

Word-Formation Processes in EPS

** 5. Conversion **

CONVERSION or **ZERO-DERIVATION** may be defined as a word-formation process by which a word, belonging to one word-class, is transferred to another word-class without any concomitant change of form.

E.g.: **to talk** (v.) → **a talk** (n.)

professional (adj.) → **a professional** (n.)

a head (n.) → **to head** (v.)

It is a highly prolific source for the production of new words, since there is no restriction on the form that can undergo conversion in English.

The major kinds of conversion are:

- **noun** → **verb**
- **verb** → **noun**
- **adjective** → **noun**
- **adjective** → **verb**
- **adjective** → **adverb**
- **preposition** → **noun**
- **preposition** → **verb**
- **conjunction** → **noun**

EXAMPLES

NOUN TO VERB = **book / to book**
experience / to experience
eye / to eye
network / to network
face / to face
campaign / to campaign
trade / to trade

“Some users may **experience** problems with gambling. We take this very seriously and train all our customer-**facing** staff to recognise and deal with such problems in a friendly and helpful way.” (source: The Telegraph, July 2017)

VERB TO NOUN = to run / a run

to increase / an increase
to delegate / a delegate
to import / an import¹
to start up / a startup
don't know / a don't-know
to check in / a check-in
to slow down / a slowdown
to lock down / a lockdown

“They were hierarchical and bureaucratic organisations that were in the business of making long **runs** of standardised products.” (source: The Economist, December 2001)

“A survey finds support for both globalisation and **import** tariffs – Free trade and globalisation are more popular in developing countries.” (source: The Economist, September 2017)

“Less than half of Clinton's losses translated to **gains** for Trump. More than half went to the ‘**don't knows**’ underscoring the **rising** uncertainty.” (source: Politico, September 2016)

ADJECTIVE TO NOUN = high / a high / highs and lows

elderly / the elderly
unemployed / the unemployed
official / an official
executive / an executive
renewable / renewables

“Tech stocks have regained their dotcom-era **highs**. But the sector has changed a lot since the last peak.” (source: The Economist, July 2017)

“US's top-paid **executives** in 2012 represent technology, coffee, and sporting goods companies – and all are white and male”. (source: The Guardian, October 2013)

“The logic for replacing old coal plants with **renewables** that run on costless inputs—wind and sun—looks obvious.”

¹ Remember that there are a set of words – such as import, export, conflict, rebel, object, subject, present – undergoing **stress shifting** when they turn from one word-class, i.e., a noun, into another, i.e., a verb.

ADJECTIVE TO VERB = empty / to empty
clean / to clean
open / to open
better / to better

“Bank of Ireland Group plc reported semi-annual 2017 revenues of 1.52bn. This **bettered** the 1.51bn consensus of the 2 analysts covering the company.” (source: Financial Times, November 2017)

VERB TO ADJECTIVE = would be / would-be
must have / must-have
must see / must-see
must read / must-read

“Zuckerberg came under fire this week after audio **surfaced** of an open meeting during which he predicted Facebook would challenge and beat back efforts by a **would-be** Warren administration to split up the company”. (source: Politico, April 2019)

“The two political veterans **face** off the evening of Sept. 29 in a **must-see-TV** event.”. (source: Transport Topics, September 2020)

PREPOSITION TO NOUN = up – down / ups and downs
in – out / ins and outs

“How Regular Investing **Smooths** the Market’s **Ups and Downs**”. (source: The New York Times, October 2016)

“The **ins and outs**² of vaccine trials” (source: Chemistry World, November 2020)

PREPOSITION TO VERB = down / to down

“Two years ago, the protest was against plans for a single European airspace. Last year, it was budget **cuts** that led the controllers to **down tools**³”. (source: The Economist, April 2015)

CONJUNCTION TO NOUN = but / buts
if / ifs

² **Ins and outs** = all the details, especially the complicated or difficult ones.

³ If you say that workers **down tools**, you mean that they stop working suddenly in order to strike or to make a protest of some kind.

“There are absolutely no **ifs**, no **buts** and no **maybes** about this — no arm-twisting and nothing that can be done to me in the intervening period.” (source: Politico, November 2017)

FUNCTIONAL SHIFT

A particular sub-type of conversion is **FUNCTIONAL SHIFT**. It refers to the same process, but in such cases, words are converted from one grammatical function to another without any change in word-class.

It occurs when a **noun** changes its function from **[U] noun** to **[C] noun** (e.g.: business, glass, paper, hair, time, etc.)

“Economists say the answer, to some degree, can be found in a start-up slump — a decline in the creation of new **businesses** — and a growing understanding of what’s behind it”. (source: The New York Times, September 2017)

or when a **full verb** changes its function from **intransitive** to **transitive verb** (e.g.: to grow, to run, to suffer, to fly, etc.)

“They **have grown** a reputation for quality and efficient delivery of their service over 15 years in sectors including pharmaceuticals, engineering, technology and construction.” (source: The Telegraph, November 2019)

or when an **adjective** changes its function from **qualifier** to **indefinite adjective** (e.g.: further)

“Another month, **further** deadlock — this isn’t what the Brexiters⁴ promised”. (source: The Guardian, October 2017)

Functional shift may involve also **prepositions** (by, for, over, etc.) and **conjunctions** (since, as).

⁴ A **Brexit**er is a supporter of Brexit.

For example, the preposition ‘**by**’ can introduce different kinds of complements, as in the following examples:



- President Donald Trump said Thursday the investigations into his campaign were "set up **by** the Democrats".
- Smaller independent retailers often pay the highest merchant charges to credit card companies and therefore are more open to haggling from a customer that does not want to pay **by** credit card.
- Banks need Brexit transition deal **by** end of year, warns FCA chief.

Also, the preposition ‘**over**’ can introduce different kinds of complements, as in the following examples

- **Over** the past two years, we have used distance learning.
- Please, put your mobiles **over** the desk.
- This book is **over** the French Revolution.
- It's **over** to you.

The conjunction ‘**since**’ can introduce different kinds of subordinate clauses, as in the following examples:

- How do you feel 20 years **since** Wales voted for devolution?
- Co-operation with the national authorities is at the heart of the CPT's⁵ work, **since** the aim is to protect persons deprived of their liberty rather than to condemn States for abuses.

⁵ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture.