Verb Formation

CEFR C2 · Verb derivation at the limits: morphology, productivity, corpus and style
WS1 Morphology & Productivity · WS2 Corpus, Register & Variation · WS3 Coinage, Conversion & Style · WS4 Scholarly Analysis & Writing · Answer Key

Worksheet 1: Morphology & Productivity

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: How Verb-Forming Processes Behave

English derives verbs by **suffixation** (-ise, -ify, -ate, -en), **prefixation** (de-, dis-, re-, en-), and — most productively of all — **conversion** (zero-derivation). These differ in **productivity**, **base selection** (Latinate vs Germanic; noun vs adjective), and phonology. **-ise** is the most productive suffix (freely coining *operationalise, decarbonise*); **-en** is restricted to monosyllabic obstruent-final adjectives (*widen, harden*, but **greenen*); **-ate** is largely unproductive today. Conversion is nearly unconstrained morphologically but limited by **blocking** and register.

Process	Productivity / base	Note
-ise / -ize	very high; many bases	operationalise, decarbonise
-ify	moderate; mono/disyllabic	solidify, gentrify
-en	restricted phonology	monosyllabic + obstruent (widen); *greenen
-ate	largely frozen	few new coinages
conversion	maximal; blocked lexically	to platform; *to strong (→ strengthen)

Part A – Theoretical Analysis

1. State the phonological constraint on **-en** (as in *widen, harden, soften*) and explain why **greenen, *bluen, *slimen* are ill-formed. Refer to syllable count and the final segment of the base.
2. Rank **-ise, -ate, conversion** by productivity, giving evidence (recent coinages / nonce forms). Why is conversion often described as the "default" verb-forming process in Modern English?
3. Explain **blocking** in verb derivation with **to strong* / *strengthen* and **to wide* / *widen*. Under what conditions does conversion nonetheless win out over an existing derived verb (e.g. *to progress* alongside older forms)?

Score: _____ / 20

Worksheet 2: Corpus, Register & Variation

Name: _____ *Date:* _____ *Level: C2 (CEFR)*

Reference: What Corpora Reveal

Corpora show **-ise/-ize** nominal-to-verb coinages clustering in policy, business and science registers (*incentivise, operationalise, decarbonise*), often drawing prescriptive criticism; **conversion** proliferating in business and tech jargon (*to action, to onboard, to architect*) and in informal/social usage (*to DM, to ghost*); the **-ize/-ise** spelling split marking AmE vs BrE (though Oxford BrE uses -ize); and **en-/-en** forms being largely fixed, coining almost nothing new. Productivity is measurable via neologism and hapax counts.

Register	Favoured process	Example
Policy / business	-ise coinage; conversion	incentivise, to action
Science / tech	-ise; conversion	decarbonise, to platform
Informal / social	conversion	to ghost, to DM, to adult
AmE vs BrE	-ize / -ise spelling	organize / organise
Frozen	en-/-en	coins almost nothing new

Part A – Diagnose Register & Productivity

#	Verb in context	Register / productivity note
1	The city pledged to decarbonise by 2035.	
2	Can you onboard the new hire today?	
3	He ghosted me after the interview.	
4	We must operationalise the strategy.	

Part B – Rate the Coinage

For each nonce verb, say whether the process licenses it and how transparent/acceptable it is.

1. to decarbonise _____
2. to sunset (a product) _____
3. *to greenen _____

Part C – Register-Corpus Map

Place each in its most likely corpus: *enfranchise · to architect · decarbonise · to ghost · formalise*

Corpus	Forms
Legal / formal	

Science / policy	
Business / tech jargon	
Informal / social media	

Score: _____ / 25

Worksheet 3: Coinage, Conversion & Style

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: Verbing as a Rhetorical Resource

Coined verbs do stylistic work: transparent **-ise** and conversions compress and sound current or technical; verbings can be witty (*to gaslight, to rage-quit*), pointed (*to weaponise*), or grating (*to leverage, to action*); denominal verbs can pack a whole scenario into one word (*to shoulder, to sideline, to platform*). The C2 writer coins verbs a reader accepts effortlessly, exploits conversion for concision and stance, and can diagnose when a verbing enlivens versus when it merely obscures.

Device	Effect	Example
denominal verb (conversion)	packs a scenario	to shoulder the blame; to sideline
-ise coinage	technical / current	to gamify, to weaponise
playful verbing	wit / novelty	to rage-quit, to doomscroll
pointed verbing	critique / stance	to whitewash, to sanitise
jargon verbing	grating / evasive	to action, to leverage, to ideate

Part A – Interpret the Coinage

1. "The report whitewashed the failures." _____
2. "He shouldered the responsibility." _____
3. "They gamified the training." _____
4. "Management wants to ideate solutions." _____

Part B – Coin with Control

Coin a transparent verb for each meaning and name the process.

1. (to remove carbon from) → _____
2. (to move to the sidelines / marginalise) → _____
3. (to make into a game) → _____

Part C – Enlivening or Obscuring?

Judge each verbing and justify; recast the obscuring ones.

#	Verbing	Enlivens / obscures + recast
1	"We'll circle back and action the deliverables."	
2	"She rage-quit the project."	
3	"Let's operationalise our learnings."	

Score: _____ / 30

Worksheet 4: Scholarly Analysis & Writing

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Part A – Critical Text Analysis

> No process reveals the opportunism of English morphology better than the verbing of nouns. Where the suffix -ise still bears the faint odour of the committee room, conversion simply helps itself: a noun is pressed into service as a verb overnight, and by morning no one remembers it was ever anything else. To platform, to onboard, to gaslight — each began as a coinage that a purist would have deplored, and each has, with time, been quietly naturalised. The lesson is uncomfortable for the prescriptivist: the coinages that survive are not the ones that were licensed, but the ones that were useful.

