

6. COMPOUNDING RULES

(See also “Compounding Examples”)

6.1. A compound word is a union of two or more words, either with or without a hyphen. It conveys a unit idea that is not as clearly or quickly conveyed by the component words in unconnected succession. The hyphen is a mark of punctuation that not only unites but separates the component words, and thus facilitates understanding, aids readability, and ensures correct pronunciation. When compound words must be divided at the end of a line, such division should be made leaving prefixes and combining forms of more than one syllable intact.

6.2. In applying the rules in this chapter and in using the list of examples in the following chapter, “Compounding Examples,” the fluid nature of our language should be kept in mind. Word forms constantly undergo modification. Two-word forms, which often acquired the hyphen first, frequently bypass the hyphen stage and instantly assume a one-word form.

6.3. The rules, therefore, are somewhat flexible. Exceptions must necessarily be allowed. Current language trends continue to point to closing up certain words which, through either frequent use or widespread dissemination through modern media exposure, have become fixed in the reader’s mind as units of thought. The tendency to merge two short words continues to be a natural progression toward better communication.

General rules

6.4. In general, omit the hyphen when words appear in regular order and the omission causes no ambiguity in sense or sound.

banking hours	day laborer	palm oil	training ship
blood pressure	eye opener	patent right	violin teacher
book value	fellow citizen	real estate	
census taker	living costs	rock candy	

6.5. Words are usually combined to express a literal or nonliteral (figurative) unit idea that would not be as clearly expressed in unconnected succession.

afterglow	cupboard	gentleman	right-of-way
bookkeeping	forget-me-not	newsprint	whitewash

6.6. A derivative of a compound retains the solid or hyphenated form of the original compound unless otherwise indicated.

coldbloodedness	ill-advisedly	praiseworthiness	Y-shaped
footnoting	outlawry	railroader	

6.7. A hyphen is used to avoid doubling a vowel or tripling a consonant, except after the short prefixes *co*, *de*, *pre*, *pro*, and *re*, which are generally printed solid. (See also rules 6.29 and 6.32.)

cooperation	micro-organism	thimble-eye	<i>but</i>
deemphasis	semi-independent	ultra-atomic	co-occupant
preexisting	brass-smith	shell-like	cross section
anti-inflation	Inverness-shire	hull-less	

Solid compounds

6.8. Print solid two nouns that form a third when the compound has only one primary accent, especially when the prefixed noun consists of only one syllable or when one of the elements loses its original accent.

airship	cupboard	fishmonger	locksmith
bathroom	dressmaker	footnote	workman
bookseller			

6.9. Print solid a noun consisting of a short verb and an adverb as its second element, except when the use of the solid form would interfere with comprehension.

blowout	hangover	runoff	<i>but</i>
breakdown	holdup	setup	cut-in
bulldown	makeready	showdown	phase-in
cooldown	markoff	throwaway	run-in
flareback	pickup	tradeoff	sit-in
giveaway			tie-in

6.10. Compounds beginning with the following nouns are usually printed solid.

book	house	school	way
eye	mill	shop	wood
horse	play	snow	work

6.11. Compounds ending in the following are usually printed solid, especially when the prefixed word consists of one syllable.

berry	headed	monger	tight
bird	hearted	over	time (not clock)
blossom	holder	owner	ward
board	hopper	<i>but</i> #ownership	ware
boat	house	person	water
book	keeper	picker	way
borne	keeping	picking	wear
bound	land	piece	weed
box	light	plane	wide
boy	like	power	wise
brained	line	proof	woman
bug	load	roach	wood
bush	maid	room	work
craft	maker	shop	worker
field	making	site	working
fish	man	skin	worm
flower	master	smith	worthy
fly	mate	stone	writer
girl	mill	store	writing
grower	mistress	tail	yard

6.12. Print solid *any*, *every*, *no*, and *some* when combined with *body*, *thing*, and *where*. When *one* is the second element, print as

two words if meaning a single or particular person or thing. To avoid mispronunciation, print *no one* as two words at all times.

anybody	everybody	nobody	somebody
anything	everything	nothing	something
anywhere	everywhere	nowhere	somewhere
anyone	everyone	no one	someone

but any one of us may stay; every one of the pilots is responsible; every body was accounted for

