
Know Your Prefix: A Guide to Terms



The list of terms that people are using to describe their identities is ever growing, and it may feel hard to stay on top of it all. This quick guide digs into the Greek and Latin roots of common prefixes to better explain their meanings and how they're being used.

PREFIX	MEANING	EXAMPLES
<i>a-</i>	From Greek, meaning “not”	asexual, aromantic, apolitical
<i>bi-</i>	From Latin, meaning “two”	bisexual, bigender, bicycle
<i>cis-</i>	From Latin, meaning “on this side of”	cisgender, cis-molecule
<i>demi-</i>	From Latin, meaning “half”	demisexual, demiboy, demigod
<i>hetero-</i>	From Greek, meaning “another”	heterosexual, heterogeneous
<i>homo-</i>	From Greek, meaning “same”	homosexual, homogeneous
<i>inter-</i>	From Latin, meaning “between”	intersex, internet, intercept
<i>mono-</i>	From Greek, meaning “one” or “only”	monosexual, monorail
<i>non-</i>	From Latin, meaning “not”	non-binary, nonprofit
<i>omni-</i>	From Latin, meaning “all” or “every”	omnisexual, omniscient
<i>pan-</i>	From Greek, meaning “all” or “every”	pansexual, panacea, panorama
<i>poly-</i>	From Greek, meaning “many” or “several”	polysexual, polymer, polyglot
<i>trans-</i>	From Latin, meaning “across”	transgender, transport

Possible discussion questions:

1. Looking at their original meanings in Greek, how would you describe the difference between being polysexual and pansexual?
2. Looking at their original meanings in Latin, how would you describe the difference between being bisexual and demisexual?
3. It is common to hear people say that a heterosexual is a person who is attracted to people of the opposite sex. Looking at the Greek meaning of “hetero-“, what might be a more accurate way to define heterosexual?

Possible activities:

1. Split students into two groups and ask them to come up with as many words in English as they can that start with “trans-“ and “inter-“. Make it a competition!
2. Write the prefixes and their meanings above on big pieces of paper, one per sheet. Hand them out and ask students to find their match.