

Word-Formation Processes in E4PS

COMPOUNDING

(compound nouns and compound adjectives)

In English, there are three main ways of putting two nouns together:

- noun + 's + noun: *William's car, my husband's name, the board's decision, New York's museums, yesterday's papers;*
- noun + of + noun: *a round of talks, an item of news, a barrel of oil¹, the middle of the meeting, the theory of relativity, the laws of physics;*
- noun + noun → **compound nouns.**

A compound word or a compound is **a new word made up of two or more other words** – that is, formed by joining two or more existing words. It means that each part of a compound must be able to occur on its own as a word. Here follow some examples of **compound nouns**:

- ✧ *headhunter*, from *head* (n) and *hunter* (n)
- ✧ *paperwork*, from *paper* (n) and *work* (n)
- ✧ *workforce*, from *work* (n) and *force* (n)
- ✧ *lawmaker*, from *law* (n) and *maker* (n)
- ✧ *ballot paper*, from *ballot* (n) and *paper* (n)
- ✧ *market survey*, from *market* (n) and *survey* (n)
- ✧ *consumer confidence*, from *consumer* (n) and *confidence* (n)
- ✧ *gender pay gap*, from *gender* (n), *pay* (n) and *gap* (n)
- ✧ *glass ceiling*, from *glass* (n) and *ceiling* (n)

The **final part** of a typical compound is the **head** (also called the **modified**) of the construction, determining its word-class and much of its semantic properties, and is **preceded by the modifier**.

As to the **spelling** of compounds, there are three forms:

¹ Note that the noun + noun structure, i.e. *an oil barrel*, refers to the container without its content.

- ❖ **hyphenated compounds**, such as *cross-bencher², bridge-building, decision-making, all-party support* or *front-runner*;
- ❖ **open compounds**, such as *exchange rate, mass media, peace talks, tax policy, policy brief* or *Home Office*;
- ❖ **solid compounds**, such as *businessperson, policymaker, turnover, startup, upstart* or *boardroom*.



The logical relations between two nouns side by side include, but are not limited to, the following:

- ❖ **the first noun answers the question ‘what kind of?’** (compare *price list* and *list price*; other examples: *corporation tax, credit card*);
- ❖ **the second noun is about the first noun** (e.g. *currency crisis, payment terms*);
- ❖ **the second noun comes from the first noun** (e.g. *a newspaper report, a bank loan*);
- ❖ **the first noun makes clear where and/or when the action, exemplified by the second noun, happens:** (e.g. *EU job vacancies, Ukraine invasion map, UK visa requirements, 2022 US midterm election, 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, New Year Address*).

REMEMBER THAT

1. in a **compound noun** the first noun is usually singular, even if it has a plural meaning.
 - ❖ a car factory, a shoe manufacturer, a toolbox, share price.
2. when the first noun of a compound is a numerical expression, it is singular:
 - ❖ a *four-star* hotel (i.e., a hotel that has four stars)
 - ❖ a *forty-hour* week
 - ❖ a *three-million-dollar* contract
 - ❖ a *five-year* plan
 - ❖ a *six-month* Presidency

² *Cross-bencher* is a member of the British House of Lords who does not belong to a particular political party. Remember also the compound nouns *backbencher* (in the House of Commons in Britain and in certain other parliaments, a member who sits in the rows of seats at the back, and who does not have an important position in the government or the Opposition) and *frontbencher* (an important member of the government or the opposition in the British parliament, who sits in the front rows of seats), all referred to the UK Parliament.

3. a longer compound made up of a sequence of two or more lexical words can be referred to as **lexical chain**. Be careful both in interpreting the correct logical relation between each item and in translating such chain into Italian. Let's try with the following examples:

- ❖ United Nations Sustainable Development Goals;
- ❖ 2023 Chinese presidential elections;
- ❖ COVID-19 weekly surveillance reports;
- ❖ Legally-binding reduction targets.

The following examples, in *italics*, show some patterns of **compound adjectives**:

- ❖ *student-friendly* (adj) coursebooks
- ❖ *purpose-built* (adj) premises
- ❖ *family-run* (adj) business
- ❖ *market-oriented* (adj) policy
- ❖ *government-led* (adj) investment initiatives
- ❖ *energy-hungry* (adj) industries
- ❖ *cost-effective* (adj) solutions
- ❖ *nuclear-powered* (adj) submarines

COMPOUND ADJECTIVES

FORM 1 Two-word adjectives

Many adjectives are formed by joining two (or more) words with a hyphen (-). There are many types of combinations:

adj + noun:	a small-scale operation, a long-term policy
adj + noun + <i>-ed</i> :	a narrow-minded approach, a short-sighted policy
adj or adv + past participle:	low-paid workers, a well-informed person
adj, adv, noun + present participle:	a high-flying professional, a far-reaching effect, a record-breaking year, a problem-solving approach
noun + adj:	a tax-free salary, a brand-new product

A few compound adjectives consist of three words:

the day-to-day organisation	up-to-date information
an out-of-court settlement	a down-to-earth approach