6.13. Print compound personal pronouns as one word.

herself	myself	themselves	yourself
himself	oneself	thyselves	yourselves
itself	ourselves		

6.14. Print as one word compass directions consisting of two points, but use a hyphen after the first point when three points are combined.

northeast	north-northeast
southwest	south-southwest

also north-south alignment

Unit modifiers

6.15. Print a hyphen between words, or abbreviations and words, combined to form a unit modifier immediately preceding the word modified, except as indicated in rule 6.16 and elsewhere throughout this chapter. This applies particularly to combinations in which one element is a present or past participle.

agreed-upon standards	no-par-value stock
Baltimore-Washington road	one-on-one situation
collective-bargaining talks	part-time personnel
contested-election case	rust-resistant covering
contract-bar rule	service-connected disability
cost-of-living increase	state-of-the-art technology
drought-stricken area	supply-side economics
English-speaking nation	tool-and-die maker
fire-tested material	up-or-down vote
Federal-State-local cooperation	U.S.-owned property; U.S.-flag ship
German-English descent	1-inch diameter; 2-inch-diameter pipe
guided-missile program	a 4-percent increase, the 10-percent rise
hearing-impaired class	
high-speed line	<i>but</i>
large-scale project	4 percent citric acid
law-abiding citizen	4 percent interest. (Note the absence of an article: <i>a</i> , <i>an</i> , or <i>the</i> . The word <i>of</i> is understood here.)
long-term loan	
line-item veto	
long-term-payment loan	
low-cost housing	
lump-sum payment	
most-favored-nation clause	
multiple-purpose uses	

6.16. Where meaning is clear and readability is not aided, it is not necessary to use a hyphen to form a temporary or made compound. Restraint should be exercised in forming unnecessary combinations of words used in normal sequence.

atomic energy power	child welfare plan
bituminous coal industry	civil rights case

civil service examination	per capita expenditure
durable goods industry	Portland cement plant
flood control study	production credit loan
free enterprise system	public at large
ground water levels	public utility plant
high school student	real estate tax
elementary school grade	small businessman
income tax form	Social Security pension
interstate commerce law	soil conservation measures
land bank loan	special delivery mail
land use program	parcel post delivery
life insurance company	speech correction class
mutual security funds	
national defense appropriation	<i>but</i> no-hyphen rule (readability
natural gas company	aided); <i>not</i> no hyphen rule

6.17. Print without a hyphen a compound predicate adjective or predicate noun the second element of which is a present participle.

The duties were price fixing.	The shale was oil bearing.
The effects were far reaching.	The area is used for beet raising.

6.18. Print without a hyphen a compound predicate adjective the second element of which is a past participle. Omit the hyphen in a predicate modifier of comparative or superlative degree.

The area is drought stricken.	This material is fire tested.
The paper is fine grained.	The cars are higher priced.
Moderately fine grained wood.	The reporters are better informed.
The boy is freckle faced.	

6.19. Print without a hyphen a two-word modifier the first element of which is a comparative or superlative.

better drained soil	<i>but</i>
best liked books	uppercrust society
higher level decision	lowercase, uppercase type
highest priced apartment	upperclassman
larger sized dress	bestseller (noun)
better paying job	lighter-than-air craft
lower income group	higher-than-market price

6.20. Do not use a hyphen in a two-word unit modifier the first element of which is an adverb ending in *ly*, nor use hyphens in a three-word unit modifier the first two elements of which are adverbs.

eagerly awaited moment	<i>but</i>
wholly owned subsidiary	ever-normal granary
unusually well preserved specimen	ever-rising flood
very well defined usage	still-new car
longer than usual lunch period	still-lingering doubt
not too distant future	well-known lawyer
most often heard phrase	well-kept secret

6.21. Proper nouns used as unit modifiers, either in their basic or derived form, retain their original form; but the hyphen is printed when combining forms.

