

English Compounds

I. There is no clear upper limit in number of roots allowed in English compounds (for example, *three-time loser*, *man about town*, *mother of pearl*, *four-dimensional space time continuum*).

II. Some compounds are written as one word: *blackbird*. Some are written with hyphens: *mother-in-law*. Some are written as separate words: *smoke screen*. Typically not spelling, but stress and word-internal sound rules distinguish compounds from non-compounds: Compare *white house* with *White House*.

III. Two-root compounds come with a number of different structures:

A. Nouns	<u>Noun-Noun</u>	<u>Adjective-Noun</u>	<u>Preposition-Noun</u>	<u>Verb-Noun</u>
	<i>apron string</i>	<i>high school</i>	<i>overdose</i>	<i>swearword</i>
	<i>hubcap</i>	<i>smallpox</i>	<i>underdog</i>	<i>whetstone</i>
	<i>bedroom</i>	<i>poorhouse</i>	<i>uptone</i>	<i>scrubwoman</i>
	<i>schoolteacher</i>	<i>bluebird</i>	<i>afterthought</i>	<i>rattlesnake</i>
B. Adjectives	<u>Noun-Adjective</u>	<u>Adjective-Adjective</u>	<u>Preposition-Adjective</u>	
	<i>headstrong</i>	<i>white-hot</i>	<i>overwide</i>	
	<i>skin-deep</i>	<i>widespread</i>	<i>ingrown</i>	
	<i>nationwide</i>	<i>bittersweet</i>	<i>underripe</i>	
	<i>earthbound</i>	<i>hardworking</i>	<i>above-mentioned</i>	
C. Verbs	<u>Noun-Verb</u>	<u>Adjective-Verb</u>	<u>Preposition-Verb</u>	<u>Verb-Verb</u>
	<i>spoonfeed</i>	<i>dry-clean</i>	<i>outlive</i>	<i>sleepwalk</i>
	<i>aircondition</i>	<i>whitewash</i>	<i>overdo</i>	
	<i>window-shop</i>	<i>broadcast</i>	<i>uproot</i>	

In each of these cases, the syntactic class of the compound is the same as the syntactic class of the final element of the compound. The compound itself can serve as the form for derivation or inflection. Thus, *sunshine* + *-y* gives the adjective *sunshiny*; *overdo* + *-er* gives the noun *overdoer*.

One thing is clear, these compounds (like other derived forms) are internally complex and have a hierarchical structure. Consider *hard-working*: it is clear that *hard* and *work* cannot form a compound first to which the suffix *-ing* is applied. Why is that clear? Because there is no verb *hard-work*. Note

**He hard-works. *They hard-worked. *I will hard-work.*

Instead, first the adjective *working* must be derived from the verb *work*, only then can *hard* be compounded with it. So that the internal structure of this word must be

