



NEGATIVE PREFIXES AND ACADEMIC PLURALS

NEGATIVE PREFIXES

DISCONTENT

- Discontent: unhappy
- “Uncontent” is not a word, but many Americans use this word in conversation.

DISQUALIFY AND UNQUALIFIED

- Disqualify: to prohibit or exclude; to bar or ban
- Unqualified: without qualifications; untrained or unskilled

NONDISCRIMINATORY AND INDISCRIMINATE

- Nondiscriminatory: equal; unbiased; fair
- Indiscriminate: random in selection; uncritical or unselective

NONSPECIFIC AND UNSPECIFIC

- Nonspecific: general; generic
- Unspecific: undefined; unclear

These two words can be used almost interchangeably.

VALUABLE AND INVALUABLE

These two words are often confused. “Invaluable” is not a negative term, but actually means that something is so valuable that it doesn’t have a price.

- Valuable: treasured; prized; respected
- Invaluable: priceless

Words with double “s”

Dissatisfied: unhappy; discontent (or: unsatisfied)

Dissolution: to break something down or separate

Dissolve: to melt, soften, or fall apart

Exceptions: unsavory: disgusting

Words with double “r”

- Irrevocable: synonym with “irretrievable;” cannot be undone or changed
- Irreversible: permanent
- Irretrievable: synonym with “irrevocable;” cannot be taken back
- Irrefutable: convincing; undeniable; cannot be argued
- Irrelevant: unrelated; not connected to the topic
- Irreparable: cannot be fixed or repaired
- Exceptions: disreputable, unreliable, and unregulated

“Im”

Impossible

Impatient

Impotent: not fertile; powerless; helpless

Immutable: absolute; undeniable

“il”

Illegible

Illegal

Illicit

Illegitimate

Exceptions: unloved; unlucky; unleashed; unlocked

IRREGULAR ACADEMIC WORDS FROM LATIN AND GREEK

WORDS ARE COLOR-CODED BY THE ACADEMIC FIELD THAT USES THEM THE MOST OFTEN. WORDS IN BLACK HAVE A MORE GENERAL USE.

MATHEMATICS

PSYCHOLOGY

SPACE/ASTRONOMY

MEDICINE

BIOLOGY

GENERAL RESEARCH

EDUCATION

WRITING & PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

Is → es

Analysis → analyses

Axis → axes

basis → bases

bias → biases

crisis → crises

diagnosis → diagnoses

emphasis → emphases

hypothesis → hypotheses

neurosis → neuroses

oasis → oases

parenthesis → parentheses

psychosis → psychoses

synopsis → synopses

thesis → theses

radius → radii

rhombus → rhombi

stratus → strati

stylus → styli

syllabus → syllabi

uterus → uteri

on/um → "a"

automaton → automata

bacterium → bacteria

criterion → criteria

curriculum → curricula

datum → data

medium → media

memorandum →
memoranda

us → "i"

alumnus → alumni

cactus → cacti

focus → foci

fungus → fungi

nucleus → nuclei

octopus → octopi

millennium → millennia

ovum → ova

phenomenon →
phenomena

referendum →
referenda

spectrum → spectra

a→ae

alumna→ alumnae

alga→algae

antenna→ antennae

formula→ formulae

larva→ larvae

minutia→ minutiae

nebula→ nebulae

vertebra→ vertebrae

Words that don't follow the spelling rules:

Campus→ campuses

Census→ censuses

Corpus→ corpora

Genus→ genera

Forum→ forums (can also use "fora")

Species→ species

Status→ statuses

Virus→ viruses

ix/ex→ices

appendix→ appendices

matrix→ matrices

index→ indices

vertex→ vertices

Other unusual plurals: Always pluralize the primary noun in the phrase.

Example: blackbird→ blackbirds (not blacksbird). The birds are plural, not their color.

Passerby→ passersby

(people walking by, usually on the street)

Hyphenated words:

Mothers-in-law

Attorneys-at-law

Based on: Howard, J. (2006). *Academic spelling power*. Boston: Cengage Learning.