BBC natural language structure

## 1. Do you need a hyphen?

Neil: Hello! Welcome to 6 Minute Vocabulary. I'm Neil.

Catherine: And I'm Catherine. And today we're talking about hyphenation.

Neil: Hyphens are those little signs – like dashes – that we use in writing to join two words together.

Catherine: Yes, like in old-fashioned. There's always a hyphen between old and fashioned. Let's start with a clip from Brian. He's a news reporter, and he's reporting from a high school about an election.

Neil: Think about this question while you're listening: How does Brian describe the young people at the school? Here's Brian.

Brian: I asked some eighteen-year-old students at this secondary school how they're voting in this year's election. They're all hard-working young people. Twenty-two of them are undecided and are likely to make a last-minute decision. But a sizable group say today's politicians are not well respected and their attitudes are out of date. Back to the studio.

Neil: So we asked you: How does Brian describe the young people at the school?

Catherine: And the answer is: He says they are hard-working.

Neil: That means they work hard. Now there are lots of compound adjectives like hard-working that we make with an adjective or adverb like hard plus a present participle like working.

Catherine: And we always write them with a hyphen. So hard hyphen working (hard-working).

Neil: And we can make compound adjectives in other ways too. Listen to this clip for three more examples.

Brian: I asked some eighteen-year-old students at this secondary school how they're voting in this year's election. Twenty-two of them are undecided and are likely to make a last-minute decision.

Catherine: First we had eighteen-year-old students. Eighteen-year-old is an adjective made from three words joined together with hyphens. When we write age before a noun, we use hyphens.

Neil: Eighteen hyphen year hyphen old (eighteen-year-old).

Catherine: Exactly. And it's the same with numbers; for example, we write the phrase a two-door car like this:

Neil: A two hyphen door car (a two-door car). But that's only for numbers before the noun. If you write: the students are eighteen years old, you don't need hyphens.

Catherine: Now, the second compound in that clip was twenty-two.

Neil: And the rule is: always use hyphens in numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine.

Catherine: Twenty hyphen one (twenty-one). Two hundred and ninety hyphen nine (two hundred and ninety-nine).

Neil: Good. Now the last compound adjective we had there was last-minute. The students were going to make a last-minute decision.

Catherine: And that's the adjective last plus the noun minute, joined with a hyphen. Now for another clip. Listen out for some more compound adjectives.

Brian: A sizable group say today's politicians are not well respected and their attitudes are out of date.

Catherine: Well respected. That's an adverb, well, and the past participle of a verb, respected. And together, they make an adjective, and the two parts of the adjective need a hyphen when we write them before a noun.

Neil: So it's a well-respected politician, with a hyphen: well hyphen respected politician (well-respected politician).

Catherine: Yes. But in a phrase like the politicians were well respected we don't use a hyphen, because the adjective comes after the noun, not before. And that rule is the same for three-word compound adjectives like out-of-date.

Neil: So, the phrase out-of-date attitudes has hyphens because the adjective is before the noun, but the phrase their attitudes are out of date doesn't have hyphens.

Catherine: Exactly. And one last rule is that we never use hyphens in compound adjectives that have an adverb which ends in -l-y.

Neil: No, we don't. So in phrases like a carefully written letter we don't use hyphens.

Catherine: Now let's talk about compound nouns. In our clip, Brian was reporting from a secondary school. The phrase secondary school is a compound noun - and there's no hyphen in it.

Neil: No, there isn't. Most compound nouns are written as two separate words.

Catherine: If you're not sure, check in a good dictionary.

Hyphen examples:

a hard-working student

a forty-year-old father, a two-door car

fifty-two

a last-minute decision

a world-famous athlete

well-respected politicians

out-of-date fashion

Without hyphens examples:

the politicians were well respected

that voucher is out of date

a carefully written letter, the letter was carefully written

## 2. Present tense (Actions right now)

**Present simple**

We use the present simple for things that we do regularly and for facts, habits, truths and permanent situations. We often use time expressions like every day, once a week, on Fridays.

