*Elizabeth Swain English Language Vocabulary:* compounds

A compound word is a combination of two or more words which functions as a single word. In English we have compound **nouns** (e.g. *police station*), compound **verbs** (e.g. *to sleepwalk*) and compound **adjectives** (e.g. *man-made*). Sometimes adverbs can be derived from compound adjectives (e.g. *half-hearted < half-heartedly; half-joking < half-jokingly*). Compound words are written either as a single word (e.g. *headache*), as hyphenated words (e.g. *self-governing*) or as two separate words (e.g. *psychology conference*).[[1]](#footnote-1)

Many different combinations are possible in the making of compound words.

**A) Noun compounds** There are three main patterns. NB today, most two-word noun compounds are written as one word, as in the examples below. They can be written as two separate words, or with a hyphen, but this is old-fashioned. If you choose this option, then be consistent throughout your text in using it.

**1.** NOUN + NOUN (+NOUN + NOUN)

**Two word compounds***:*

*language course; university building; workshop; housework; raincoat; sleepwalking; television programme; birth-rate; conveyor belt; guest list; starvation diet; development aid; taskforce; thinktank*

NB difference between *horse race* and *racehorse; vegetable garden* and  *garden vegetables*

**Three word compounds*:***

*hotel reception desk; psychology conference programme; World Health Organisation; development aid programme;*

**Noun compounds using numbers*:***

*fourteen-year-old* (two hyphens)*; a ten-pound note; a five-dollar bill; a three-year degree; a four-day programme* (hyphen only between the number and the entity it describes)

**2.** POSSESSIVE NOUN + NOUN\*

*professor Willis’ comments; the government’s position; the writer’s conclusion; the rat’s tail; a woman’s job; the country’s economy; yesterday’s lecture; last week’s conference*

**3.** PREPOSITIONAL STRUCTURES

*a look of fear; the end of the line; the beginning of the month; the name of the paper; work in progress*

NB difference between *shopping bag* and *bag of shopping*

**PS.** NOUNS from PHRASAL VERBS. These are less common perhaps in formal writing. They are sometimes used with a hyphen:

*Build-up start-up stop-over stop-off go-ahead mix-up break-in*

and sometimes written as one word:

*Breakdown, workout, outbreak, breakout, setback, turnout*

**B) Adjective compounds.** NB: **most adjectival compounds use a hyphen** as in the examples in this section. See footnote 1.

NOUN + ADJECTIVE

*half-serious; computer literate; fashion conscious; rent-free; life-long; oil-resistant; three-month-old*

NOUN + PARTICIPLE

*self-centred; home-grown; God-given; machine-driven; wealth-creating; performance enhancing; half-hearted; time-consuming; computer-assisted; London-based; debt-stricken; love-struck;*

ADJECTIVE + PARTICIPLE

*short-lived; low-ranking; open-ended; wide-ranging; full-blown; deep-rooted*

ADVERB + PARTICIPLE

*hard-working; fast-moving; hard-won; well-executed; well-planned; far-reaching; long-running; old-fashioned; far-sighted*

**C) Verb compounds**

NOUN + VERB

*to sleepwalk; to babysit; to sightsee; to kerbcrawl*

PREPOSITION + VERB

*to overdose; to underestimate; to update; to downgrade; to underlie; to understate*

TIME EXPRESSIONS WITH NUMBERS, used in noun compounds

*three-hour; four-week; ten-year; five-minute; sixty-second; three-day*

*A three-day conference; a one-hour lesson; a five-minute speech etc.*

**Miscellaneous.** These compounds do not fit into the above categories:

*high-rise; low-income; free-market; downfall; take-over bid; think tank*

**Exercises**

**1) What category do the compounds (highlighted in bold) in the text below belong to?**

**Smith, Adam** (1723-1790) was a Scottish economist whose writings formed the basis of classical economics. Smith’s most famous book, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), stressed the benefits of the division of labour, discussed the need for specialization and exchange, and outlined the workings of the **market mechanism** (**price system**). Smith argued that if producers were free to seek profits by providing goods and services, then the ‘invisible hand’ of **market forces** would ensure that the right goods and services were produced. Provided that markets were free of **government regulation**, then in this **laissez-faire** environment, competition would organize production in ways which would increase public **well-being**.

