

# What Is a Compound Noun?

A compound noun contains two or more words which join together to make a single noun. Compound nouns can be words written together, words that are hyphenated (separated with a hyphen), or separated words that go together by meaning.

Most compound nouns contain at least one noun. The other word or words may be an adjective, preposition, or verb. The second word is almost always the main word, that means that the first word modifies or adds meaning to the first one.

Compound words can be divided in three groups:

- Closed form - It is the union of 2 words that combined together make one new word, such as: softball, redhead, makeup, and keyboard.
- Hyphenated form examples are: six-pack, five-year-old, and son-in-law.
- Open form - has the words next to each other and they are separated by a blank space, such as: post office, upper class, and attorney general.

Examples of compound noun types and their written forms:

NOUN	+	NOUN	bus stop	Is this the <b>bus stop</b> for the bus number 12?
			fire-fly	In the tropics you can see <b>fire-flies</b> at night.
			football	Shall we play <b>football</b> today?
ADJECTIVE	+	NOUN	full moon	Werewolves feel crazy at <b>full moon</b> nights.
			blackboard	Clean the <b>blackboard</b> please. I can't see anything
			software	I can't install this <b>software</b> on my PC.
VERB (-ING)	+	NOUN	smoking pipe	Some people <b>smoke</b> with wooden <b>pipes</b>
			washing machine	Put the dirty clothes in the <b>washing machine</b> .
			swimming pool	This <b>swimming pool</b> is very cold!

NOUN	+	VERB (-ING)	sunrise	I like to get up at <b>sunrise</b> .
			haircut	You need a <b>haircut</b> .
VERB	+	PREPOSITION	check-out	Please remember that <b>check-out</b> is at 12 noon.
NOUN	+	PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE	mother-in-law	My <b>mother-in-law</b> lives with us.
PREPOSITION	+	NOUN	underworld	Do you think the police accept money from the <b>underworld</b> ?
NOUN	+	ADJECTIVE	truckful	We need 10 <b>truckfuls</b> of bricks to build the house.

### More information:

#### Making compound nouns plural:

Most compound nouns follow the normal convention that would be used if the final part of the compound were **pluralised**:

- suitcases, handouts, swimsuits
- housewives, bypasses

When compounds end in the prepositions **by** or **on** the first word is made plural:

- passer-by --> passers-by
- hanger-on --> hangers-on

When compounds have three words, the first one is made plural, but if this word is the defining word (verb) we pluralise the last word (the noun):

- sisters-in-law **but** washing-up-liquids

# More Compound Nouns:

- adjective/adjective - blue-green,
- adjective/noun - blackboard, full moon
- adjective/preposition - forthwith
- adjective/verb - dry-cleaning, highlight
- noun/adjective - snow white
- noun/noun - toothpaste, football, fish tank
- noun/preposition (adverb) - love-in, hanger on, passer-by
- noun/verb - haircut, browbeat, rainfall
- preposition/adjective - over-ripe
- preposition (adverb)/noun - underground, underworld, bystander, onlooker
- preposition/preposition - without
- preposition (adverb)/verb - output, undercut, outlook, overthrow
- verb/adjective - tumbledown
- verb/noun - swimming pool, breakwater, washing machine
- verb/preposition (adverb) - takeout, check-in, drawback, lookout
- verb/verb - freeze-dry

# What Is a compound adjective

A compound adjective is an adjective that contains two or more words.

In general we put a hyphen between two or more words (before a noun) when we want them to act as a single idea (adjective) that describes something.

- I live in an English-speaking country.

English-speaking is an adjective (used to describe the country). We use a hyphen to connect the word *English* with *speaking* to show that it is one adjective (or one idea). A compound adjective is sometimes called a hyphenated adjective. This adjective with two words joined by the hyphen is called a compound adjective.

Look at the following sentences:

- I saw a man-eating alligator which was 6 meters long.
- Our office is in a **twenty-storey** building.
- I have just finished reading a **300-page** book.
- He is a **well-known** writer.

List of the most common types:

## Compound Adjectives + Periods of Time

When we have compound adjectives using numbers + a time period, that word referring to a time period is in singular form and is joined to the number with a hyphen.

- I work eight hours every day --> I work an **eight-hour** day
- I'm going on vacation for three weeks --> I have a **three-week** vacation
- There was a delay of 5 seconds --> There was a **five-second** delay

Notice how we normally write the number as a word, not in numerical form.

## Adverbs and Compound Adjectives

Adverbs modify a verb.

- She walks **slowly**.

How does she walk? Slowly. Slowly is an adverb that modifies (or describes) the verb.

Adverbs can also be used to modify an adjective.

- It is **very** hot today. (*Very* is an adverb)
- She is **extremely** intelligent. (*Extremely* is an adverb)

Notice how we do not put a hyphen between an adverb and an adjective (not even before a noun).

- It is a **very** hot day.
- She is an **extremely** intelligent girl.

## Adverb + Past Participle

However when we have an Adverb + past participle, we put a hyphen between the two words to make it a compound adjective.

- This is a **brightly-lit** room.
- She is a **well-known** actress.
- We live in a **densely-populated** city.

## Noun + Past Participle

When we have a noun + past participle, we put a hyphen between the two words to make it a compound adjective.

- We should [start](#) using **wind-powered** generators to cut costs.
- I love eating **sun-dried** raisins.

## Noun + Present Participle

When we have a noun + present participle, we put a hyphen between the two words to make it a compound adjective.

- I bought some **mouth-watering** strawberries.
- That was a **record-breaking** jump.

## Noun + Adjective

When we have a noun + adjective, we put a hyphen between the two words to make it a compound adjective.

- She is a **world-famous** singer.
- This is a **smoke-free** restaurant.

## Adjective + Noun

When we have an adjective + noun, we put a hyphen between the two words to make it a compound adjective.

- It was a **last-minute** decision.
- We watched the **full-length** version of the movie.

## Adjective + Past Participle

When we have an adjective + past participle, we put a hyphen between the two words to make it a compound adjective.

- That is an **old-fashioned** dress
- Reptiles are **cold-blooded** creatures.

## Adjective + Present Participle

When we have an adjective + present participle, we put a hyphen between the two words to make it a compound adjective.

- She is a **good-looking** girl.
- It left a **long-lasting** taste in my mouth.

## Compound Adjectives with Proper Nouns

A proper noun is the name of something or someone (e.g. John, Susan Sanders).

Compound Adjectives made from Proper nouns don't need a hyphen though must have capital letters.

- I bought the James Jackson tickets for us.
- James Jackson is a compound adjective describing the tickets (What type of tickets? James Jackson tickets). Since the adjective is a Proper noun, we don't need a hyphen between the two names.