway*.

Have students practice the words by cheering and writing them. Continue this practice when you have a few minutes of down time until all students become automatic at spelling them. Before adding the next set of new words, have students read, spell and analyze new words made from the parts of the current words.

govern governed government press pressed impress impressed impressive
express expressed expression expressionless expressive depend depended
dependence marine export exported exportation import imported importation
patience impatience expose exposed transpose transposed compress compression
expense inexpensive

More Nifty Fifty Thrifty Words and Transfer Words

Here is a possible sequence for adding the remaining words and the transfer words they can spell by combining parts of all the words learned.

Words 16-20

beautiful--The word *beauty* with the suffix *ful* added and the *y* changed to an *i*. The suffix *ful* means "full of" as in *painful* and *fearful*. If the word to which *ful* is added ends in *y*, the *y* will change to *i* as in *merciful* and *plentiful*.

classify--The word *class* with the suffix *ify*. When you classify something, you put it in a certain class. Other similar words include *glory*, *glorify*; *note*, *notify*; *sign*, *signify*.

electricity--The word *electric* with the *ity* suffix. Note that the spelling does not change but the pronunciation of the *c* does. Remind your students that it was the pronunciation of the *c* that changed in *music-musician*. Many words follow the *electric-electricity* pattern including *curious*, *curiosity*; *public*, *publicity*; *impossible*, *impossibility*

happiness--*happy* with the suffix *ness* and with the *y* to *i* spelling change. The suffix *ness* often changes a word into a noun. When you are happy, you experience happiness; Other similar words include *dark*, *darkness*; *kind*, *kindness*; *sad*, *sadness*.

prettier--*pretty* with the suffix *er* meaning "more than" and the *y* changed to an *i*.

Transfer Words

beauty beautify beautician class classified unclassified classification electric
electrify electrician happy happier happily unhappy unhappier unhappiest unhappily
unhappiness pretty prettiest hopeful hopefully hopelessly richer possibility
impossibility

Words 21-25

community--The word *community* is the word *unity* with the prefix *com* and the *m* doubled. People who live together in a community live together with unity. Other words in which the *com* indicates "with or together" include *combat*--to do battle with, *compose*--to put together and *compress*, to press together.

communities--words that end in *y* have the *y* changed to *i* and *es* added to make this for of the word, as in *countries*, *counties* and *cities*.

continuous--The word *continue* with the suffix *ous* added and the *e* dropped. When something doesn't end but continues on, we say it is continuous. Other words that follow this pattern are *nerve, nervous; danger, dangerous* and *humor, humorous*.

swimming--The word *swim* with the ending *ing* and the *m* doubled. Other similar words include *running, jogging, rapping* and *kidding*.

valuable-- The word *value* with the suffix *able* and the *e* dropped. The suffix *able* means "able to" or "has". Something that is valuable has value. A business that has a profit is profitable. A person who is reliable is able to be relied on. An animal that is lovable is able to be loved.

Transfer Words

unity unify unification communication continue continuing swim swimmer value valued valuing invaluable impressionable classifiable unclassifiable governable ungovernable transportable portable classifying hoping encouraging discovering composing finishing transporting depending discouraging courageous courageously (e is not dropped because pronunciation would change)

Words 26-30

dishonest--The word *honest* with the prefix *dis* meaning "not."

conversation--The word *converse* with the suffix *tion* and the *e* dropped. When you converse with someone, you are having a conversation. Other similar words include *reserve, reservation; invite, invitation* and *conserve, conservation*.

nonviolent--The word *violent* with the prefix *non*. Other words in which *non* means "not" include *nonfat, nonsense, nonprofit* and *nonfiction*

unpleasant-- The word *please* with the prefix *un*, the suffix *ant* and the *u* dropped. Help students notice the change in pronunciation from *please* to *pleasant*. Students should notice that in both *unpleasant* and *unfinished*, *un* signals an opposite relationship.

written--The word *write* with the suffix *en* and the *t* doubled. Something that you write is written. Other similar words include *rot, rotten; hide, hidden, and forbid, forbidden*

Transfer Words

violent violently nonviolently please pleasant pleasantly unpleasantly unpleasantness write writer writing unwritten converse conversing honest honesty dishonesty honestly dishonestly displease discontinue important importance

Words 31-35

illegal--The word *legal* with the prefix *il* meaning "not" or "opposite." Other similar words include *illiterate* and *illegitimate*.

