

## What are Word Cells?

Just like cells make up the human body, word cells make up our language. Word cells are the little bits and pieces that we have borrowed from other languages in order to create English. Most of the word cells on the lists you will be assigned in this class are really just Greek or Latin *root words*, but some of them are also *prefixes* or *suffixes*. Rather than quibble over the precise definitions of all these terms, I just invented a new term to cover all of them: Word Cells.

## Why do we need to know the Word Cells?

If you encounter an unfamiliar word, you can often figure out what it means if you know what all the parts (cells) of it mean. For example, let's say you come across the word *antipathy*. You may not know exactly what it means, but you certainly recognize the cell *-anti-* from words like *antifreeze*, *antiwar*, and *antidote*. Then, if you think a bit more, you might notice that you've seen the cell *-path-* before in words like *sympathy*, *empathy*, and *pathetic*, all words that relate to feelings. Put *-anti-*, which clearly means "against" with *-path-*, "feelings", and you can figure out that *antipathy* is "feeling against something." Of course that may not be exactly what the dictionary says, but you get the general idea, which helps you make meaning of whatever you happen to be reading. Knowing the word cells will help you figure out the meanings of words you might not otherwise know.

## How many Word Cells are there?

There are hundreds of them, probably too many to count. In this class, you'll be learning the most common ones. You've probably already learned a lot of the ones that deal with measurement in science class, and, if you have been speaking English all your life, you will have already figured some of them out just because you have used them so often.

## How do I deduce the meaning of word cells?

Think of all the English words you can that seem to have that cell in them and see if you can figure out what they have in common.

### **-act-**

An **activity** is something you do.  
An **actor** does something.  
**Actions** are things we do.  
So *-act-* must mean "do."

### **-bio-**

**Biology** is the study of life.  
A **biography** is a life story.  
An **antibiotic** kills the tiny life forms that make us sick.  
So *-bio-* must mean "life."

### **-dem-**

**Democracy** is rule by the people.  
An **epidemic** affects many people.  
**Demographics** are statistics about people.  
So *-dem-* must mean "people."

### **-alt-**

**Altitude** is how high you are in the air.  
An **alto** is at the high end of the vocal scale.  
An **altimeter** measures how high you are in an airplane.  
So *-alt-* must mean \_\_\_\_\_.