* **I check** my email **every day**. (regular activity)
* **Yuki works** at the bank. (permanent situation)

**Form:**  
For positive sentences, use the same form as the**infinitive without 'to'**for **I, you, we** and **they.** For **he, she** and **it,** add **-s** or **-es** to the infinitive. Make questions and negatives with **do** **/ does + the infintive without 'to'.**

* **They live** in Rome.
* **Julian starts** work at nine o’clock and **finishes** at five.
* **I don't eat** meat.
* **It doesn't** usually **snow** in October.
* **Why do you read**the news online every day?
* **Does the supermarket sell** stamps?

**Present Continuous**   
We use the present continuous for things that are happening at the time we are speaking, for temporary situations, and for activities that are in progress.

* Just a minute. **I’m checking** my email. (now)
* She usually works in London, but **she’s working** from home this week. (temporary)
* **I’m studying** Economics (activity in progress)

We can also use the present continuous for future arrangements, usually with a time expression.

* **I'm seeing** the doctor on Monday morning.

**Form:**For positive sentences, the form is**subject + am/is/are + verb-ing**. Make questions and negatives with **am/are/is + not + verb-ing.**

* Can I call you back later? **We’re having** dinner right now.
* **He isn’t answering** his mobile at the moment.
* **What are you doing?**
* **Is it raining?**

**Note:** There are some verbs that we don’t usually use in the continuous form. They are often verbs of thinking and feeling, for example: **hear, see, smell, hate, know, understand, believe, want, need.**

**WRONG:** Could you explain that again? I’m not understanding.  
**CORRECT:** Could you explain that again? **I don’t understand.**

**Present Perfect**Use the present perfect for:

**1) Life experiences in the past.** We don’t say when these happened: we are interested in the experience, not the time or date. We often use **ever** and **never.**

* **I’ve seen** all Tarantino’s films.
* **Have you ever eaten** sushi? - **Yes, I have. / No, I haven’t.**

**2) Recent past actions that are important now.**

* Oh no! **I’ve left** my wallet on the bus.
* **The president has resigned.**

**3) Past situations that are still happening now.** We often use**how long** with**for**(throughout a period of time) and**since**(from a point in the past until now).

* **I haven’t seen** Jenny this morning. (It is still this morning.)
* **How long have you known** Mitya? - **I’ve known him for** two years.
* **Jack's been** in Italy since January.

**4)** With **just, already, yet** to talk about recent events in the past. The exact time is not important. Use **just** and **already** mainly in positive sentences. Use **yet** in negatives and questions.

* **It’s just stopped** raining. Let’s go out.
* Can you feed the cat? - **I’ve already fed** her.
* We can still watch the film.**It hasn’t started yet**.
* **Have you done** your English homework yet?

**Note:**Use the past simple for completed actions in the past.

* **I saw** Jenny yesterday.
* **Peter moved** to Saudi Arabia in 2011.
* **Natasha didn't want** to have another piece of cake.
* **When did you see** Alex?

**Form:**  
For positive sentences, the form is**subject + have/has + past participle.** Make negatives with **not**and change the word order to make questions.

* **I've finished** the report.
* **Jack's been** in Italy since January.
* **We've just got** back from Germany.
* **I haven’t seen** Jenny this morning.
* **How long has Alex known** Mitya?

**Catherine**Hello and welcome to 6 Minute Grammar with me, Catherine.

**Finn**And me, Finn. Hello.

**Catherine**     
In this programme we're talking about present tenses.

**Finn**Now let's get started. The first thing we need to know is that the present simple tense is mainly for facts, habits and truths. Now, Catherine, give me a true fact about you.

**Catherine**A true fact about me is that I like gardening.

**Finn**Oh, wow, great.

**Catherine**Love it.

**Finn**Thanks Catherine. And can you tell me one of your habits?

**Catherine**I drink a cup of coffee every morning. I drink one at home and I drink another one when I get to work.

**Finn**So far so good. We make the present simple with a subject and base verb, and we add **-s** to the verb for **he**, **she** and **it**. So: I work, you work, he works, she works, and so on. We make questions and negatives with **do** or **does**. So Catherine, do you take milk in your coffee?