irresponsible--The word *response* with the prefix *ir* signaling an opposite relationship and the suffix *ible* with the *e* dropped. If you are irresponsible, you are not able to make the correct response or to take responsibility, Other similar words include *irregular* and *irrational*. Students should notice that the *im* in *impossible*, the *in* in *independence*, the *il* in *illegal* and the *ir* in *irresponsible* all change these words to opposites.

performance--The word *perform* with the suffix *ance*. Musicians and actors perform and we call what they perform the performance. *Performance* is made up of the root word *form* meaning "form" or "shape," the prefix *per* and the suffix *ance*. Other words in which *form* is the root include *deformity, reform* and *transform*.

rearrange-- *arrange* with the prefix *re* meaning again. When you rearrange things you arrange them again. Other words in which *re* means "again" include *replay, rewrite* and *reread*.

replacement-- *place* with the suffix *ment* and the prefix *re*. In *replacement*, *re* means "back". When you replace something you put something back where something was before. The thing you replace is the replacement. Other words in which *re* means back include *recall, report* and *repay*. Students should notice that the *ment* in *replacement* and *encouragement* both change words into nouns.

Transfer Words

legal legally illegally responsible response perform form arrange arranging rearranging arrangement rearrangement replace place displace displacement placing replacing reform conform conformity inform informer informant information uninformed formation formal formally informal transform transformer transformation performer responsibility responsive unresponsive responsiveness responsibly irresponsibly write rewritten report reporter refinish reclassify revalue recover rediscover reunification repress repressive musical musically continual continually electrical disposal irreplaceable (e not dropped because pronunciation of *c* would change if it were)

Words 36-40

deodorize--The word *odor* with the prefix *de* and the suffix *ize*. When you deodorize something, you take away the odor. Other words in which *de* means "take away" include *deflate*, *defrost* and *destabilize*.

different--The word *differ* with the suffix *ent*.

invasion--The word *invade* with the *ion* suffix. The spelling and pronunciation change is common for many words ending in d-e: *provide*, *provision*; *collide*, *collision*; *erode*, *erosion*.

prehistoric-- The root word, *history* becomes *historic*. The suffix *pre* means "before." In actuality, nothing could actually happen before history but prehistoric means it happened before history was written down. Thus dinosaurs are called prehistoric creatures. There are many other words in which the prefix *pre* means "before" including *prefix*, *preview*, *precede* and *predict*.

signature--The root word *sign* with the suffix *ture*. Note the change in pronunciation. Similar changes happen in related words *signal*, *signify* and *significance*.

Transfer Words

odor deodorant differ difference invade invasive noninvasive invasiveness prearrange deploy depress depression depressing deport deportation deportee devalue declassify decompose deform deformity history historic historical historically sign signal significant insignificant significance consignment predispose predisposition design resign resignation designation (note pronunciation changes)

Words 41-45

employee--The word *employ* with the suffix *ee* meaning person. Other words ending in *ee* signifying a person include *nominee* and *referee*.

midnight--The word *night* with the prefix *mid* meaning "middle" Other words in which *mid* has this meaning include *midlife*, *midyear* and *midair*.

overpower--The word *power* with the prefix *over* meaning "more than" or "too much." Other words in which *over* has this meaning include *overcharge*, *overflow*, *overjoyed* and *overload*.

underweight-- The word *weight* with the prefix *under* meaning "below" Other words in which *under* has this meaning include *underclass*, *underground*, *undertow* and *underprivileged*

supermarket-- The word *market* with the prefix *super* meaning "really big" Other words in which *super* has this meaning include *superpower*, *supertanker*, *supersaver* and *superman*.

Transfer Words

market super night overnight overweight overexpose overture under underclass underexpose undercover undervalue power empower empowerment powerful powerfully powerfulness powerless powerlessly superpower weight weighty weightier weightiest weightless employ employer employment unemployment unemployed employable unemployable

Words 46-50

antifreeze--The word *freeze* with the prefix *anti* meaning "against." Other words in which *anti* means against include *antibody*, *antibiotic* and *antihistamine*.

international--*nation* with the prefix *inter* and the suffix *al*. *Inter* often means between as in *intersection* and *intervene*. Notice how the pronunciation changes when *nation* becomes *national*

misunderstood--The word *understood* (past of *understand*) with the prefix *mis*. The prefix *mis* often means "bad" or "wrong" as in *mistake*, *miscarriage* and *misdemeanor*.

promotion--The word *motion* with the prefix *pro* meaning "forward" or "in favor of." Other words in which *pro* has this meaning include *propose*, *propeller*, and *projector*.

semifinal--The word *final* with the prefix *semi* meaning "half" or "partly" Other words in which *semi* has this meaning include *semiannual*, *semisweet* and *semiconductor*.

