Adjective Formation

CEFR C1 · Suffix choice, connotation and register
WS1 Near-Synonymous Suffixes · WS2 Connotation & Register · WS3 Derivation, Blocking & Nuance · WS4 Critical Analysis & Writing · Answer Key

Worksheet 1: Near-Synonymous Suffixes

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)

Reference: Small Suffix, Big Difference

Several suffixes seem to do the same job but differ in meaning, productivity or tone: **-ic vs -ical**, **-ly vs -like**, **-ish vs -ly**, **-ese/-ian/-ic** for origin. At C1, precise selection — and awareness of which pairs have split into distinct meanings — marks advanced control.

Contrast	Distinction	Example
-ic / -ical	often specialised meanings	economic/economical; classic/ classical
-ly / -like	-ly = manner/quality; -like = resembling	friendly / child-like
-ish	approximation / mild degree / pejorative	reddish, sevenish, childish
-ly (adj) vs -ly (adv)	some -ly words are adjectives	a lovely view (adj), not an adverb
-some	tending to / causing	troublesome, tiresome

Part A – Choose with Precision

1. a _____ reaction — typical, chemical sense (class/classic/classical)
2. He behaved in a very _____ way — like a child, immature. (child: -ish/-like)
3. She has a _____ innocence — pure, positive. (child: -ish/-like)
4. We'll meet at _____. (seven → approximately)
5. a _____ problem — causing trouble (trouble → -some)

Part B – -ish: Which Nuance?

State whether -ish means approximation, mild degree, or pejorative.

#	Word in context	Nuance
1	a greenish tint	
2	a selfish attitude	
3	We'll arrive at eightish.	
4	a foolish remark	

Score: _____ / 20

Worksheet 2: Connotation & Register

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)

Reference: Same Root, Different Feel

Derived adjectives from one root can carry very different **connotations**: *childish* (negative) vs *childlike* (positive); *economic* (neutral/technical) vs *economical* (approving). Register also varies: some suffixes feel formal/academic (**-ory, -ative**), others informal (**-y, -ish**). Choosing the wrong one creates a tone mismatch.

Positive	Negative	Neutral / technical
childlike (wonder)	childish (immature)	—
thrifty (praise)	stingy (blame)	economical
assertive	aggressive / pushy	—
youthful	juvenile	young
distinctive	peculiar / odd	distinct

Part A – Positive, Negative, or Neutral?

#	Adjective	Connotation + why
1	childish	
2	youthful	
3	peculiar	
4	assertive	

Part B – Choose for Tone

1. (praising a careful spender) She's very _____. (thrifty / stingy)
2. (criticising sulking) His _____ behaviour annoyed everyone. (childlike / childish)
3. (neutral report) The plan is _____ and saves money. (economical / mean)
4. (admiring energy) She has a _____ enthusiasm. (youthful / juvenile)

Part C – Register Match

Replace the informal adjective with a more formal derived synonym.

1. a chatty style → _____ (formal)
2. a pushy manager → _____ (neutral/formal)
3. a weird result → _____ (formal)

Score: _____ / 25

Worksheet 3: Derivation, Blocking & Nuance

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)

Reference: Why Some Forms Don't Exist

Not every base + suffix combination is possible. **Blocking** occurs when an existing word occupies the slot (**stealer* is blocked by *thief*; **gooder* by *better*). Some suffixes attach only to certain bases (Latinate vs Germanic). And a base may yield several adjectives with divided meanings (*comparable* vs *comparative*). C1 users recognise these constraints.

Phenomenon	Explanation	Example
Blocking	an existing word fills the slot	reliable ✓ but *believable-ness → believability
Latinate selectivity	some suffixes prefer Latinate bases	*helpful→helpful ✓; comprehensible ✓
Split derivatives	one base, two meanings	comparable (similar) / comparative (relative)
Stress shift	suffix moves the stress	PHOtograph → photoGRAPHic

Part A – Choose the Right Derivative

1. a _____ amount — able to be compared, roughly equal (compare)
2. a _____ study — based on comparison (compare)
3. a _____ explanation — able to be understood (comprehend)
4. a _____ course — covering everything (comprehend → -sive)

Part B – Mark the Stress

Underline the stressed syllable in the derived adjective.

