# Compound adjectives and further information

## Compound adjectives

**Compound adjectives consist of more than one word and are usually hyphenated. They are formed in different ways. Here are some examples:<?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />**

| Construction | Examples |
|---|---|
| number + noun | a 4-hour flight<br>a three-week supply<br>two-bedroom apartments<br>a 20-page report<br>a 15-minute presentation |
| adjective + noun | free-range eggs<br>a last-minute change<br>a full-length dress<br>deep-sea diving<br>a middle-class area |
| adjective + present participle | easy-going colleagues<br>a hard-working manager<br>a long-lasting relationship<br>French-speaking Canada<br>a good-looking man |
| noun + present participle | labour-saving devices<br>record-breaking profits<br>mouth-watering fruit<br>fun-loving friends<br>a man-eating shark |
| adjective + past participle [see note below] | kind-hearted people<br>middle-aged men<br>a left-handed tennis player<br>a dark-haired woman<br>old-fashioned values |

| | |
|---|---|
| **adverb + past participle [often with 'well']** | **a well-known actor**<br>**a well-written book**<br>**well-dressed people**<br>**a brightly-lit room**<br>**densely-populated towns** |
| **noun + past participle** | **sun-tanned tourists**<br>**a customer-focused company**<br>**a nuclear-powered industry**<br>**a Paris-based team**<br>**corn-fed chickens** |
| **noun + adjective** | **a world-famous singer**<br>**sky-blue curtains**<br>**a cost-effective solution**<br>**a smoke-free zone**<br>**user-friendly instructions** |
| **comparative or superlative adjective + other word** | **the lowest-priced car**<br>**the shorter-term loan**<br>**a better-looking man**<br>**a lower-risk option**<br>**the highest-paid directors** |
| **prefix + other word [see prefixes for more information]** | **a self-motivated individual**<br>**anti-government propaganda**<br>**post-natal depression**<br>**an auto-immune disease**<br>**ex-military equipment** |
| **more than two words, sometimes derived from a short phrase or expression** | **an out-of-the-ordinary experience**<br>**value-for-money cars**<br>**a door-to-door salesman**<br>**a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity**<br>**a five-year-old daughter** |

# Describing people

**There are a lot of compound nouns used to describe people in which the second word relates to a part of the body and resembles a past participle although there is no related verb:<?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />**

**I have a red-haired daughter and a blond-haired son.**
**He's tall and broad-shouldered.**

**Here are some more examples:**

**blue/brown/green-eyed**
**brown/black/fair/dark-haired**
**rosy-cheeked**
**slim-hipped**
**long-legged**

# Hyphens with compound adjectives

1. **Most two-word compound adjectives are hyphenated. This is sometimes necessary in order to avoid ambiguity. For example:<?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />**

   **I saw a man-eating shark. [I saw a shark - the kind of shark that eats people.]**
   **I saw a man eating shark. [I saw a man who was eating shark.]**

   **The hand-delivered invitations were much appreciated.** ✔
   **The hand delivered invitations were much appreciated.** ✖ **[Because it might seem, when starting to read the sentence, that just a hand and not a person delivered the invitations.]**

   **He's a used-book seller.**
   **He's a used book seller. [Are the books used or the seller?]**

2. **We always use hyphens with multi-word adjectives in order to make the meaning clear:**

   **It was a never-to-be-forgotten trip.** ✔
   **It was a never to be forgotten trip.** ✖

3. **We do not need to use hyphens when multi-word adjectives aren't directly before the noun. For example:**

   **He likes to keep up to date with mobile phone technology.**

**He was nothing out of the ordinary.**
**He sells books door to door.**

**The same is true of adverb + past participles:**

**The room was brightly lit.**
**The staff were highly motivated.**

**But those with 'well' remain hyphenated:**

**He isn't well-known in the UK.**
**Her children are well-behaved.**

4. **The word 'ill' used to be used as an adverb and meant 'badly'. It survives in certain expressions and compound adjectives:**

