

THE MOST COMMON SUFFIXES OF FORMING DIMINUTIVES

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As we know that a diminutive (or pet name) of a given name is a short and/or affectionate form. Often they are only used by friends and relatives.

The most common diminutives (at least among English names) are those that are short forms of the original name, very often from the first syllable or sound of the name. For example, Alex is from Alexander, Barb is from Barbara, Deb is from Deborah, and Mike is from Michael. Other short forms don't come from the beginning of the name, but instead from the end or the middle, like Beth from Elizabeth, Fred from Alfred, Greta from Margareta, and Lisa from Elisabeth.

Diminutives can also be formed by adding a suffix to the original name or the name's short form. In English, the *-y/-ie* suffix is very common, leading to diminutives like Abby, Debbie, Charlie, Johnny and Sammy.

Italian diminutives can use the *-ino/-ina* suffix (ultimately from the Latin masculine *-inus* or feminine *-ina* meaning "belonging to"). It can be seen in the names Giorgino, Giuseppina and Luigino. The *-etto/-etta* diminutive suffix gives rise to Antonietta, Giulietta and Simonetta.

French feminine diminutives often use *-ette*, as in Annette and Jeannette. The *-ette* and *-ine* suffixes can also make masculine names feminine, as in Antoinette from Antoine, Georgine from Georges, Henriette from Henri, and Paulette from Paul. The French also use *-on* (Alison, Manon and Ninon) and *-ot/-otte* (Charlot, Charlotte, Jeannot and Margot).

Russian diminutives are formed using many different suffixes. These include *-sha* (Masha for Mariya, Misha for Mikhail, Natasha for Nataliya,

and Sasha for Aleksandr or Aleksandra) and *-ya* (Anya for Anna, Kolya for Nikolai, Petya for Pyotr, and Zhenya for Yevgeniya), as well as *-ik*, *-nka* and *-shka*.

Uzbek diminutives are formed using many different suffixes. These include – *bonu* (*Bonu* for *Robiyabonu*), *oyim* (*Oyim* for *Mohlaroyim*), *dona* (*Dona* for *Durdona*), *zoda* (*Zoda* for *Gulzoda*), *bek* (*Bek* for *Otabek*, *Oybek*), *voy* (*Akmalvoy* for *Akmal*) and others.

Others include:

-ito/-ita in Spanish - Anita, Carlito, Juanita and Pepito

-je/-tje in Dutch - Antje, Liesje and Maartje

-an/-in in Irish - Aidan, Kevin, Máirín and Ryan

-ag in Scottish - Beileag, Morag and Seonag

-ek in Polish and Czech - Bolek, Jarek, Jurek and Radek

-ska in Hungarian - Annuska, Juliska and Mariska

-ka/-ko in various Eastern European languages -

Branka, Ivanka, Stanko and Zlatko

Sometimes sounds that were difficult to pronounce (especially by children) were omitted or altered, resulting in diminutives. The difficult Norman *r* sound in medieval English names was often dropped (as in Babs for Barbara, Biddy for Bridget, and Fanny for Francis) or changed (as in Hal for Harry, Molly for Mary, and Sally or Sadie for Sarah). Likewise, the *th* sound was often changed, as in Dot for Dorothy and Betty or Bess for Elizabeth.

Rhyming nicknames were also used. Robert might be known as Rob, Hob, Dob or Nob (although Hob, Dob and Nob have since died out, they are preserved in surnames such as Hobson, Dobb and Nobbs). Likewise Roger might be Rodge, Hodge, Nodge or Dodge and Richard might be Rick, Dick or Hick.

The diminutive Ned for Edward resulted from the medieval affectionate phrase *mine Ed (ward)*, which was later reinterpreted as *my Ned*. Other examples of this formation include Nan (later Nancy) for Ann, Nell for Ellen, and Noll for Oliver.

In this place we'd like to give a big list of little affixes:

1. **-aster**: This generally pejorative suffix denoting resemblance was common a couple hundred years ago but is rare today; the only well-known surviving instance is *poetaster*, a word describing an inferior poet.
2. **-cule**: This ending, sometimes with letter c omitted, is common in medical and scientific vocabulary. Capsule and molecule are common examples: animalcule, referring to minute organisms such as bacteria, is rarely in lay usage.
3. This direct borrowing from Latin is rarer than its Frenchified counterpart: calculus is perhaps the best-known form, though homunculus ("little man") is an interesting example.
4. The diminutive suffix **-el** appears frequently in ordinary language: chapel and tunnel are only two of many examples.
5. The diminutive suffixes **-ella** and **-ello** are the feminine form and they are best known as part of Cinderella's name: among objects, novella is perhaps the most familiar usage.
6. The rare suffix **-elle** occurs in organelle.
7. The suffix **-en** denotes a small or young form, as in kitten, though chicken is a reserve example: the term for adults was fowl and chicken denotes a young bird.
8. The suffix **-erel** as with **-rel**, words ending in **-erel** are sometimes pejorative, as in doggerel.
9. The diminutive suffix **-ers** does not literally suggest a reduction in size; it is employed in coining slang such as bonkers and preppers.
10. The diminutive suffix **-ster** refers to a person who does or is what the root word indicates: gangster, bankster and youngster.
11. The masculine form of the French diminutive suffixes **-et** and **-ette** appear in such ubiquitous words as faucet and wallet. The feminine form of **-et**, more common in English than the masculine form, is seen in words such as cigarette and kitchenette.

12. –ie: Words with this suffix are from English as in doggie, Scottish as in laddie, or Dutch as in cookie and are diminutives of personal names, as in Charlie.
13. The English diminutive suffix –ing generally appears in references to fractions or parts, as in farthing or tithing.
14. The suffix can be added to almost any noun to create an adjective noting the connection or similarity of one thing to another as greenish.
15. These forms of suffixes as –let, -lette respectively indirectly and directly borrowed from French as in booklet, roulette or the word omelet was formerly written as omelette. -let is diminutive - piglet, ringlet, booklet - and is still used to form diminutives.
16. The suffix –ling formed words with this diminutive are generally but not exclusively affectionate as darling and duckling. -ling and -let are not necessarily affectionate. -ling is used to indicate a diminutive version of something - codling, duckling, gosling - duckling) or to indicate that something has some kind of attribute - darling (dear-ling), earthling, farthing (fourth-ling).
17. The first variant of this baby-talk slang is found as –sie(s) or –sy, for example, footsie and onesies, while the second appears in teensy-weensy and the like and names like Betsy.
18. –y is a form with doubling of the preceding letter is seen both in diminutives of given name such as Bobby and Patty, and in words like puppy and mommy. In addition, the flexible prefix mini- is easily attached to any existing word, such as in miniskirt, minivan, minibar, miniblind, miniboss, minibus, minicar, minicassette, minicomputer, minigame, minigun, minimall, minimarket, minimart, mini-nuke, minischool, miniseries, minitower, minivan, miniver, mini-LP, mini-me and MiniDisc.

Modern English doesn't actually go in for diminutive suffixes very much. There are lots of word where a diminutive suffix is 'fossilised' - like the "-ling" in

"duckling" or the "-let" in "piglet". But we wouldn't usually, today, use "-ling" or "-let" to create new diminutives - not unless we were being humorous.

The only diminutive suffix we can think of that is still productive is "-ie"/"y"/"ey": you could add this to more or less anything to produce the connotations *little* + *affectionate*. So doggie, horsey, housey, leggie.... I say more or less anything: I probably should say "more or less anything a child would want to be affectionate about", because adding "-ie" to words does make them sound like child speak unless the words concerned are proper names and you're turning them into a nickname.

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