

Word formation

1 Compounds

A Compound nouns

A compound noun can be formed by joining two nouns together, e.g. *hand* + *bag* = *handbag*.

a handbag the weekend football a guidebook my bedroom

We stress the first part of the word: *a 'handbag*.

There is little difference between a compound noun and two separate nouns used one after the other, e.g. *a phone bill*. Some combinations can be written either as a compound or as two separate nouns, e.g. *guidebook* or *guide book*.

Some compound nouns are formed from an adjective + noun or from a verb + noun.

a greenhouse a blackboard some workmen a searchlight

NOTE

Compare these phrases.

Compound noun: *a 'hotplate* (= a place on a cooker where you heat food)

Adjective + noun: *a hot 'plate* (= a plate which is hot)

B Gerund + noun

We can use a gerund to classify a noun, to say what type it is or what its purpose is.

the dining-room (= the room for dining in)

a washing-machine (= a machine that washes clothes)

a sailing-ship some writing-paper a swimming-pool

the booking office

We often use a hyphen after the gerund. We stress the gerund, e.g. *the 'dining-room*.

NOTE

Compare a gerund and a participle.

Gerund: *a 'sleeping-pill* (= a pill that helps you to sleep)

Participle: *a sleeping 'child* (= a child who is sleeping)

C Noun + gerund

We can form a compound with a noun + gerund.

Taxi-driving was what I ended up doing.

We had three days of ***sightseeing***.

Coin-collecting is an interesting hobby.

We stress the noun, e.g. *'coin collecting*.

The noun in this pattern is singular, e.g. ***coin-collecting***. But after a gerund the noun can be either singular or plural depending on the meaning.

*Driving a **taxi** was what I ended up doing.*
*Collecting **coins** is an interesting hobby.*

D Compound modifiers

We can use a number + noun to modify another noun.

*a **three-day** visit a **sixty-mile** journey a car with **four-wheel** drive*

The noun in this pattern is usually singular, e.g. *a **three-day** visit*.

The modifier can also be a number + noun + adjective.

*a **three-day-old** baby a **hundred-metre-long** queue*

We can also form compounds with participles.

*a **road-widening** scheme a **hard-boiled** egg*

2 Prefixes

A A prefix is something that we can put at the beginning of a word to change the meaning. Compare these two sentences.

*I **calculated** the amount I would need.*

*I **mis**calculated the amount I would need.*

(= I **wrongly** calculated the amount I would need.)

Here the prefix *mis-* (= wrongly) changes the meaning.

B Here are some prefixes and some examples of words we can form with them.

<i>anti-</i> (= against)	<i>anti-nuclear protestors, anti-social behaviour</i>
<i>auto-</i> (= self)	<i>an autobiography, auto-suggestion</i>
<i>co-</i> (= together)	<i>co-exist, a co-production, my co-driver</i>
<i>ex-</i> (= previously)	<i>his ex-wife, an ex-footballer</i>
<i>inter-</i> (= between)	<i>an inter-city train, an international phone call</i>
<i>mini-</i> (= small)	<i>a minibus, a minicab</i>
<i>mis-</i> (= badly/wrongly)	<i>misuse, misbehave, miscount, a misprint</i>
<i>mono-</i> (= one)	<i>a monorail, monolingual, speak in a monotone</i>
<i>multi-</i> (= many)	<i>a multinational company, a multi-storey car park</i>
<i>out-</i> (= more/better)	<i>outnumber the opposition, outplayed their opponents</i>
<i>over-</i> (= too much)	<i>overweight, an overgrown garden, ill from overwork</i>
<i>post-</i> (= after)	<i>the post-war years, a post-dated cheque</i>
<i>pre-</i> (= before)	<i>the pre-war years, preheat an oven</i>
<i>pro-</i> (= in favour of)	<i>pro-government forces, pro-European policies</i>
<i>re-</i> (= again)	<i>re-write a letter, remarry, the resale value of the car</i>
<i>semi-</i> (= half)	<i>semi-precious stones, reach the semi-final</i>
<i>sub-</i> (= under/less)	<i>the subway, subnormal intelligence, sub-zero temperatures</i>
<i>super-</i> (= big/more)	<i>a superstar, a superhuman effort, a supersonic aircraft</i>

<i>trans-</i> (= across)	<i>a transatlantic flight, a heart transplant operation</i>
<i>under-</i> (= too little)	<i>undercooked food, an underused resource, underpopulation</i>

NOTE

Out- and *under-* can have a literal meaning: *underwear, the Underground, underline a word; an outbuilding, an outdoor pool, the outskirts of the town.*

C There are some negative prefixes meaning 'not.'