In competitive markets, producers would compete to sell more goods, forcing prices down to the lowest level which covered **production costs** and allowed normal profit to be made. Furthermore, if certain goods were scarce buyers would offer higher prices, drawing more producers into these industries and swelling supply. In this manner production in the **market system** would be driven by what consumers wanted.

Smith’s outline of the **market mechanism** described the new economic system that was beginning to emerge in the **newly-industrialized** Western countries.

However, for the system to work Smith acknowledged that two important conditions needed to be met: a) markets needed to be free of **government intervention** without the close **government regulation** of economic activity as had prevailed prior to Smith’s day; b) the **self-seeking** behaviour of producers could only be harnessed to the common good where competition prevailed, and Smith was deeply suspicious of monopolies, considering them to be conspiracies against the consumer.

*(text from a dictionary of economics)*

1. **NOUN COMPOUNDS ………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….**
2. **ADJECTIVE COMPOUNDS ……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..**

**2)** Match the words in the left column with a word in the right one to make compound adjectives, and match them with the nouns in column 3, e.g. *laissez-faire economics*:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Adjective compound* | | *Noun* |
| Laissez- | winning | reforms |
| State- | driven | economics |
| Self- | stricken | attack |
| Market- | supported | country |
| Poverty- | market | scientist |
| Nobel prize- | led | intervention |
| NATO | regulating | mechanism |
| Free- | faire | solutions |

**3)** Now make compound nouns from these :

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| conspiracy | behaviour |
| tax | insurance |
| bargaining | place |
| health | relief |
| Government | power |
| market | regulations |
| consumer | theory |

**4)** Now fill in the spaces in the text below with the missing compounds:

Below the $75,000 threshold, many of (1) …………………………………………….. have a much bigger negative impact. For the poor, getting divorced, having asthma, and being alone have far more severe effects. Even the benefits of the (2) ………………………………………. turn out to be lower. Deaton and Kahneman offer an assortment of other findings, most of which have (3) ……………………………………. . While women are slightly happier than men, they show much higher (4) ………………………………………………….... Having children is highly stressful, and so is being a (5) …………………………………..; both are reasons to find ways to relieve the economic and emotional [pressures](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/dc-could-become-best-place-in-us-to-have-a-baby-get-sick-or-have-parents/2015/10/05/0277c3ae-6b30-11e5-aa5b-f78a98956699_story.html) on those who take care of others.

*caregiver policy implications stress levels life’s misfortunes weekend*

**Solutions for n 2)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Adjective compound* | | *Noun* |
| Laissez- | winning | reforms |
| State- | driven | economics |
| Self- | stricken | attack |
| Market- | supported | country |
| Poverty- | market | scientist |
| Nobel prize- | led | intervention |
| NATO | regulating | mechanism |
| Free- | faire | solutions |

***Laissez-faire economics***

***State-supported intervention / solution***

***Self-regulating mechanism***

***Market-driven reforms***

***Poverty-stricken country***

***Nobel prize-winning scientist***

***NATO-led attack / intervention***

***Free-market solutions / reforms***

**Solutions for 3)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| conspiracy | behaviour |
| tax | insurance |
| bargaining | place |
| health | relief |
| Government | power |
| market | regulations |
| consumer | theory |

***Conspiracy theory***

***Tax relief***

***Bargaining power***

***Health insurance***

***Government regulations***

***Marketplace***

***Consumer behavior***

1. Most **adjectival compounds** use a hyphen, but only when they come BEFORE the noun they describe: *a hard-won victory,* but *the victory was hard won; up-to-date statistics,* but *the statistics are up to date.* Note that not all adjectival compounds can be used after the noun: you cannot say *X a plan that was wide ranging,* or X *an investigation that was full blown*. See Oxford Dictionaries online for full account: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/punctuation/hyphen [↑](#footnote-ref-1)