   **The employees in these factories are often ill-treated.**
   **He was ill-prepared for the exam.**

5. **We do not always form a compound adjective when placing an adverb and past participle together. For example:**

| Hyphenated - a descriptive adjective, what something is like | Not hyphenated - primarily about how or when something is done |
|---|---|
| It's a densely-populated area. [crowded] | It's a publicly run service. |
| These people have deeply-rooted traditions. [old] | Their deposit was partially refunded. |
| It's a widely-held belief. [common] | They discussed the recently launched products. |

6. **There are different opinions about whether some compound adjectives should be hyphenated at all. If you are unsure, look in a good dictionary for examples.**

7. **Compound adjectives are not fixed in the language so, in informal conversation, we sometimes invent new ones when needed using the above constructions.**

# Nationality

**We use adjectives for nationality in the same way as other adjectives - before a noun or after a verb:<?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />**

**I met a Spanish man at the conference.**
**We have a Swedish manager.**
**He's French.**
**They look Chinese.**

**However, the adjectives ending in 'an' can also be used alone as nouns:**

**I met a German/an American/an Italian.** ✔
**I met a Swedish/a French/a Japanese.** ✘

**Note that adjectives relating to countries, continents, states, cities and other regions all begin with a capital letter:**

**They had to close their European plants.**
**She has a Parisian boyfriend.**

**Many of them are irregular, including the unusual examples relating to British cities below, so check in a good dictionary if you aren't sure.**

**Liverpool - Liverpudlian**
**Manchester - Mancunian**
**Glasgow - Glaswegian**

# Using adjectives as nouns

1. **Some adjectives can be used as nouns with 'the' to talk about a group of people or things:<?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />**

   **We need to care for the elderly. [= elderly people]**
   **Robin Hood robbed the rich to give to the poor!**
   **We need to forget the old and focus on the new. [e.g. technology, rules, methods]**

**Here are some more examples:**

**the young**
**the homeless**
**the unemployed**
**the brave**
**the weak**
**the strong**
**the necessary**

**This includes some adjectives for nationality ending in 'ese', 'ish' and 'ch' when talking about a population generally:**

**The Japanese are often silent for long periods.**
**There are a lot of cultural differences between the English and the French.**

**With nationalities ending in 'an', no article is necessary - it is possible to use one butwe usually omit it:**

**Americans are often friendly.**
**Italians enjoy spending time with their family.**

2. **Some but not all adjectives for nationality can be used as nouns with articles to talk about a person. These include the adjectives ending in 'an' and 'i' as well as a few irregular ones such as Greek or Swiss. For example:**

**I spoke to an American/a Pakistani/a Greek at the conference.** ✔
**I spoke to an English/a French/a Japanese at the conference.** ✘

**See articles for more information.**

**British and American speakers of English use the same structure in conversation to talk about some foreign meals and restaurants. For example:**

**We always have an Indian on Friday nights.**
**Have you tried the new Italian in the High Street?**
**I didn't fancy cooking last night so we ordered a Chinese.**

