

Lesson 13: The Building Blocks of Language

Inside the Toolbox: Why Is It Called **PREFIX**?

Lesson at a Glance

Guiding Question	Why is it called PREFIX ?
Known Handle	A prefix is added before a base.
Spoken Break	PRE FIX
Proposed Investigation Break	PRE + FIX
WORD ROOTS Clue	PRE = BEFORE; FIX = FASTEN / ATTACH
Core Discovery	THE HISTORY OF PREFIX HELPS EXPLAIN ITS JOB.

Purpose

Students reopen the established language toolbox, select **PREFIX** as the word to investigate, and use **WORD ROOTS** to discover why its name fits its job. The routine stays familiar while the object of investigation changes: students use one language tool to investigate another.

Teacher Background and Instructional Handle

Students already know the classroom handle **A PREFIX IS ADDED BEFORE A BASE**, and they have already built and compared words with prefixes. Lesson 13 is not another definition lesson. It marks a change in the class’s relationship to the toolbox: students are ready to turn their established language tools back onto the language of the toolbox itself.

PREFIX is a useful place to make that turn. The word **PREFIX** reaches English through forms ultimately built from Latin ideas meaning **BEFORE** and **FASTEN or FIX IN PLACE**. Children do not need Latin vocabulary or a historical timeline. The useful classroom discovery is that this older trail helps explain the job they already know: a prefix is attached before a base.

The lesson also models what to do when present-day knowledge is real but incomplete. A child may know **fix** as “repair.” Preserve that contribution. **BEFORE + REPAIR** does not adequately explain the name **PREFIX**, so the class deliberately reaches for **WORD ROOTS**, the established tool for meaning and word history. The older fastening or attaching sense adds information rather than replacing the child’s modern meaning.

This movement matters more than memorizing the etymology. Students experience that a familiar clue may be useful without being the whole answer, that different tools answer different questions about the same word, and that history may preserve information no longer obvious in a word’s most familiar modern meaning. **PREFIX** itself can be seen, said, clapped, broken, investigated, rebuilt, read, and written.

Keep the investigation narrow. **PREVIEW** and **PREHEAT** provide enough comparison to establish **PRE = BEFORE**; **PREFIX** becomes the third comparison and the real object of study. Let children contribute, test their ideas, and choose another tool when needed. Supply only the historical information they could not reasonably discover, then return that information to the investigation rather than turning it into a lecture.

Objectives

- Reopen and use the six established tools in the language toolbox.
- Distinguish the spoken break **PRE | FIX** from the proposed investigation break **PRE + FIX**. Use **WORD ROOTS** to test whether that second break is supported by the word's meaning and history.
- Use familiar examples to establish **PRE = BEFORE**.
- Use word history to understand **FIX = FASTEN / ATTACH**.
- Explain why **PREFIX** is a fitting name for a part attached before a base.

Materials

- Toolbox or display labeled **OUR LANGUAGE TOOLBOX**
- Tool cards: **SYLLABLES**, **COMPOUND WORDS**, **BASE**, **PREFIX**, **SUFFIX**, **WORD ROOTS**
- Cards for **PRE**, **FIX**, **PLAY**, and **RE-**
- **PRE** comparison set: **PREVIEW**, **PREHEAT**, **PREFIX**
- Magnet, clip, Velcro, or tape for physically attaching word parts

Participation Handle: Children may name and place tools, clap, point, move cards, write on the board, attach word parts, explain a clue, disagree with or build on an idea, and rebuild the word. Preserve the investigation rather than requiring one participation format.

Keep three board areas visible: **OUR LANGUAGE TOOLBOX** on the left, the changing **WORKBENCH** in the center, and growing **EVIDENCE** on the right. Build the contents with the class; do not preload the answers.

Move the word through one visible representation at a time on the **WORKBENCH: PREFIX → PRE | FIX → PREFIX → PRE + FIX → PREFIX**. Erase or rebuild between stages rather than displaying all versions simultaneously. The changing workbench should show the class dismantling the word for different purposes and then restoring the whole word.

