



What do you need to know?

Compound words are made up of two or more **root words** which join together to make a **new word** with a **new meaning**.

They can help to clarify the meaning of our writing. The root words can be joined with a **hyphen**, with a **space**, or put directly **next to each other**!

Compound words often have very **specific meanings**: they take a bit of meaning from each of the words they are made up of.

Open Compound Words

An **open compound word** is made when two words are put together to create a **new word** with a **new meaning**, with a **space left** between the words (this is why we call them 'open' compounds - they are not closed!). Examples of open compounds are:

peanut + butter = peanut butter full + moon = full moon



living + room = living room



Closed Compound Words

Closed compound words do not have a space or hyphen between them. They are only **one word**, even though they are made up of two. The space between the two words has been **closed off**. Again, the new word has a single unit of meaning. Examples of closed compounds are:

flower + pot = flowerpot note + book = notebook



fire + fighter = firefighter



Hyphenated Compound Words

When two words are joined by a **hyphen**, we call them **hyphenated compound words**. Some hyphenated compounds are nouns but most are adjectives.

quick + thinking = quick-thinking son + in + law = son-in-law



bad + tempered = bad-tempered



We use hyphenated compound words to help **clarify** what we mean. It's important to use one if the phrase or sentence would be ambiguous without it!

We can use compound words to make **precise nouns**.

Precise Nouns

For example, the word **'bluebird'** is a closed compound noun. It is made up of the root words **'blue'** and **'bird'** with nothing between the two.

However, it doesn't mean simply 'the bird that was blue'. Instead, it refers to a very **specific type** of bird! This is because compound words refer to very **specific things**, and help us to clarify our writing. This is why we call them **precise nouns**! They are also known as **exact nouns**.

One situation where we **hyphenate words** to create a **compound word** is when they come **before** the noun they describe and are working together as a **compound adjective**.

Compound Adjectives

One example would be **'family-owned cafe'**. In this phrase, the compound word **'family-owned'** tells us that the cafe is owned by a family!

However, if it comes **after** the noun, a hyphen is **not** necessary. For example:

We went to a family-owned cafe.

We went to a cafe that was family owned.

Let's look at some more examples. We **hyphenate** the phrase **'once in a lifetime'** when it comes **before** the **noun it describes**:

The once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to swim with dolphins.

But we **do not hyphenate** it when it comes **after** the **noun** - it is no longer acting as a **compound adjective**:

The opportunity to swim with dolphins was once in a lifetime.

Remember!

Before the noun - **hyphenate!** **After** the noun - **don't hyphenate!**

'the bad-tempered boy'
'the boy was bad tempered'

'The long-term solution'
'The solution was long term'

It can often be hard to tell the difference between an **open compound** word and a **noun phrase**, even though they have very different meanings.

Open Compounds

An open compound word is one which has a **space** in the middle of it, and this makes it hard to recognise. An example of an open compound is **'ice cream'**. The root words **'ice'** and **'cream'** are combined with a **space** to make an open compound word with a single unit of meaning. Let's compare this to the noun phrase **'smooth cream'**:

The cat wanted to eat the ice cream in the fridge

The cat wanted to eat the smooth cream in the fridge

How can we tell which is an **open compound word** and which is a **noun phrase**?

We can tell that **'ice cream'** is an **open compound** because we can modify it with an adjective, but only if we keep the word order as it is. We could use the adjective **'delicious'** and say:

The cat wanted to eat the delicious ice cream in the fridge. ✓

But we couldn't say:

The cat wanted to eat the ice delicious cream in the fridge. ✗

However, we can tell that **'smooth cream'** is part of a noun phrase because it doesn't matter what order the words go in. You could say:

or the smooth, delicious cream ✓

the delicious, smooth cream ✓

without altering their meanings.

Let's put this to practice ...

In the sentence below, identify the **compound word**. When you have identified it, try and work out its **specific meaning**.

The boy threw a stone, accidentally smashing the greenhouse window.



The compound word in this sentence is **'greenhouse'**.

It is a closed compound word made up of the root words **'green'** and **'house'**

However, it doesn't refer to a house that is green. Instead, **'greenhouse'** is a precise noun that refers to a glass structure used to help plants grow faster.

Example 2

In the sentence below, is **'fire alarm'** an open compound word or a noun phrase?

At school today we had a practice evacuation when the fire alarm went off.

In this sentence, **'fire alarm'** is an **open compound word!** We know that this is a compound noun because we can add an adjective before **'fire alarm'**, but not in the middle of it. For example, we could say:

But not: the loud fire alarm ✓

the fire loud alarm. ✗



So to summarize

Compound words are made by two or more **root words** which join together to make a **new word** with a **new meaning**.

There are **three** types of compound words:

★ **Open** compound words (e.g. 'post office').

★ **Hyphenated** compound words (e.g. 'part-time').

★ **Closed** compound words (e.g. 'earthworm').