

## MODERN ENGLISH GRAMMAR

### WORD FORMATION PROCESS

#### Compounding

Compounding forms a word out of two or more root morphemes. The words are called compounds or compound words.

In Linguistics, compounds can be either native or borrowed.

Native English roots are typically free morphemes, so that means native compounds are made out of independent words that can occur by themselves. Examples:

*mailman* (composed of free root *mail* and free root *man*)

*mail carrier*

*dog house*

*fireplace*

*fireplug* (a regional word for 'fire hydrant')

*fire hydrant*

*dry run*

*cupcake*

*cup holder*

*email*

*e-ticket*

*pick-up truck*

*talking-to*

Some compounds have a preposition as one of the component words as in the last 2 examples.

In Greek and Latin, in contrast to English, roots do not typically stand alone. So compounds are composed of bound roots. Compounds formed in English from borrowed Latin and Greek morphemes preserve this characteristic. Examples include *photograph*, *iatrogenic*, and many thousands of other classical words.

Note that compounds are written in various ways in English: with a space between the elements; with a hyphen between the elements; or simply with the two roots run together with no separation. The way the word is written does not affect its status as a compound. Over time, the convention for writing compounds can change, usually in the direction from separate words (e.g. *email* used to be written with a hyphen. In the 19th century, today and tomorrow were sometimes still written *to-day* and *to-morrow*. The *to* originally was the preposition *to* with an older meaning 'at [a particular period of time]'. *Clock work* changed to *clock-work* and finally to one word with no break (*clockwork*). If you read older literature you might see some compound words that are now written as one word appearing with unfamiliar spaces or hyphens between the components.

Another thing to note about compounds is that they can combine words of different parts of speech. The list above shows mostly noun-noun compounds, which is probably the most common part of speech combination, but there are others, such as adjective-noun (*dry*

*run, blackbird, hard drive*), verb-noun (*pick-pocket, cut-purse, lick-spittle*) and even verb-particle (where 'particle' means a word basically designating spatial expression that functions to complete a literal or metaphorical path), as in *run-through, hold-over*. Sometimes these compounds are different in the part of speech of the whole compound vs. the part of speech of its components. Note that the last two are actually nouns, despite their components.

Some compounds have more than two component words. These are formed by successively combining words into compounds, e.g. *pick-up truck*, formed from *pick-up* and *truck*, where the first component, *pick-up* is itself a compound formed from *pick* and *up*. Other examples are *ice-cream cone, no-fault insurance* and even more complex compounds like *top-rack dishwasher safe*.

There are a number of subtypes of compounds that do not have to do with part of speech, but rather the sound characteristics of the words. These subtypes are not mutually exclusive.

### **Rhyming compounds** (subtype of compounds)

These words are compounded from two rhyming words. Examples:

*lovey-dovey*  
*chiller-killer*

There are words that are formally very similar to rhyming compounds, but are not quite compounds in English because the second element is not really a word--it is just a nonsense item added to a root word to form a rhyme. Examples:

*higgledy-piggledy*  
*tootsie-wootsie*

This formation process is associated in English with child talk (and talk addressed to children), technically called hypocoristic language. Examples:

*bunnie-wunnie*  
*Henny Penny*  
*snuggly-wuggly*  
*Georgie Porgie*  
*Piggie-Wiggie*

Another word type that looks a bit like rhyming compounds comprises words that are formed of two elements that almost match, but differ in their vowels. Again, the second element is typically a nonsense form:

*pitter-patter*  
*zigzag*  
*tick-tock*  
*riffraff*  
*flipflop*

**Derivation** Derivation is the creation of words by modification of a root without the addition of other roots. Often the effect is a change in part of speech.

### **Affixation** (Subtype of Derivation)

The most common type of derivation is the addition of one or more affixes to a root, as in the word *derivation* itself. This process is called affixation, a term which covers both prefixation and suffixation.

### **Blending**

Blending is one of the most beloved of word formation processes in English. It is especially creative in that speakers take two words and merge them based not on morpheme structure but on sound structure. The resulting words are called blends.

Usually in word formation we combine roots or affixes along their edges: one morpheme comes to an end before the next one starts. For example, we form *derivation* out of the sequence of morphemes de+riv+at(e)+ion. One morpheme follows the next and each one has identifiable boundaries. The morphemes do not overlap.

But in blending, part of one word is stitched onto another word, without any regard for where one morpheme ends and another begins. For example, the word *swooshtika* 'Nike swoosh as a logo symbolizing corporate power and hegemony' was formed from *swoosh* and *swastika*. The *swoosh* part remains whole and recognizable in the blend, but the *tika* part is not a morpheme, either in the word *swastika* or in the blend. The blend is a perfect merger of form, and also of content. The meaning contains an implicit analogy between the *swastika* and the *swoosh*, and thus conceptually blends them into one new kind of thing having properties of both, but also combined properties of neither source. Other examples include *glitterati* (blending *glitter* and *literati*) 'Hollywood social set', *mockumentary* (*mock* and *documentary*) 'spoof documentary'.

The earliest blends in English only go back to the 19th century, with wordplay coinages by Lewis Carroll in *Jabberwocky*. For example, he introduced to the language *slithy*, formed from *lithe* and *slimy*, and *galumph*, (from *gallop* and *triumph*. Interestingly *galumph* has survived as a word in English, but it now seems to mean 'walk in a stomping, ungainly way'.

