

Open Compound Words

Open compound words are slightly different because they still appear as two words separated by a space. However, we still consider them a compound word because when they are used together they take on a new and different meaning.

For example:

- *Living room*
- *Full moon*
- *Real estate*
- *Ice cream*
- *Hot dog*

Let's say a friend invites you to a picnic.

He asks, "Would you like a burger or a hot dog with your potato salad?"

You're more likely to think about the edible *hot dog* as opposed to the adjective *hot* describing the noun *dog*. The two single words work together to form a new noun. Hence, this is why separated words, such as *hot dog*, can still be considered compound words.

Hyphenated Compound Words

Hyphenated compound words can be tricky as there are many rules to remember. However, the main point to remember is that, in most cases, an open compound word will be hyphenated if it's to modify another noun.

For example, the term *video game* is an open compound, but is typically hyphenated when modifying a noun such as the word *player* or *collector*. The new words are therefore written as *video-game collector*.

The video-game collector was excited about the release of the latest adventure saga.

Hyphens are also typically used when a compound adjective is placed before a participle, or a word formed from a verb. These words also modify a noun. For example, “record-breaking snow” where the adjective comes before the present participle, and they both describe the noun “snow.”

Let’s look at a few other examples of hyphenated compounds:

- *Long-term*
- *Mother-in-law*
- *Good-hearted*
- *Merry-go-round*
- *Check-in*

Twinkl Top Tip:

Occasionally, compound words are referred to as compound nouns. This is when two nouns are combined to form a new noun. A compound noun is a type of compound word that is used to describe a person, place, or thing.

For example, *toothpaste*, *rain forest*, and *sister-in-law* are all compound nouns.

How are compound words formed?

Similar to many features of English, compound words are created as a result of language change over time.

When two words are frequently used together in speech and writing, over time they will be used closer and closer together. Usually, this happens in speech first and then translates to writing, where compounds become recognized as words within their own right.

A good example of this would be the closed compound word *notebook*. Before *notebook* was a word, we would have used something like “a book to write notes in.”

It's likely that this would then have been shortened to an open compound, *note book*. The word would then be hyphenated to *note-book* until finally, we arrive at the word *notebook* we use in the English language today.

We can even see how the English language evolves over time by comparing compound words which should be similar in nature.

The words *backyard* and *backseat* are closed compound words, but the words *front yard* and *front seat* are open compound words. Yet they both outline either a specific portion of the yard or the seat position in a vehicle.

However, sometimes compounds are formed because of a gap in our language. The word *football*, for example, would have been formed out of necessity as the game itself would not have had a name to begin with. This compound is thought to be very literal, as it's a compound of *foot* and *ball* from the act of kicking the ball with the foot.