

## Word-Formation Processes in E4CP

### \*\* 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**

**“Who Experiences Homelessness?”**

Anyone can **experience** homelessness. And while every person **faces** unique challenges, all people **experiencing** homelessness are **impacted** by systemic issues like the lack of affordable housing and inadequate incomes”.



**VERB TO NOUN = to run / a run**

- to increase / an increase
- to delegate / a delegate
- to import / an import<sup>1</sup>
- 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)

“Poll shows support for Welsh independence running at 41%, excluding **don't knows**”.

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

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

“U.S. stocks **are nearing** record **highs** again after a furious rally — ‘this market could surprise everyone’”.

“Apple **executives** think its internal AI chatbot is ‘on par’ with ChatGPT”.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Remember that there are a set of words – such as import, export, conflict, rebel, object, subject, present, impact – 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

“The high point of TV as a medium’: David Lynch’s Twin Peaks may never be **bettered**”.

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

“Fox News’ gaffe: Overlay caption calls Biden a ‘**would-be** dictator’”. (source: Nova News, June 2023)

“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

“A month of **ups and downs** in almost every corner of the market”.

“The **ins and outs**<sup>2</sup> 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**<sup>3</sup>”. (source: The Economist, April 2015)

**CONJUNCTION TO NOUN** = but / buts  
if / ifs

“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)

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.

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## 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 Brexiters<sup>4</sup> promised”. (source: The Guardian, October 2017)

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

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".**

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<sup>4</sup> A **Brexiter** is a supporter of Brexit.

- 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’s<sup>5</sup> work, **since** the aim is to protect persons deprived of their liberty rather than to condemn States for abuses.

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<sup>5</sup> European Committee for the Prevention of Torture.