Transfer Words

freeze freezer freezing freezable subfreezing final finally finalize finalizing finalization motion motionless demotion commotion propose proposal antidepressant stood understood misinform misplace misplacing national nation nationalize nationally nationality nationalities internationalize internationally interdependence

Here are just some of the words buildable from just the parts of the 50 words. The number grows astronomically when the prefixes and suffixes are attached to other root words students know.

300-Plus Words Your Students Can Spell Based on Nifty Thrifty Fifty Words			
antidepressant	arrange	arrangement	arranging
beautician	beautify	beauty	class
classifiable	classification	classified	classifying
commotion	communication	compose	composed
composing	compress	compression	conform
conformity	consignment	continual	continually
continue	continuing	converse	conversing
courage	courageous	courageously	cover
covered	declassify	decompose	deform
deformity	demotion	deodorant	depend

depended	dependence	depending	deploy
deport	deportation	deportee	depress
depressing	depression	design	designation
devalue	differ	difference	discontinue
discourage	discouraged	discouragement	discouraging
discover	discovered	discovering	dishonestly
dishonesty	displace	displacement	displease
disposal	dispose	electric	electrical
electrician	electrification	electrify	employ
employable	employer	employment	empower
empowerment	encourage	encouraged	encouraging
enrich	enrichment	expense	export
exportation	exported	expose	exposed
express	expressed	expression	expressionless
expressive	final	finalization	finalize
finalizing	finally	finish	finished
finishing	form	formal	formally
formation	freezable	freeze	freezer
freezing	govern	governable	governed

government	happier	happily	happy
historic	historical	historically	history
honest	honestly	honesty	hope
hoped	hopeful	hopefully	hopelessly
hoping	illegally	impatience	impatient
impatiently	import	importance	important
importation	imported	impossibility	impossibly
impress	impressed	impressionable	impressive
inexpensive	inform	informal	informant
information	informer	insignificant	interdependence
internationalize	internationally	invade	invaluable
invasive	invasiveness	irreplaceable	irresponsibly
legal	legally	marine	market
misinform	misplace	misplacing	motion
motionless	music	musical	musically
nation	national	nationalities	nationality
nationalize	night	noninvasive	nonviolence
nonviolently	odor	overexpose	overnight
overture	overweight	patience	patient

perform	performer	place	placing
pleasant	pleasantly	please	port
portable	pose	posed	possibility
possible	possibly	power	powerful
powerfully	powerfulness	powerless	powerlessly
prearrange	predispose	predisposition	press
pressed	prettiest	pretty	proposal
propose	rearrangement	rearranging	reclassify
recover	rediscover	refinish	reform
replace	replacing	report	reporter
repress	repressive	resign	resignation
response	responsibility	responsible	responsibly
responsive	responsiveness	reunification	revalue
rewrite	rewritten	rich	richer
richly	sign	signal	significance
significant	stood	subfreezing	super
superpower	swim	swimmer	transform
transformation	transformer	transport	transportable
transported	transporting	transpose	transposed

unclassifiable	unclassified	uncover	uncovered
underclass	undercover	underexpose	understood
undervalue	unemployable	unemployed	unemployment
ungovernable	unhappier	unhappiest	unhappily
unhappiness	unhappy	unification	unify
uninformed	unity	unpleasantly	unpleasantness
unresponsive	unwritten	value	valued
valuing	violence	violent	violently
weight	weightier	weightiest	weightless
weighty	write	writer	writing

The brain is a pattern detector. You figure out new things by comparing and contrasting them with things you already know. When you see a new word, your brain compares that new word to other words with the same patterns. The first time you ever saw the word *bling*, your brain divided just before the vowel and you quickly pronounced it because you have lots of words that begin with *bl*—*blue*, *black*, *blood*, *blubber*-- and lots of *ing* words—*sing*, *ring*, *swing*, *anything*. In fact, you probably pronounced it so quickly you didn't even realize you had never before read the word *bling*! Because you have lots of words that share the beginning letter and rhyming patterns stored in your brain, pronouncing new short words is effortless and automatic. This is also true for most third graders who are good readers.

The patterns in big words are not onsets and rimes. Most English big words are smaller words with parts we call prefixes attached to the beginning of the word and parts we call suffixes added to the end of the word. When these suffixes are added, the pronunciation or spelling of the root word often changes. Many children who are good decoders of smaller words are unable to pronounce big words because they lack a store of big words they can access to find the familiar patterns. The Nifty Thrifty Fifty is a list of "raw material" big words. Students who can read, spell and analyze these words and who learn to use these patterns to decode, spell and understand the meaning of thousands of other big words.