
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Vocabulary

Suffixes: -less & -free



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Catherine

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute Vocabulary. I'm Catherine...

Neil

And I'm Neil. Today we're looking at the suffixes **-less** and **-free**.

Catherine

Suffixes are two or three letters at the end of a word that affect its meaning.

Neil

We'll look at what the suffixes **-free** and **-less** mean and give you some examples...

Catherine

There'll be a quiz...

Neil

...and we'll leave you with a top tip for learning vocabulary.

Catherine

Let's start by listening to Markus. He's a politician and he's talking about his party's policies.

Neil

Right. So while you listen, think about this question: Do e-cigarettes produce smoke? Here's Markus.

INSERT

Markus

We're focusing on the **jobless**, the **homeless**, the sick and the elderly – people who are **powerless** to change things for themselves. We're campaigning for more **car-free** and **smoke-free** zones. We're going to extend the smoking ban to include e-cigarettes, which may be **smokeless**, but they aren't **harmless**, and we're going to raise the penalties for **careless** drivers.

Catherine

So we asked you: Do e-cigarettes produce smoke?

Neil

And the answer is: No they don't. E-cigarettes are **smokeless**.

Catherine

And **smokeless** is a key word in this programme because it ends with the suffix **less**, spelt **l-e-s-s**. This means 'without'.

Neil

So **smokeless** cigarettes are cigarettes without smoke – they don't produce any smoke.

Catherine

And if something is **harmless**, it doesn't cause harm. Markus said that e-cigarettes are not **harmless**. In other words, they are dangerous.

Neil

Markus also said his party was going to raise penalties – or increase punishments – for **careless** drivers – people who drive without care.

Catherine

Yes, **careless** means not being careful.

Neil

So, by adding **-less** to the nouns **smoke**, **harm** and **care**, we turn them into adjectives. Let's hear some more examples with **-less**.

INSERT

Markus

We're focusing on the **jobless**, the **homeless**, the sick and the elderly – people who are **powerless** to change things for themselves.

Neil

So we had the **jobless**...

Catherine

That's people without jobs...

Neil

...the **homeless**...

Catherine

...people who have nowhere to live. We can create a noun to describe a particular group of people, by using the word **the** with a **-less** word. **The jobless, the homeless**.

Neil

Lastly, we had the adjective **powerless**, which describes people who are unable to do certain things. If we add **the**, we get a group noun: **the powerless**.

Neil

Let's have another clip. Listen out for the suffix **-free**.

INSERT

Markus

We're campaigning for more **car-free** and **smoke-free** zones.

Neil

We had **car-free** and **smoke-free**. Now if you add **-free** to a noun, you get an adjective, meaning that there isn't any of that noun, or it's not allowed, or both. **Car-free** means there are no cars because they're not allowed. **Smoke-free** means smoking is not allowed and so there is no smoke.

IDENT

6 Minute Vocabulary from BBC Learning English.

Catherine

And we're talking about the suffixes **-free** and **-less**. And Neil how was your journey to work today; **stress-free**, I hope?

Neil

No, actually, it was awful! I tried to use my **contactless** credit card to pay for the train, but it didn't work, so I had to walk all the way...

Catherine

Oh, won't do you any harm, Neil.

Neil

No. It's good for me, I suppose.

Catherine

It is. And **contactless** credit cards are the cards that work without a PIN number.

Neil

Usually you use either **-free** or **-less** with a particular word. But occasionally you can use **-free** and **-less** interchangeably, as in **sugarless** and **sugar-free**. These both mean: without sugar.

Catherine

But be very careful with the words **careless** and **carefree** because they have very different meanings.

Neil

Yes, they do. A **careless** person is someone who doesn't take much care over what they're doing...

Catherine

...whereas a **carefree** person like you, Neil, doesn't worry about anything.

Neil

No, I don't worry about a thing.

Catherine

Now, it's time for a quiz. Choose the correct word. Ready? Number one: Jack looks scary, but he's actually very kind and gentle. He's a) careless b) harmless c) powerless.

Neil

And the answer is b) **harmless**.

Catherine

Number two. Dalya doesn't check her work properly so she makes lots of mistakes. She's very a) careless b) carefree c) contactless.

Neil

And the answer is a) **careless**.

Catherine

Number three: To cut the risk of cancer, some people smoke e-cigarettes which are a) smokeless b) smokeless-free c) smoke-free.

Neil

And the answer is a) **smokeless**.

Catherine

And that's the end of the quiz. Well done if you got them right.

Neil

And now, here's today's top tip for learning vocabulary: record yourself saying new words and then listen to them every day.

Catherine

Top tip. And there's more about this at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again for more 6 Minute Vocabulary.

Both

Bye!

Vocabulary points to take away

careless

without care or attention

Many road accidents are caused by careless drivers. People should pay more attention when driving.

contactless

not touching

It's so much quicker and easier now that we can use our phones to make contactless payments.

harmless

not likely to cause harm

There is only one poisonous snake in the UK. The others are harmless.

homeless

without anywhere to live

The flood destroyed their house. They were homeless for several months and had to stay with friends.

jobless

unemployed

Many of the jobless today are young people leaving university. They just can't find jobs as so many people are applying for the same position.

powerless

unable to do anything

When the huge wave hit the boat, he was powerless. He could only stand and watch as the boat sunk.

smokeless

not producing any smoke

In some parts of the city, only smokeless coal can be used in fires, which is cleaner for the environment.

sugarless

not containing any sugar

I'm on a diet, so I'm only having sugarless drinks.

car-free

cars are not allowed

Now that the city centre is car free, it's so much more pleasant to walk in the centre of the city without worrying about cars and buses

carefree

without worries or anxiety

I wish I was on my gap year again – I miss those carefree days, not having to worry about paying the mortgage or getting to work on time.

smoke-free

in which no one is smoking or smoking is not allowed

"I'm sorry, sir, you'll have to put out that cigarette – this is a smoke-free area."

stress-free

without any stress or worry

The journey was completely stress-free. The taxi picked us up at the door and took us straight there. There wasn't any traffic and we arrived early.

sugarfree

not containing any sugar

This drink doesn't have any calories as it's sugarfree.