1. economy → economic
2. photograph → photographic
3. history → historical

Part C – Explain the Gap

Why is the starred form odd, and what is used instead?

#	Blocked / odd form	What's used + why
1	*unpossible	
2	*gooder / *goodest	
3	*informations (as adj base)	

Score: _____ / 30

Worksheet 4: Critical Analysis & Writing

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)

Part A – Critical Reading

Word-formation is quietly evaluative. To call a politician assertive is to admire; to call the same manner aggressive is to condemn; the suffix is innocent, but the choice of root is not. A childlike delight flatters where a childish tantrum disparages, though both derive from one noun. Even our most technical-sounding adjectives — economic, historic — shadow their homelier twins, and a careless writer who reaches for the wrong one will seem, at best, imprecise and, at worst, unintentionally comic.

1. Identify each derived adjective and classify its connotation (positive, negative, neutral).
2. Analyse the childlike / childish contrast: same base, opposite evaluation. How does the suffix carry the load?
3. "technical-sounding" is a compound. Break it down and comment on its formation.
4. Evaluate the claim that "the suffix is innocent, but the choice of root is not." Is derivation ever value-neutral?

Part B – Extended Analytical Writing

Write a formal analytical paragraph of 160–200 words on: "The adjectives we derive reveal the judgements we make." You must include and underline: (1) one pair of **same-root adjectives with opposite connotations**; (2) one **-ic/-ical** or **-ish/-like** contrast used precisely; (3) one **register-marked** derived adjective; (4) one **compound adjective**; (5) two **epistemic hedges** calibrated to claim strength.

#	Line
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	

Features: _____ / 5 Word count: _____ Score: _____ / 35

Answer Key & Teacher Notes

For teacher use only — C1 Level, Adjective Formation

Worksheet 1 – Part A

1 classic (a classic reaction = typical) — accept "classical" only if chemistry sense intended · 2 childish · 3 child-like · 4 sevenish · 5 troublesome

Worksheet 1 – Part B

1 approximation (colour) · 2 pejorative · 3 approximation (time) · 4 pejorative / mild degree

Worksheet 2 – Part A (model)

1 childish — negative (immature). · 2 youthful — positive (energetic, fresh). · 3 peculiar — negative/odd. · 4 assertive — positive/neutral (confident, not aggressive).

Worksheet 2 – Part B

1 thrifty · 2 childish · 3 economical · 4 youthful

Worksheet 2 – Part C (model)

1 conversational / discursive · 2 assertive · 3 anomalous / peculiar (formal register).

Worksheet 3 – Part A

1 comparable · 2 comparative · 3 comprehensible · 4 comprehensive

Worksheet 3 – Part B

1 econOMic · 2 photoGRAPHic · 3 hisTORical — the suffix pulls stress onto the syllable before it.

Worksheet 3 – Part C (model)

1 "impossible" is the established form; un- is blocked by the lexicalised im- form. · 2 suppletion: "better/best" fill the comparative/superlative slots, blocking regular *gooder/*goodest. · 3 "information" is uncountable, so no plural; as a modifier we use the singular ("information age").

Worksheet 4 – Part A (model)

1 assertive (pos), aggressive (neg), childlike (pos), childish (neg), technical-sounding (neutral), economic (neutral/technical), historic (neutral/elevated), imprecise (neg), comic (neg here). · 2 Both derive from "child"; -like projects the admired qualities (innocence, wonder), -ish the deprecated ones (immaturity). The suffix selects which semantic features are foregrounded and assigns the evaluation. · 3 technical + -sounding (noun/adj + present participle) = "seeming technical"; a compound participial adjective, arguably hyphenated attributively. · 4 A strong answer notes the suffix is a fixed morpheme with no evaluative content per se, but the derivational choice (which root, which of two rival suffixes) encodes stance; hence derivation is formally neutral yet rhetorically loaded in use.

Worksheet 4 – Part B: Marking Rubric

Criterion	Descriptor	Marks
Opposite-connotation pair	Same root, contrasting evaluation	0–5
-ic/-ical or -ish/-like	Precise distinction shown	0–5
Register-marked derivative	Tone appropriate and deliberate	0–5

Compound adjective	Well-formed and natural	0–5
Argument & length	160–200 words; developed with hedges	0–5