Word Formation

Overview
There are many word beginnings (prefixes) and word endings (suffixes) that can be added to a word to change its meaning or its word class. The most common ones are shown here, followed by examples of how they are used in the process of word formation. More can be found in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.

Verb Formation
The endings ize and ify can be added to nouns and adjectives to form verbs.

Noun + ize = Verb
American + ize = Americanize
Legal + ize = legalize

This will make the factory more modern. This will modernize the factory.

Adjective + ize = Verb
False + ify = Falsify
Humid + ify = humidify

These tablets make the water pure. They purify the water.

Adverb Formation
The ending ly can be added to most adjectives to form adverbs.

Adjective + ly = Adverb
Easy + ly = easily

His behaviour was stupid. He behaved stupidly

Noun Formation
The endings er, ment, and ation can be added to many verbs to form nouns.

Verb + er = Noun
Fasten + er = faster
Open + er = opener
John drives a bus. He is a bus driver.

Amaze + ment = amazement
Retire + ment = retirement

Children develop very quickly. Their development is very quick.

Admire + ation = admiration
Organize + ation = organization

The doctor examined me. The doctor gave me an examination.

The endings ity/ty and ness can be added to many adjectives to form nouns.

Stupid + ity = stupidity

Don’t be so cruel. I hate cruelty

Adjective Formation

The endings y, ic, ical, ful, and less can be added to many nouns to form adjectives. The ending able can be added to many verbs to form adjectives.

Noun + y = Adjective
Dirt + y = dirty

That was an awful smell. It was very smelly.

Atom + ic = atomic

That was a book of poetry. It was a poetic book.

Hope + ful = hopeful

His broken leg caused pain. It was very painful.

Care + less = careless

The operation didn’t cause pain. It was painless.

Verb + able = Adjective
Love + able = lovable

You can wash this coat. It’s washable

Opposites

Prefixes added to the front of many words can produce an opposite meaning.

un + fortunate = unfortunate

I’m not very happy. In fact I’m very unhappy.
In + efficient = inefficient & ill + literate = illiterate & Im + possible = impossible

De + centralize = decentralize

Instead of inflating the tire, he deflated it.

dis + honest = dishonest

I don’t agree with everything you said. I disagree with the last part.

non + payment = non-payment

You are not making any sense. What you are saying is nonsense.