1. Identify every derived verb and classify it (suffixation, prefixation, conversion), noting any that could be analysed more than one way.
2. "the faint odour of the committee room" characterises -ise. Unpack the metaphor and its sociolinguistic claim.
3. The passage claims survival tracks usefulness, not "licensing". Evaluate this with reference to blocking and lexicalisation.
4. Assess how the passage's own coinages enact its thesis about naturalisation.

Part B – Extended Scholarly Writing

Write the opening two paragraphs (220–260 words) of a scholarly essay on: "Conversion is the default verb-forming process of Modern English, and its productivity is a problem only for the prescriptivist." Requirements — include and underline: (1) one **conversion (denominal verb)** you justify; (2) one **-ise/-ify** suffix verb with correct base selection; (3) one **prefixed verb** whose prefix you gloss; (4) one precise **metalinguistic term** (conversion, zero-derivation, productivity, blocking, lexicalisation, Latinate) used correctly; (5) two **epistemic hedges** calibrated to each claim; (6) one **conjunct** that maps the argument's logic precisely.

#	Line
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	

Features: _____ / 6 Word count: _____ Score: _____ / 35

Answer Key & Teacher Notes

For teacher use only — C2 Level, Verb Formation

Worksheet 1 – Part A (model)

1 -en attaches only to monosyllabic adjectives ending in an obstruent (stop/fricative): wide, hard, soft, black → widen, harden, soften, blacken. Bases that are polysyllabic or end in a sonorant/vowel are excluded, so *greenen (ends in /n/, a sonorant), *bluen (ends in a vowel) and *slimen (ends in /m/) are all ill-formed. · 2 conversion > -ise > -ate. Conversion coins freely and instantly (to platform, to onboard); -ise is productive but stratally biased and register-marked (decarbonise); -ate is essentially frozen. Conversion is the "default" because it requires no phonological or etymological licensing — any noun can, in principle, verb. · 3 Blocking: an existing derived verb (strengthen, widen) pre-empts the converted rival (*to strong, *to wide), because the lexicon already has a form for that meaning. Conversion wins when no established verb occupies the slot, when the noun's meaning diverges from any existing verb, or when register/novelty favour it (to progress, to platform).

Worksheet 2 – Part A (model)

1 science/policy — productive -ise coinage (decarbonise). · 2 business/HR jargon — conversion (to onboard). · 3 informal/social — conversion (to ghost). · 4 policy/management jargon — -ise (operationalise), often criticised.

Worksheet 2 – Part B (model)

1 licensed and transparent (-ise on a Latinate stem), now standard in climate discourse. · 2 licensed conversion (noun "sunset" → verb "retire/phase out"), tech register, transparent but jargon-ish. · 3 *greenen — ill-formed: -en rejects a sonorant-final polysyllabic base; use "make greener".

Worksheet 2 – Part C

Legal/formal: enfranchise. · Science/policy: decarbonise. · Business/tech jargon: to architect. · Informal/social media: to ghost. (formalise straddles formal/academic — accept with justification.)

Worksheet 3 – Part A (model)

1 pointed/critical — "whitewash" implies deliberate concealment of wrongdoing. · 2 denominal conversion packing a scenario — "shoulder" = take on (a burden), bodily metaphor. · 3 -ise coinage, technical/current — "gamify" = add game elements. · 4 jargon verbing — "ideate" (=generate ideas) reads as corporate cant.

Worksheet 3 – Part B (model)

1 decarbonise (-ise / de- + carbon + -ise) · 2 sideline (conversion) / marginalise (-ise) · 3 gamify (-ify).

Worksheet 3 – Part C (model)

1 obscures — "circle back/action the deliverables" is padded jargon; recast: "We'll follow up and complete the tasks." · 2 enlivens — "rage-quit" is vivid and precise. · 3 obscures — "operationalise our learnings" → "put what we learned into practice." Accept reasoned judgements.

Worksheet 4 – Part A (model)

1 verbing (conversion), coinage (—), to platform / to onboard / to gaslight (conversion), naturalised (-ise, from an adjective/Latinate stem), licensed (—, participial). "Onboard" could be analysed as

conversion of a noun/particle phrase. · 2 The metaphor associates -ise with bureaucratic, committee-generated language: -ise coinages carry a whiff of officialdom/jargon, a sociolinguistic association (not a grammatical defect) that colours how readers receive them. · 3 Sound: blocking shows the lexicon resists redundant coinages, but where a converted verb is useful and unblocked it lexicalises regardless of prescriptive "licensing"; survival is usage-driven, so utility, not sanction, predicts which coinages persist. · 4 Self-exemplifying: the passage uses to platform/onboard/ gaslight and "naturalised" to demonstrate the very naturalisation it describes — rhetorically effective, though enactment is illustration rather than proof.

Worksheet 4 – Part B: Marking Rubric

Criterion	Descriptor at C2	Marks
Justified conversion	Denominal verb, defended	0–5
-ise/-ify verb	Correct base selection	0–5
Prefixed verb	Prefix glossed correctly	0–5
Metalinguistic accuracy	Term used correctly, no overclaiming	0–5
Epistemic calibration	Two hedges matched to claim strength	0–5
Argument & length	220–260 words; contestable claim developed	0–5

The C2 benchmark is conscious control of verb coinage: a student who verbs a noun and can explain, in a footnote, why conversion beats an -ise rival here (blocking, register, transparency) has demonstrated mastery.