<i>un-</i>	<i>feeling unhappy, an unfair decision, unhealthy conditions, high unemployment, unplug a machine, unpack a suitcase</i>
<i>in-</i>	<i>an independent state, an inoffensive remark, the invisible man, an incurable disease, a terrible injustice</i>
<i>il-</i> (+ l)	<i>an illegal act, an illogical argument</i>
<i>im-</i> (+ b/m/p)	<i>an imbalance, an immoral act, immature behaviour, an impossible situation, an impractical dreamer, wait impatiently</i>
<i>ir-</i> (+ r)	<i>an irrational fear, an irresponsible attitude</i>
<i>dis-</i>	<i>a dishonest statement, a violent disagreement, disappearing out of the door, a dislike of flying</i>
<i>non-</i>	<i>non-alcoholic drinks, non-stop entertainment, a non-smoking area</i>
<i>de-</i>	<i>defrost a fridge, the depopulation of the countryside, the decentralization of government</i>

We do not use *in-* before *b, l, m, p, or r*. We use *il-*, *im-*, and *ir-* instead.

3 Suffixes

A Introduction

A suffix comes at the end of a word. For example, we can add the suffix *-ness* to the adjective *kind* to form the noun *kindness*. Compare these two sentences.

*We won't forget **how kind you've been**.*

*We won't forget **your kindness**.*

Here the use of the suffix to form a noun makes the sentence shorter and neater.

Sometimes the addition of a suffix involves other changes in the form or pronunciation of the word.

apply → *application*

possible → *possibility*

courage /'kʌrɪdʒ/ → *courageous* /kə'reɪdʒəs/

Changes in pronunciation can involve both sounds and stress. For example, when we add *-ous* to *courage*, the stress changes from the first to the second syllable.

TIP

Not all combinations of words and suffixes are possible. For example, we can add *-ment* to some verbs to form *statement*, *amusement*, *punishment*, and so on. But we cannot add *-ment* to every verb. The possible combinations have to be learned as individual words.

B Abstract nouns

Here are some ways that we can add a suffix to a verb or adjective to form a noun – usually an abstract noun.

Verb → noun ending in <i>-ion</i>	<i>correct</i> → <i>correction</i> , <i>discuss</i> → <i>discussion</i> <i>produce</i> → <i>production</i> , <i>describe</i> → <i>description</i> <i>inform</i> → <i>information</i> , <i>invite</i> → <i>invitation</i> <i>add</i> → <i>addition</i> , <i>repeat</i> → <i>repetition</i> <i>decide</i> → <i>decision</i> , <i>permit</i> → <i>permission</i>
Verb + <i>-ment</i>	<i>development</i> , <i>government</i> , <i>movement</i> , <i>payment</i>
Verb + <i>-ance/-ence</i>	<i>acceptance</i> , <i>performance</i> ; <i>existence</i> , <i>preference</i>
Verb + <i>-ing</i>	<i>a building</i> , <i>my feelings</i>
Adjective + <i>-ness</i>	<i>blindness</i> , <i>forgetfulness</i> , <i>illness</i> , <i>sadness</i>
Adjective in <i>-ant/-ent</i> → noun in <i>-ance/-ence</i>	<i>distant</i> → <i>distance</i> , <i>important</i> → <i>importance</i> <i>absent</i> → <i>absence</i> , <i>silent</i> → <i>silence</i> , <i>violent</i> → <i>violence</i>
Adjective + <i>-ty/-ity</i>	<i>certainty</i> , <i>royalty</i> ; <i>nationality</i> , <i>stupidity</i>

C *Driver, student, tourist, etc.*

There are a number of endings that we use to express a person's role.

Noun/Verb + <i>-er/-or</i>	<i>builder</i> , <i>driver</i> , <i>footballer</i> , <i>interviewer</i> , <i>lawyer</i> , <i>owner</i> , <i>smoker</i> , <i>walker</i> , <i>writer</i> > Note a <i>editor</i> , <i>navigator</i>
Noun/Verb/Adjective + <i>-ist</i>	<i>journalist</i> , <i>motorist</i> , <i>nationalist</i> , <i>tourist</i>

Verb + <i>-ant/-ent</i>	<i>assistant, informant, inhabitant, servant correspondent, student</i>
Verb + <i>-ee</i>	<i>addressee, employee, interviewee, payee</i> > Note b
Noun + <i>-an/-ian</i>	<i>republican; historian, musician</i> > Note c

NOTE

- a We also use *-er* in many nouns referring to a device such as a tool or machine, e.g. *a computer, a food mixer, a heater, a screwdriver*.
- b The suffix *-ee* usually has a passive meaning. Compare *-er* and *-ee*.
*The company is the biggest **employer** in the town. It has two thousand **employees**.*
- c Some adjectives of nationality end in *-an/-ian*, e.g. *American, Brazilian*. > 6B

D *Friend, waitress, policeman/policewoman, etc*

Most nouns for people can mean either a male or a female, so *a friend, a student, a doctor, a motorist*, etc. can be either a man or a woman.