**Catherine**I do take milk in my coffee, Finn. Do you take milk in your coffee?

**Finn**             
I don't. I like it black.

**Catherine**And what about Mrs Finn, does she take milk in her coffee?

**Finn**She doesn't drink coffee.

**Catherine**Oh, what does she drink?

**Finn**Tea. All the time.

**Catherine**Very British.

**Finn**Yes.

**Catherine**Good. So that's present simple for facts and habits. Now when we're talking about activities, temporary situations, and things that are happening now – or around now – we use **am**, **is** or **are**plus an **i-n-g verb** to make the present continuous. So Finn, what are you doing now?

**Finn**Now, right now, right at this minute, I'm sitting in the studio, on a chair, talking to you, but off and on, I'm also reading a novel called The Unconsoled by Kazuo Ishiguro. It's great.

**Catherine**Well pronounced.

**Finn**Thank you. And are you reading anything right now Catherine?

**Catherine**Yes I am. I'm reading a novel also. It's a comedy about Adrian Mole and it's really good, I'm enjoying it a lot.

**Finn**Sounds great. I'd like to borrow it.

**Catherine**You can. We can also use the present continuous for future arrangements. So Finn, what are you doing tonight?

**Finn**Tonight I'm taking my wife to dinner. Don't tell her.

**Catherine**Lucky wife.

**Finn**That's right. So, present simple for facts and habits; present continuous for activities and future arrangements.

**Catherine**     
And now for the present perfect. We make it with **have** or **has** plus the past participle, it connects the past to the present, and it's useful for asking about life experiences. So, life experience question coming, Finn. Have you ever eaten insects?

**Finn**             
I have, yes. I've eaten ants and beetles in Cambodia. So in the question, the word **ever** means 'at any time in your life'. **Never** means at no time in your life. So Catherine, tell us about an experience that you have **never** had.

**Catherine**Well, I've never eaten insects Finn. And I've never been on safari. But I'm sure that our colleague Rob has been on safari.

**Finn**He's been to many places.

**Catherine**He has. Other words we use with present perfect are **just**, **already** and **yet**. We use **just**, **already** and **yet** a lot when we're using the present perfect tense to talk about the present effect of a past event. **Already** means something has happened, perhaps earlier than expected. So Finn, give us an example of **already**:

**Finn**Right. I've **already** had breakfast today.

**Catherine**And coffee? Have you had coffee?

**Finn**I've **just** had a cup of coffee. **Just** means recently. I haven't had lunch **yet**.

**Catherine**I should think not, it's only half ten.

**Finn**It's a bit early for lunch, yeah.

**Catherine**     
And **yet** means something like 'not until now'.

**Finn**Good. And if a past situation has continued until now, use **for** or **since** to say how long it has continued, like this:

**Catherine**     
I've lived in London **for** five years. I've been married **since** 2003.

**Finn**We also use the present perfect to give news. Things that happened a short time ago, and are important now. So, have you got any news for us, Catherine?

**Catherine**     
Yes I have, actually.

**Finn**OK?

**Catherine**I've won the lottery!

**Finn**I don't believe you.

**Catherine**That's because I'm not telling the truth, it's just an example!

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**Catherine**     
And we're talking about present tenses. And it's quiz time! Question one. Which of these sentences best describes a habit? a) I have smoked 20 cigarettes a day, b) I smoke 20 cigarettes a day.

**Finn**And the answer's b) I smoke 20 cigarettes a day. Question two. Is this sentence grammatically correct, or wrong? Humans have not visited the planet Mars yet, but they have already been to the moon.

**Catherine**It's correct.

**Finn**It is. Now, last one: Which sentence is correct? a) Catherine has never eaten insects, b) Catherine never eats insects, or c) Catherine is never eating insects.

**Catherine**And the answer is that both a) and b) are correct. As a life experience it's true to say that I have never eaten insects; and as a fact I can say: I never eat insects. So that brings us to the end of the quiz, and well done to you if you got them all right.

**Finn**             
A free insect for everyone who got all of those right! Now, there's more about this on our website at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again for more 6 Minute Grammar.

**Both**Bye.