Teaching Sequence

1. Open the Toolbox

Open the toolbox and place the tools on the table in this stable Lesson 13–14 order: **SYLLABLES** → **COMPOUND WORDS** → **BASE** → **PREFIX** → **SUFFIX** → **WORD ROOTS**. Let children name, place, point to, or briefly demonstrate what each tool helps them do. Keep the rhythm quick: spoken beats; whole words joined; something to build on; before the base; after the base; meaning and word history. This is an inventory, not six miniature reviews.

2. Put PREFIX on the Workbench

Remove **PREFIX** from the toolbox. Say: “We know how to use a prefix. But PREFIX is a word too. Why is it called PREFIX?” Do not answer yet.

3. Use the Familiar Routine

1. **SEE IT:** Display PREFIX.
2. **SAY IT:** Read the whole word naturally.
3. **CLAP IT:** Use the syllable tool to hear **PRE | FIX**.
4. **BREAK IT:** Invite a student to propose **PRE + FIX** as a break worth investigating. Do not label it as historically meaningful yet.
5. **FIND WHAT WE KNOW:** Ask what each part may contribute.

Teacher move: Note briefly that the two breaks land in the same place but answer different questions. CLAP IT gives spoken structure; BREAK IT opens a meaning/history investigation.

4. Investigate PRE

Begin with **PREVIEW**: ask what a preview is, whether it shows the whole movie, game, show, or video, and when it is seen. Then use **PREHEAT** as confirmation: ask when something is preheated. Record **PRE** → **BEFORE** in the **EVIDENCE** area and leave it visible. Return immediately to **PRE + FIX** so PREFIX becomes the third comparison.

PRE = BEFORE

5. Test What We Know About FIX

Invite students’ present-day understanding of **fix**. If they say “repair,” record **FIX** → **repair** in the **EVIDENCE** area and leave it visible. Test the clue: Does **BEFORE + REPAIR** explain the name of the tool? When it does not, say: “We found something we know, but it did not finish the investigation. We need another tool.” Add the historical evidence beneath the first clue later rather than replacing it.

6. Use WORD ROOTS

Pull **WORD ROOTS** from the toolbox. Explain: “FIX can mean repair in English today. When we follow the history of this word backward, it takes us to an older idea: FASTEN or ATTACH—to put something firmly in place.” In the **EVIDENCE** area, add **older trail** → **FASTEN / ATTACH** beneath **FIX** → **repair**. Keep both clues visible.

FIX = FASTEN / ATTACH

7. Put the Evidence Together

Combine the clues: **BEFORE + FASTEN**, or **ATTACH BEFORE**. Connect this directly to the known handle: **A prefix is added before a base**. Place **RE-** before **PLAY** and physically fasten the cards: **RE + PLAY** → **REPLAY**. Ask: “Why is PREFIX a good name for this tool?”

8. Rebuild and Return

Return to the whole word **PREFIX**. Rebuild it, read it together, and have students write PREFIX or complete a brief response such as “PREFIX is a fitting name because ____.” Ask what they knew before and what the investigation added. Then return PREFIX and WORD ROOTS to the toolbox.

THE TOOLS IN OUR TOOLBOX ARE WORDS TOO.

WE CAN USE OUR TOOLS TO INVESTIGATE OUR TOOLS.

Quick Formative Check

- Say PREFIX and clap **PRE | FIX**.
- Show the investigated pieces **PRE + FIX**.
- Tell what PRE contributes and what WORD ROOTS revealed about FIX.
- Explain why PREFIX fits the tool’s job.
- Place RE- correctly before PLAY.

Teacher Notes

- Keep the toolbox inventory quick and physical; do not reteach six definitions.
- Preserve “fix means repair” as valid present-day knowledge, then test whether it explains the target word.
- Do not turn the lesson into Latin grammar or a technical debate about roots, bases, and stems.
- Do not investigate SUFFIX yet; Lesson 14 should repeat the same opening with SUFFIX on the workbench.
- The lesson is successful when students can use the tools and explain the relationship in their own words.

Student Packet Direction: The packet supports and extends the live toolbox and workbench investigation. It should not replace the class building the board, moving the pieces, testing clues, and choosing WORD ROOTS together. The paper supports the lesson; it does not overtake it.

Lesson Stop Point

Students should leave knowing that **PRE means BEFORE, FIX carries the older idea FASTEN / ATTACH, and PREFIX is a name that fits the job.** They do not need to memorize Latin terminology.