# Position of adjectives

**Adjectives are almost always placed before a noun or after the verb 'to be' but there are some exceptions:**

| | Before the noun | After the noun or other structures |
|---|---|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **A few adjectives can be placed directly after a noun when they are part of a fixed or archaic expression or title.** | | **the Attorney General**<br>**the President Elect**<br>**the Princess Royal**<br>**the devil incarnate**<br>**a court martial** |
| **The word 'proper' has two meanings.** | **I can't do this job without the proper equipment. [real, correct or suitable]** | **I'd like to live in the city proper, not the outskirts. [the actual city, the main part]**<br><br>**The delegates are arriving at 10am for coffee but the seminar proper starts at 11.** |
| **Some adjectives appear to be used directly after nouns but, in fact, the sentences are elliptical.**<br><br>**Some of the adjectives used in this way have more than one meaning.** | **We used all the available resources.**<br><br>**It's the only possible option.**<br><br>**The concerned employees complained to the boss. [the employees were worried]**<br><br>**I spoke to the present manager. [the current manager]**<br><br>**He's a responsible person. [sensible, reliable]** | **We used all the resources (that were) available.**<br><br>**It's the only option (that's) possible.**<br><br>**The manager thanked the people concerned. [the appropriate people]**<br><br>**I spoke to all the managers present. [the managers who were present, in that place]**<br><br>**We need to find the person responsible. [the person who did something or is responsible for dealing with something]** |
| **To talk about age or size.** | | **The room is 4m long and 3m wide.**<br><br>**He's 30 years old.** |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Some adjectives, especially related to feelings, including those ending in 'ed', are not usually used directly before a noun.**<br><br>**Other examples include adjectives with the prefix 'a'.** | **He's a pleased manager. ✗**<br><br>**I spoke to an annoyed woman. ✗**<br><br>**I think my ill colleagues should stay at home. ✗**<br><br>**an awake/asleep/alone/alive person ✗** | **The manager is pleased. ✓**<br><br>**She seemed annoyed when I spoke to her. ✓**<br><br>**My colleagues who are ill should stay at home. ✓**<br><br>**He's awake. ✓**<br><br>**I saw someone asleep on the train. ✓** |
| **There are a few adjectives which are *only* placed directly before a noun.** | **He lives in northern/southern/ eastern/western France. ✓**<br><br>**We had countless applicants for the job. ✓**<br><br>**They have an indoor swimming pool. ✓** | **His part of France is northern/ southern/ eastern/western. ✗**<br><br>**The applicants were countless. ✗**<br><br>**They have a swimming pool which is indoor. ✗** |

# Nouns as adjectives

**We can use nouns (including gerunds) as adjectives. They answer the question. 'what kind?' or 'for what purpose?' For example:**

**a brain surgeon**
**history teachers**
**detective novels**
**a horror film**
**football boots**
**an arctic wolf**
**a car door**
**a table leg**
**a food cupboard**
**a Christmas cake**

**Note that like others, these adjectives do not take an 's' when the noun is plural:**

**We operate services desks. ✗**
**We operate service desks. ✓**

**Sometimes, we use more than one noun:**

**staff development costs**
**a winter sports clothes shop**
**an army truck manufacturing plant**

**And we can use other kinds of adjectives in front of them:**

**a big winter sports clothes shop**

**Note that we do not use commas between nouns which function as adjectives.**

# Participles

**Some present participles can be used as adjectives. For example:**

**a laughing man [a man who is/was laughing]**
**a falling tree**
**a crying baby**
**a bleeding hand**

**Some 'ed' and irregular past participles can be used as adjectives. For example:**

**an injured dog**
**an abandoned car**
**a painted wall**
**a broken leg**
**a lost handbag**
**a frozen pizza**

**The past participles that can be used as adjectives are usually those which can be used in a passive sense:**

**baked potatoes [potatoes which were baked by someone]**
**stolen money [money which was stolen]**

**a laughed man**

**However, there are a few past participles which can't be used in a passive sense but can function as adjectives. For example:**

**a fallen tree**
**an advanced student**
**a retired lawyer**
**a married couple**

**If you are unsure, check in a good dictionary.**

# Word order

**Note that with nouns as adjectives, the word order is determined by working backwards:**

> **a winter sports clothes shop**
>
> **What kind of shop? - clothes. What kind of clothes? - sports clothes. What kind of sports? - winter sports.**

**Before a noun, other adjectives are usually used in the order of the table below:**

| Opinion | Size | Age | Shape | Colour | Other | Origin | Material | Purpose |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| lovely | big | old | round | red | famous | French | wooden | walking |
| horrible | huge | young | square | green | honest | Asian | metal | shopping |
| nice | tiny | new | oval | cream | useful | northern | plastic | holiday |
| great | tall | ancient | triangular | auburn | happy | oriental | cotton | garden |

