



Politechnika Wrocławska



## **Wirtualne Środowisko Nauki SJO**

Projekt Studium Języków Obcych  
Politechniki Wrocławskiej

**Ćwiczenia gramatyczne z języka  
naukowo-technicznego wspierające  
osiągnięcie kierunkowych efektów kształcenia**

Właściwości dokumentu:

Autor:	<b>mgr Magdalena Kondro</b>
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# Compound nouns

## Definition and usage

Compound nouns are two or more words which act together as a single noun, which often has a different meaning from the separate words. In a compound noun there is a headword, i.e. the main word and modifiers.

Compound nouns are common in technical language as they efficiently express a lot of information in a few words. Use only the accepted compound nouns, avoid making new ones as these may confuse the reader.

## Patterns

Compound nouns have different patterns, the most common ones are as follows:

- noun+noun, e.g. railway
- adjective+noun, e.g. software
- noun+verb, e.g. bee sting
- gerund+noun, e.g. spinning wheel
- preposition+noun, e.g. bypass

## Nouns acting as adjectives

In compound nouns the noun in the modifier acts as an adjective. This is important as the plural form becomes singular, e.g. *a wall that is two metres high* becomes *a two-metre wall* in a compound noun.

## Spelling

Compound nouns can be

1. open or spaced (unconnected words), e.g. *the lowest common denominator*
2. closed or solid (words are combined into one), e.g. *wildlife*
3. hyphenated, e.g. *a six-year-old*

There are no clear rules so it is always a good idea to check the compound noun in a dictionary.

## Modifiers

Modifiers in compound nouns in Technical English can refer to different things, usually:

- the function, e.g. *a washing machine*
- materials, e.g. *a silicon chip*
- place, e.g. *deep-sea technology*

## Pronunciation

In compound nouns the stress usually falls on the first part, e.g. *wildlife*

## Plurals

To make compound nouns plural,

- in open/spaced and hyphenated compounds add 's' to the headword, e.g. *bus stop* becomes *bus stops*, *brother-in-law* becomes *brothers-in-law*, *runner-up* becomes *runners-up*;
- in closed/solid compound nouns always add 's' at the very end of the word, e.g. *taxpayer* becomes *taxpayers*.

## Understanding

To understand the meaning of a longer compound noun try reversing the order of the words and using prepositions, e.g. *a 5-inch-diameter pole* is *a pole that is 5 inches in diameter*. Most compound nouns can be interpreted this way.

## Compound nouns – exercises

### I. Make these compound nouns plural.

1. a travel agent - travel agents
2. a traffic light
3. a keyboard
4. a mother-in-law
5. a six-year-old
6. an egg roll
7. a director general
8. a runner-up
9. a workman
10. a hand-me-down
11. an assistant secretary of state
12. a doctor of philosophy
13. a great uncle

### II. Reverse the order of these compound nouns and insert prepositions where necessary to show understanding.

1. a 10-metre-diameter pipe  
a pipe that is 10 metres in diameter
2. a sea creature analysis centre report  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. a large-scale project  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. a Polish-German border  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. low-grade metamorphic rocks  
\_\_\_\_\_

### III. Make compound nouns from these clues.

1. a reduction in cost  
a cost reduction
2. a tape for measuring up to 100 centimetres  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. a holiday that lasts two weeks  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. an analysis of the risk of an oil spill  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. a specimen that is well-preserved  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **Answers**

### **Task I**

1. travel agents
2. traffic lights
3. keyboards
4. mothers-in-law
5. six-year-old
6. egg rolls
7. directors general
8. runners-up
9. workmen
10. hand-me-downs
11. assistant secretaries of state
12. doctors of philosophy
13. great-uncles

### **Task II**

1.  
a pipe that is 10 metres in diameter
2.  
a report of the centre that makes analyses of sea creatures
3.  
a project whose scale is large/a project is large scale
- 4  
a border between Poland and Germany
5.  
metamorphic rocks of low grade

### **Task III**

1.  
a cost reduction
2.  
a 100-cm tape measure
3.  
a two-week notice
4.  
an oil-spill risk analysis
5.  
a well-preserved specimen