

Noun + noun (a **tennis ball** / a **headache**)

A

You can use two nouns together (*noun + noun*) to mean *one* thing/person/idea etc. For example:

a **tennis ball**    **income tax**    the **city centre**

The first noun is like an adjective. It tells us what kind of thing/person/idea etc. For example:

a **tennis ball** = a **ball** used to play **tennis**

a **bus driver** = the **driver** of a **bus**

a **road accident** = an **accident** that happens on the **road**

**income tax** = **tax** that you pay on your **income**

the **city centre** = the **centre** of the **city**

a **Paris hotel** = a **hotel** in **Paris**

my **life story** = the **story** of my **life**

So you can say:

a **television** camera    a **television** programme    a **television** studio    a **television** producer

(these are all different things or people to do with television)

language **problems**    marriage **problems**    health **problems**    work **problems**

(these are all different kinds of problems)

Compare:

**garden vegetables** (= **vegetables** that are grown in a garden)

a **vegetable garden** (= a **garden** where vegetables are grown)

Sometimes the first word ends in **-ing**. Usually these are things we use for doing something:

a **frying** pan (= a pan for frying)    a **washing** machine    a **swimming** pool

Sometimes there are more than two nouns together:

☐ I waited at the **hotel reception desk**.

☐ We watched the **World Swimming Championships** on television.

☐ If you want to play **table tennis** (= a game), you need a **table tennis table** (= a table).

B

When two nouns are together like this, sometimes we write them as one word and sometimes as two separate words. For example:

a **headache**    **toothpaste**    a **weekend**    a **car park**    a **road sign**

There are no clear rules for this. If you are not sure, write two words.

C

Note the difference between:

a **sugar bowl** (maybe empty) and a **bowl of sugar** (= a bowl with sugar in it)

a **shopping bag** (maybe empty) and a **bag of shopping** (= a bag full of shopping)

D

When we use *noun + noun*, the first noun is like an *adjective*. It is normally singular, but the meaning is often plural. For example: a **bookshop** is a shop where you can buy **books**, an **apple tree** is a tree that has **apples**.

In the same way we say:

a **three-hour** journey (= a journey that takes three **hours**)

a **ten-pound** note (*not* pounds)

a **four-week** course (*not* weeks)

a **six-mile** walk (*not* miles)

two **14-year-old** girls (*not* years)

Compare:

☐ It was a **four-week** course.

but    The course lasted four **weeks**.