**Note that**

1. **We don't often use more than two adjectives together.**

2. **This is a guide rather than a fixed rule. You may see slight variations of this table and sometimes 'opinion' and 'size' are reversed, especially with 'ing' adectives:**

   **We had a huge, delicious pizza.**
   **It was a long, boring meeting.**
   **I read a short, interesting article on that topic.**

3. **When we use more than one adjective, they usually are separated by commas:**

   **We have a small, round, wooden table.**

**Although we tend not to use them after adjectives of opinion:**

**I bought some beautiful red, Italian, leather shoes.**

4. **Some adjectives are so closely associated with a noun that the two together**

**are seen as a single unit e.g. 'green tea' or 'short story' so we do not separate them in order to follow the usual rule or use commas:**

**We bought some sparkling white wine.**
**We bought some white, sparkling wine. ✖**

**He's an honest young man. ✔**
**He's a young, honest man. ✖**

**I read some old short stories. ✔**
**I read some short, old stories. ✖**

5. **Adjectives for opinions can be divided into two categories - 'general' and 'specific'. The table above has 'general' examples - these adjectives can be used to describe a wide range of objects or people:**

**a good chair**
**a good meal**
**a good manager**

**Sometimes adjectives are more specific to the noun they are describing. For example:**

**a comfortable chair**
**a delicious meal**
**a friendly manager**

**If we use both, the general adjective comes before the specific:**

**a lovely, comfortable chair**
**a nice, tasty meal**
**a pleasant, friendly manager**

6. **When we use two adjectives from some of the categories in the table, we separate them with 'and'. If we use more than two, we need commas and 'and':**

**We have young and old people in this team.**
**I have a metal and plastic chair.**
**My scarf is red, green and beige.**

7. **When not placed directly before a noun, the word order is less strict. For example:**

**My new table is wooden, round and beautiful.**

# Base and extreme adjectives

**Some adjectives can be categorised as 'base' or 'extreme':**

| Base adjectives | Extreme adjectives |
|---|---|
| cold | freezing |
| hot | boiling, scorching |
| good | wonderful, amazing, brilliant, fabulous |
| bad | horrible, terrible, awful |
| interesting | fascinating |
| hungry | starving, famished |
| big | huge, enormous, gigantic |
| attractive | beautiful, gorgeous |

**This is important when deciding which adverb of degree to use. We use 'very' with base adjectives and 'absolutely' with extreme adjectives:**

**She lives in a very big house.**
**She lives in an absolutely enormous house.**

**We can use 'really' with both kinds of adjectives - it is more conversational than 'very':**

**I saw a really good film last night.**
**It's really freezing at the moment.**

# Gradable and non-gradable adjectives

**Some adjectives can be categorised as 'gradable' or 'non-gradable'. We use gradable adjectives for qualities that vary in intensity or degree. We can ask the question, 'How..?'**

**How hot/big/important/strong/old is it?**

**With non-gradable adjectives, there is no question of degree. For example, a person is either dead or not; a cup is either full or not. For this reason, extreme adjectives are also non-gradable as are classifying adjectives such as electrical, wooden or indoor.**

| Gradable adjectives | Non-gradable adjectives |
|---|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| **angry** | **right** |
| **busy** | **wrong** |
| **intelligent** | **possible** |
| **cold** | **impossible** |
| **deep** | **unique** |
| **fast** | **essential** |
| **happy** | **empty** |
| **high** | **delicious** |
| **funny** | **medical** |
| **soft** | **chemical** |
| **useful** | **married** |
| **friendly** | **lost** |

**We do not usually use adverbs of degree with non-gradable adjectives. However, in informal conversation, we sometimes use intensifiers that mean 'completely' for emphasis:**

> **We couldn't get into the restaurant last night - it was completely full.**
> **You're absolutely right; I couldn't agree more.**
> **Are you entirely certain about that?**

**And 'quite' is sometimes used in conversation with some non-gradable adjectives to mean 'completely' or 'absolutely'.**

> **You're quite right.**
> **The meal was quite delicious.**

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