*My friend has sold **his** car.* (a male friend)

*My friend has sold **her** car.* (a female friend)

If we need to specify what sex, we add another word, e.g. *her **boyfriend**, **female** students, **women** doctors*.

Some words for family members are different for males and females, e.g. *husband/wife, father/mother, son/daughter, brother/sister, uncle/aunt*. But a *cousin* can be male or female.

We can add the female suffix *-ess* to some nouns. A *prince* is male, and a *princess* is female. Other examples are *hostess* and *empress*. But be careful not to over-use *-ess*. Where there is a word that can refer to either sex, e.g. *manager* or *poet*, it is old-fashioned and may be seen as sexist to use *manageress* or *poetess*. The only jobs where *-ess* is still regularly used are *actress* and *waitress*, although *actor* can refer to either a man or a woman.

There is also a male suffix *-man* /mən/ and a female suffix *-woman*, e.g. *businessman/businesswoman, chairman/chairwoman, policeman/policewoman, salesman/saleswoman, spokesman/spokeswoman*. But these are now often regarded as sexist, and words that can refer to both males and females are preferred. Sometimes we use the suffix *-person*, e.g. *the chairperson, a salesperson*. Or we use a different word, e.g. *a business executive, a police officer, a sales representative*.

NOTE

Some adjectives of nationality end in *-man/-woman*, e.g. *Frenchman, Irishwoman*. > 6B

E Verbs

There are many verbs in *-ize* formed from adjectives with an abstract meaning. We can also add *-en* to some adjectives with a concrete meaning.

Adjective + <i>-ize</i>	<i>centralize, legalize, modernize, popularize, privatize</i>
Adjective + <i>-en</i>	<i>brighten, harden, loosen, sharpen, shorten, widen</i>

NOTE

- a The ending *-ize* can also be spelled *-ise* in British English: *centralize/centralise*.
b Some adjectives can be used as verbs, e.g. *clear, empty*.

F Adjectives

Noun + <i>-al</i>	<i>industrial, national, natural, original, traditional</i>
Noun + <i>-ic</i>	<i>artistic, energetic, heroic, photographic</i>
Noun + <i>-ful</i>	<i>careful, hopeful, peaceful, powerful, wonderful</i> > Note a-b
Noun + <i>-less</i>	<i>careless, hopeless, powerless, useless, worthless</i> > Note b
Noun + <i>-ous</i>	<i>courageous, dangerous, famous, luxurious</i>
Noun + <i>-y</i>	<i>greedy, healthy, salty, thirsty, wealthy</i>
Noun + <i>-ly</i>	<i>costly, cowardly, friendly, neighbourly</i> > Note c
Verb + <i>-ive</i>	<i>active, effective, exclusive, informative</i>
Verb + <i>-ing</i>	<i>amusing, exciting, surprising</i>
Verb + <i>-ed</i>	<i>amused, excited, surprised</i>
Verb + <i>-able/-ible</i>	<i>acceptable, eatable, excusable, manageable</i> > Note d <i>comprehensible, defensible</i>

NOTE

- a Nouns with the suffix *-ful* end in a single *l*, but the adverb has two. Compare *careful* and *carefully*.
b *-less* is a negative suffix. *Hopeless* means 'without hope'. *Painful* and *painless* are opposites.
c *Hourly, daily, weekly, and monthly* can be adjectives or adverbs.
d The suffix *-able/-ible* often means that something can be done.
*This sweater is **washable**. (= This sweater can be washed.)*
But not all adjectives in *-able/-ible* have this meaning, e.g. *pleasurable* (= giving pleasure), *valuable* (= worth a lot), formed from the nouns *pleasure* and *value*.

G Adverbs

Many adverbs are formed from an adjective + *-ly*, e.g. *quick* → *quickly*.

4 Vowel and consonant changes

A Sometimes two related words have a different vowel sound.

