

Word Building

In one section of the Cambridge First Certificate Use of English paper you are asked to complete a paragraph, supplying words derived from a root word that is given to you, like this:

According to many (1) SCIENCE sports can be very (2) in VALUE training people to overcome their ...

In the first case, you are expected to see that the word that is missing is a noun, it is plural, and if it is derived from **science**, it must be **scientists**. In the second case the word that is missing is an adjective derived from **value**, so it is **valuable**.

You will find 15 tests of this kind at the end of this section of the book. Before you attempt them, however, it will be useful for you to learn the best technique for dealing with this kind of question, and at the same time to expand your vocabulary by referring to the appendices at the back of the book.

The best way to learn new vocabulary is to meet it in context in the course of your reading, but while you probably know the root words that are given in most cases – **friend**, for example – you may not have seen the abstract noun, **friendship**, or the adjective, which looks like an adverb, **friendly** or the negative form, **unfriendly**.

The root words may be verbs, nouns or adjectives, but many of them belong to related families. For instance, from the adjective root, **sweet**, we can derive the verb **sweeten**, the noun **sweetness** and the adverb **sweetly**. The preliminary exercises here are meant to draw your attention to the commonest families of related words in English, where the forms have the same beginnings or endings, and also to the exceptions, which are the ones most likely to appear in an examination!

Preliminary exercises

A Adjective root: verb *-en*, noun *-ness*

Study Appendix 5:1 on page 121. A number of common adjectives act as roots for verbs and nouns. In these cases, the verb ending **-en** has the meaning of increasing the quality of the adjective, the noun indicates the state. So the state of being **black** is **blackness** and to make something **black** is to **blacken**.

Most of these combinations are consistent but pay special attention to those that are irregular (shown in different type in the Appendix). For instance, the noun derived from **strong** is NOT *strongness* but **strength** and to make something **stronger** is to **strengthen** (NOT *strongen*) it.

Without looking at the Appendix, make nouns derived from these adjectives, but do not assume that all of them will be regular and if you think you know a correct form that is irregular, put it down: **bright, dark, deep, fresh, light, long, mad, quiet, weak, wide**.

Check the Appendix to see if any are irregular. Did you know which they were?

Now form verbs in the same way from the following: **fat, fresh, hard, long, ripe, sharp, soft, straight, thick, white**.

Only one in this list is irregular. Which is it?

1 In completing the exercises that follow, you must decide on the function of the word in the sentence and whether it is affirmative or negative. Look at these examples.

- a These days many people use saccharin to *sweeten* their tea. (SWEET)
- b Putting saccharin in the tea has *sweetened* it. (SWEET)
- c Putting saccharin in the tea makes it *sweeter*: it has a *sweetening* effect. (SWEET, SWEET)
- d She sang so *sweetly* that everyone was impressed. (SWEET)
- e She had the *sweetest* singing voice I've ever heard. (SWEET)