Some blends that have been around for quite a while include *brunch* (breakfast and lunch), *motel* (motor hotel), *electrocute* (electric and execute), *smog* (smoke and fog) and *cheeseburger* (cheese and hamburger). These go back to the first half of the twentieth century. Others, such as *stagflation* (stagnation and inflation), *spork* (spoon and fork), and *carjacking* (car and hijacking) arose since the 1970s.

Here are some more recent blends I have run across:

*mocktail* (mock and cocktail) 'cocktail with no alcohol'

*splog* (spam and blog) 'fake blog designed to attract hits and raise Google-ranking'

*Britpopperati* (Britpop and literati) 'those knowledgeable about current British pop music'

### **Clipping**

Clipping is a type of abbreviation of a word in which one part is 'clipped' off the rest, and the remaining word now means essentially the same thing as what the whole word means or meant. For example, the word *rifle* is a fairly modern clipping of an earlier compound *rifle gun*, meaning a gun with a rifled barrel. (*Rifled* means having a spiral groove causing the bullet to spin, and thus making it more accurate.) Another clipping is *burger*, formed by

clipping off the beginning of the word *hamburger*. (This clipping could only come about once *hamburg*+*er* was reanalyzed as *ham*+*burger*.)

### Acronyms

Acronyms are formed by taking the initial letters of a phrase and making a word out of it. Acronyms provide a way of turning a phrase into a word. The classical acronym is also pronounced as a word. *Scuba* was formed from *self-contained underwater breathing apparatus*. The word *snafu* was originally WW2 army slang for Situation Normal All Fucked Up. Acronyms were being used more and more by military bureaucrats, and soldiers coined *snafu* in an apparent parody of this overused device. Sometimes an acronym uses not just the first letter, but the first syllable of a component word, for example *radar*, RADio Detection And Ranging and *sonar*, SOund Navigation and Ranging. Radar forms an analogical model for both *sonar* and *lidar*, a technology that measures distance to a target and maps its surface by bouncing a laser off it. There is some evidence that *lidar* was not coined as an acronym, but instead as a blend of *light* and *radar*. Based on the word itself, either etymology appears to work, so many speakers assume that *lidar* is an acronym rather than a blend.

A German example that strings together the initial syllables of the words in the phrase, is *Gestapo*, from GEheime STAats POLizei 'Secret State Police'. Another is *Stasi*, from STAats SIcherheit 'State Security'. Acronyms are a subtype of initialism. Initialisms also include words made from the initial letters of a Phrase but NOT pronounced as a normal word - it is instead pronounced as a string of letters. Organization names are often initialisms of this type. Examples:

NOW (National Organization of Women)  
US or U.S., USA or U.S.A. (United States)  
UN or U.N. (United Nations)  
IMF (International Monetary Fund)

Some organizations ARE pronounced as a word:

UNICEF  
MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving)

The last example incorporates a meaning into the word that fits the nature of the organization. Sometimes this type is called a Reverse Acronym or a Backronym.

These can be thought of as a special case of acronyms.

Memos, email, and text messaging (text-speak) are modes of communication that give rise to both clippings and acronyms, since these word formation methods are designed to abbreviate. Some acronyms:

NB - Nota bene, literally 'note well'. Used by scholars making notes on texts. (A large number of other scholarly acronyms from Latin are used, probably most invented in the medieval period or Renaissance, not originally in Latin)  
BRB - be right back (from 1980s, 90s)  
FYI - for your information (from mid 20th century)  
LOL - laughing out loud (early 21st century) - now pronounced either /lol/ or /el o el/; has spawned compounds like *Lolcats*).

ROFL - rolling on the floor laughing  
 ROFLMAO - rolling on the floor laughing my ass off

### Reanalysis

Sometimes speakers unconsciously change the morphological boundaries of a word, creating a new morph or making an old one unrecognizable. This happened in *hamburger*, which was originally *Hamburger steak* 'chopped and formed steak in the Hamburg style, then *hamburger* (*hamburg* + *er*), then *ham* + *burger*

### Folk etymology

A popular idea of a word's origin that is not in accordance with its real origin.

Many folk etymologies are cases of reanalysis in which the word is not only reanalysis but it changes under the influence of the new understanding of its morphemes. The result is that speakers think it has a different origin than it does.

### Analogy

Sometimes speakers take an existing word as a model and form other words using some of its morphemes as a fixed part, and changing one of them to something new, with an analogically similar meaning. *Cheeseburger* was formed on the analogy of *hamburger*, replacing a perceived morpheme *ham* with *cheese*. *carjack* and *skyjack* were also formed by analogy.

### Novel creation

In novel creation, a speaker or writer forms a word without starting from other morphemes. It is as if the word is formed out of 'whole cloth', without reusing any parts.

Some examples of now-conventionalized words that were novel creations include *blimp*, *googol* (the mathematical term), *bling*, and possibly *slang*, which emerged in the last 200 years with no obvious etymology. Some novel creations seem to display 'sound symbolism', in which a word's phonological form suggests its meaning in some way. For example, the sound of the word *bling* seems to evoke heavy jewelry making noise. Another novel creation whose sound seems to relate to its meaning is *badonkadonk*, 'female rear end', a reduplicated word which can remind English speakers of the repetitive movement of the rear end while walking.

### Creative respelling

Sometimes words are formed by simply changing the spelling of a word that the speaker wants to relate to the new word. Product names often involve creative respelling, such as *Mr. Kleen*.

[Reference: <https://www.ruf.rice.edu/~kemmer/Words/wordtypes.html> . Access date: 18/04/2020]