*We could feel the **hot** sun on our backs.*

*We could feel the **heat** of the sun on our backs.*

Here *hot* is an adjective, and *heat* is a noun.

Other examples are *blood* → *bleed*, *food* → *feed*, *full* → *fill*, *lose* → *loss*,
proud → *pride*, *sell* → *sale*, *shoot* → *shot*, *sing* → *song*, *sit* → *seat*.

- B** Two related words can have a different consonant sound.
*The explanation was hard to **believe**.*
*The explanation was beyond **belief**.*
 Here *believe* is a verb, and *belief* is a noun.
 Other examples are *advise* → *advice*, *descend* → *descent*, *prove* → *proof*,
speak → *speech*.
- C** Sometimes there is more than one sound change, e.g. *choose* → *choice*,
lend → *loan*, *live* /lɪv/ → *life* /laɪf/, *succeed* → *success*, *think* → *thought*.

5 Words used in more than one way

- A** Many words can be both verbs and nouns.

Verb:	Noun:
<i>We had to wait a long time.</i>	<i>We had a long wait.</i>
<i>How much will it cost?</i>	<i>What about the cost?</i>
<i>Things are going to change around here.</i>	<i>I'm going to make some changes.</i>

Here are some common words of this kind.

<i>aid</i>	<i>claim</i>	<i>drive</i>	<i>hit</i>	<i>plan</i>	<i>support</i>
<i>answer</i>	<i>control</i>	<i>experience</i>	<i>hope</i>	<i>report</i>	<i>talk</i>
<i>attack</i>	<i>cost</i>	<i>fall</i>	<i>look</i>	<i>run</i>	<i>test</i>
<i>attempt</i>	<i>cut</i>	<i>fear</i>	<i>love</i>	<i>sound</i>	<i>vote</i>
<i>call</i>	<i>deal</i>	<i>fight</i>	<i>market</i>	<i>start</i>	<i>wait</i>
<i>cause</i>	<i>demand</i>	<i>form</i>	<i>need</i>	<i>stay</i>	<i>walk</i>
<i>change</i>	<i>design</i>	<i>help</i>	<i>offer</i>	<i>stop</i>	

- B** Sometimes a noun differs from a verb in where the stress goes. Usually the verb is stressed on the second syllable and the noun on the first.

Verb	Noun
<i>The goods are expensive to transport.</i> /træn'spɔ:t/	<i>What transport do you use?</i> /'trænsɔ:t/
<i>How is your research progressing?</i> /prə'gresɪŋ/	<i>Are you making progress?</i> /'prəʊgres/

The change of stress can make a difference to a vowel sound such as in the first syllable of *progress*, which is /prə/ when unstressed and /prəʊ/ when stressed.

Here are some words that are stressed differently as a verb and as a noun.

<i>conduct</i>	<i>export</i>	<i>produce</i>	<i>rebel</i>	<i>suspect</i>
<i>conflict</i>	<i>import</i>	<i>progress</i>	<i>record</i>	<i>transfer</i>
<i>discount</i>	<i>increase</i>	<i>protest</i>	<i>reject</i>	<i>transport</i>

C Some concrete nouns can also be verbs.

*If you could **butter** the bread, it would be a help.* (= put butter on)

*The waste was illegally **shipped** across the Channel.* (= taken by ship)

*We aim to break into the UK **bottled** water market.* (= put into bottles)

Here are some other verbs formed in this way.

<i>brake</i> (= apply the brake, slow down)	<i>hand someone their key</i>
<i>finger</i> (= touch or feel with your fingers)	<i>mail</i> (= to send by post or by e-mail)
<i>fish</i> (= to try to catch fish)	<i>parcel up a present</i>
<i>glue</i> (= to stick with glue)	<i>ski down a slope</i>
<i>gun down</i> (= shoot and kill or injure)	<i>(tele)phone a friend</i>
<i>hammer a nail in</i>	<i>wallpaper a room</i>
	<i>water the plants</i>

NOTE

Some of these verbs can also have less literal meanings.

*The team got absolutely **hammered**.* (= badly beaten in a game)

D Some adjectives can also be verbs.

*The paint will soon **dry**.* (= become dry)

*They're going to **free** the prisoners.* (= set free)

Some words of this kind are *blind, calm, clear, cool, dry, empty, free, narrow, slow, smooth, warm, wet*.

NOTE

Some adjectives with similar meanings are equivalent to verbs with *-en*, e.g. *widen*.

