Difference Between Base Word and Root Word
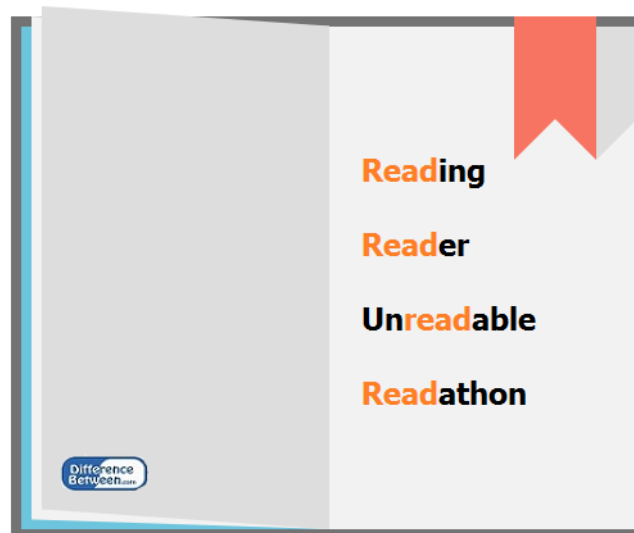
Key Difference – Base Word vs Root Word

Base words are words that exist as recognizable words in the English language. These words cannot be divided into smaller units. Prefixes and suffixes can be added to these words to create new words. There are two theories about root words. Some people use the term root word as a synonym for the base word. However, in some contexts, root words refer to the part of the base word that comes from another language. This article will mainly focus on this second meaning. The key difference between base word and root word is that **base words are recognizable words in the English language whereas root words are from another language.**

What are Base Words?

There are two types of words in the English language: the words that can be broken down into smaller units and words that cannot be broken down into smaller units. Words that cannot be broken down into smaller units are known as base words. In other words, base word is the base form of a word and gives its basic meaning. For example, let's look at the two words *happy* and *unhappy*. The word *happy* cannot be broken down into smaller units, but *unhappy* can be broken down into two units since this word is made by adding the prefix *un* to the base word *happy*. Prefixes and suffixes are always added to base words.

Reading

Reader

Unreadable

Readathon

Prefixes and Suffixes

- Prefix is a word element is found in front of a base word.
- Suffix is a word element is found after a base word.

Look at the following words and see if you can identify the base word by removing the suffixes and prefixes.

Reusable, disappear, unhappiness, unacceptable, disqualified, childish, unlikely, reinvention
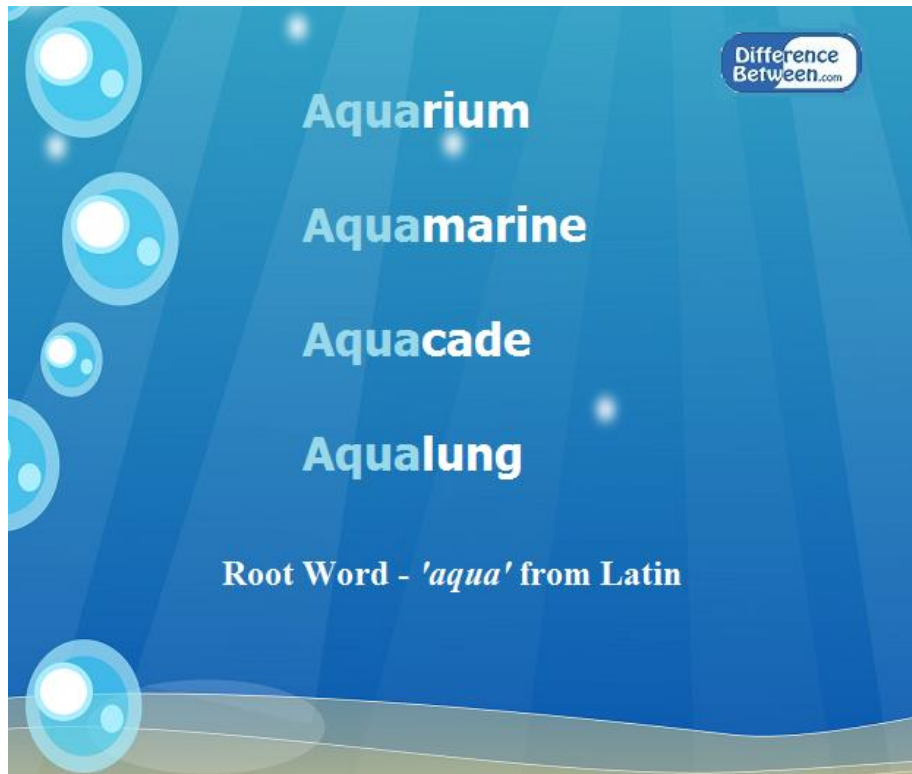
The base words of the above list are underlined in the following section.

1. Reusable – re + use + able
2. Disappear – dis + appear
3. Unhappiness – un + happy + ness
4. Unacceptable – un + accept + ble
5. Disqualified – dis + qualify + ed
6. Childish – child + ish
7. Unlikely – un + like + ly
8. Reinvention – re + invent + ion

What are Root Words?

In linguistics, the term root word is often used synonymously with base word, and refers to a morpheme from which words have been created by the addition of prefixes or suffixes. For example, the word *transportation* is formed from the root word *transport*.

However, the term root word also refers to the origin of the word. In this sense, root word is the part of the base word that comes from another language. For example, the word *maternal* comes from Latin *mater* and gives the meaning *mother*. So, this Latin word, *mater* can be considered as the root word of *maternal*. The root words of words like *maternity, maternally, maternalism,* etc. is also the Latin word *mater*.

Examples of Base Words and Root Words

Let's look at some other examples to understand the meaning of base words and root words more clearly.

1. Tricycle

Base word = *cycle*, Root word = Latin *cyclus* (circle)

2.   Transportation

Base word = transport, Root word = Latin *port* (to carry)

3.   Immoderately

Base word = moderate, Root word = Latin *moderatus* (reduced, controlled)

What is the Difference Between Base Word and Root Word?

Base Word vs Root Word	
Base Word is a morpheme from which words have been created by the addition of prefixes or suffixes.	Root word is the part of the base word that comes from another language.
Individual Meaning	
Base word can stand alone.	Root word cannot often stand alone.
Nature	
Base words cannot be further divided.	Root word comes from another language.

Summary – Base Word vs Root Word

Base word is a form of a word to which affixes can be added to create new words. Base words and root words are two terms that are sometimes used as synonyms. However, root words are also defined as parts of the base word that come from another language. This is the difference between base word and root word.

References:

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2. Nordquist, Richard. "Base Forms of Words in English." ThoughtCo, Available here.

How to Cite this Article?

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