

Activity R9: What's in a place name?

Early settlers needed food, shelter and water. All these were provided by rivers and the adjacent land and so over the centuries settlements have grown up alongside rivers. Many places developed at river crossings and so the words “forth” (meaning crossing) and “bridge” are common in place names within the UK. Other place names also refer to river features or connections and use word like “mouth” and “ford” in their names. Examples are listed in the table below>

Have a look at a local map, find the nearest river and see how many examples you can find of place names that use prefixes and suffixes that refer to rivers.

Prefix/suffix	Meaning of prefix/suffix	Examples of place names
aber	mouth (of a river), confluence	Aberystwyth Aberdeen
afon, avon	river	River Avon Glanyrafon
beck	stream	Holbeck Troutbeck
bourne, burn	brook, stream	Bournemouth Ashbourne
bridge	bridge	Bridgend Bridgenorth
ford, forth	ford, crossing	Bradford Stafford
inver	mouth of (a river), confluence	Inverness Inveraray,
mouth	mouth (of a river),	Plymouth Weymouth
pont	bridge	Pontypridd Pontypool
-upon-	by, upon	Stratford-upon-Avon