6 Nationality words

A We form nationality words from the name of a country, e.g. *Italy* → *Italian*, *France* → *French*, *Japan* → *Japanese*. We can do the same with continents and regions, e.g. *Africa* → *African*, *Texas* → *Texan*.

We can use nationality words in the following ways.

As an adjective	<i>the Italian embassy Japanese tourists a Texan oilman</i>
As the name of a language	<i>The President gave his speech in Italian. When did you learn Japanese?</i>
For one person or a group	<i>My sister is married to an Italian. Lots of Japanese come here on holiday.</i>
For a whole people	<i>(The) Italians love their football, don't they? The French don't call it 'the English Channel'.</i>

NOTE

We can also refer to a whole people using the adjective + *people*.

*(The) **Italian people** love their football, don't they?*

*The Statue of Liberty was a gift from the French to **the American people**.*

- B** Many nationality words end in *-an*, e.g. *American, Asian, Australian, Brazilian, Indian, Italian, Mexican*. We can use them as adjectives or nouns, and we can add *-s* to the noun.

*the **Russian** Revolution a **Russian** (person) the **Russians***

Some nationality words end in *-ese*, e.g. *Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese*. We can use them as adjectives or nouns, but we cannot add *-s* to the noun.

*a **Chinese** official a **Chinese** (person) the **Chinese** (NOT *the Chineses*)*

We cannot use a word ending in *-ese* on its own as a noun.

***The Chinese** have become more open to the West.*

(NOT ~~Chinese have become~~ ...)

With some nationalities, the adjective is different from the noun.

*a **Polish** student a **Pole** the **Poles***

Others are *Denmark/a Dane, Finnish/a Finn, Swedish/a Swede*, and *Turkish/a Turk*.

Some nouns have a suffix *-man* /mən/ or *-woman*.

*a **French** magazine a **Frenchman**/a **Frenchwoman***

*the **French** (NOT *the Frenches*)*

Others are *a Dutchman, an Englishman, an Irishwoman, a Scotswoman*, and *a Welshman*.

NOTE

A nationality word + *man* is usually written as one word: *an Irishman*. When we use *woman*, it can usually be written as one word or two: *an Irishwoman/an Irish woman*.

- C** From Britain we form the adjective *British*, e.g. *the **British** Isles*. To refer to a person or a group, we can say *a British person* or *some British people*. You may also see *a Brit* or *a Briton*.

*Local people are puzzled by the influx of **Britons** into the area.*

But *Brit* and *Briton* are rather journalistic. *Brit* is informal.

For the whole people we say *the British*.
 At one time India was ruled by **the British**.

C Here are some examples of nationality words.

Place name	Adjective	Person	Whole People
<i>Africa</i>	<i>African</i>	<i>an African</i>	<i>Africans</i>
<i>America</i>	<i>American</i>	<i>an American</i>	<i>(the) Americans</i>
<i>Asia</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>an Asian</i>	<i>Asians</i>
<i>Australia</i>	<i>Australian</i>	<i>an Australian</i>	<i>(the) Australians</i>
<i>Britain</i>	<i>British</i>	> C	<i>the British</i>
<i>England</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>an Englishman/woman</i>	<i>the English</i>
<i>Europe</i>	<i>European</i>	<i>a European</i>	<i>Europeans</i>
<i>France</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>a Frenchman/woman</i>	<i>the French</i>
<i>Germany</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>a German</i>	<i>(the) Germans</i>
<i>Greece</i>	<i>Greek</i>	<i>a Greek</i>	<i>(the) Greeks</i>
<i>India</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>an Indian</i>	<i>(the) Indians</i>
<i>Ireland</i>	<i>Irish</i>	<i>an Irishman/woman</i>	<i>the Irish</i>
<i>Japan</i>	<i>Japanese</i>	<i>a Japanese</i>	<i>the Japanese</i>
<i>Pakistan</i>	<i>Pakistani</i>	<i>a Pakistani</i>	<i>(the) Pakistanis</i>
<i>Poland</i>	<i>Polish</i>	<i>a Pole</i>	<i>(the) Poles</i>
<i>Scotland</i>	<i>Scottish</i>	<i>a Scot</i> <i>a Scotsman/woman</i>	<i>(the) Scots</i>
<i>Switzerland</i>	<i>Swiss</i>	<i>a Swiss</i>	<i>the Swiss</i>
<i>Turkey</i>	<i>Turkish</i>	<i>a Turk</i>	<i>(the) Turks</i>
<i>Wales</i>	<i>Welsh</i>	<i>a Welshman/a Welsh woman</i>	<i>the Welsh</i>