Latin American countries	Winston-Salem festival
North Carolina roads	African-American program
a Mexican-American	Anglo-Saxon period
South American trade	Franco-Prussian War
Spanish-American pride	Seventh-day Adventists

but
 Minneapolis-St. Paul region
 North American-South American
 sphere

French-English descent
 Washington-Wilkes-Barre route
or Washington/Wilkes-Barre
 route

6.22. Do not confuse a modifier with the word it modifies.

elderly clothesman
 old-clothes man
 competent shoemaker
 wooden-shoe maker
 field canning factory
 tomato-canning factory
 gallant serviceman
 service men and women
 light blue hat (weight)
 light-blue hat (color)
 average taxpayer
 income-tax payer
 American flagship (military)
 American-flag ship

well-trained schoolteacher
 elementary school teacher
 preschool children (kindergarten)
 pre-school children (before school)
 rezoned wastesite
 hazardous-waste site

but
 common stockholder
 stock ownership
 small businessman
 working men and women
 steam powerplant site
 meat packinghouse owner

6.23. Where two or more hyphenated compounds have a common basic element and this element is omitted in all but the last term, the hyphens are retained.

2- to 3- and 4- to 5-ton trucks
 2- by 4-inch boards, *but* boards 2 to 6 inches wide
 8-, 10-, and 16-foot boards
 6.4-, 3.1-, and 2-percent pay raises
 moss- and ivy-covered walls, *not* moss and ivy-covered walls
 long- and short-term money rates, *not* long and short-term money rates
but twofold or threefold, *not* two or threefold
 goat, sheep, and calf skins, *not* goat, sheep, and calfskins
 intrastate and intracity, *not* intra-state and -city
 American owned and managed companies
 preoperative and postoperative examination

6.24. Do not use a hyphen in a unit modifier consisting of a foreign phrase.

ante bellum days	ex officio member	per diem employee
bona fide transaction	per capita tax	prima facie evidence

6.25. Do not print a hyphen in a unit modifier containing a letter or a numeral as its second element.

abstract B pages	class II railroad	point 4 program
article 3 provisions	grade A milk	ward D beds

6.26. Do not use a hyphen in a unit modifier enclosed in quotation marks unless it is normally a hyphenated term, but quotation marks are not to be used in lieu of a hyphen.

"blue sky" law	<i>but</i>
"good neighbor" policy	right-to-work law
"tie-in" sale	line-item veto

6.27. Print combination color terms as separate words, but use a hyphen when such color terms are unit modifiers.

bluish green	bluish-green feathers
dark green	iron-gray sink
orange red	silver-gray body

6.28. Do not use a hyphen between independent adjectives preceding a noun.

big gray cat

a fine old southern gentleman

Prefixes, suffixes, and combining forms

6.29. Print solid combining forms and prefixes, except as indicated elsewhere.

afterbirth
Anglomania
antedate
antislavery
biweekly
bylaw
circumnavigation
cisalpine
cooperate
contraposition
countercase
deenergize
demitasse
excommunicate
extracurricular
foretell
heroicomic
hypersensitive
hypoacid
inbound

infrared
interview
intraspinal
introvert
isometric
macroanalysis
mesothorax
metagenesis
microphone
misstate
monogram
multicolor
neophyte
nonneutral
offset
outbake
overactive
pancosmic
paracentric
particoated

peripatetic
planoconvex
polynodal
postscript
preexist
proconsul
pseudoscholastic
reenact
retrospect
semiofficial
stepfather
subsecretary
supermarket
thermocouple
transonic
transship
tricolor
ultraviolet
unnecessary
underflow

6.30. Print solid combining forms and suffixes, except as indicated elsewhere.

portable
coverage
operate
plebiscite
twentyfold
spoonful
kilogram

geography
manhood
selfish
pumpkin
meatless
outlet
wavelike

procurement
innermost
partnership
lonesome
homestead
northward
clockwise

6.31. Print solid words ending in *like*, but use a hyphen to avoid tripling a consonant or when the first element is a proper name.

lifelike
lilylike

girllike
bell-like

Scotland-like
MacArthur-like

6.32. Use a hyphen or hyphens to prevent mispronunciation, to ensure a definite accent on each element of the compound, or to avoid ambiguity.

anti-hog-cholera serum
co-occurrence
co-op
mid-decade
multi-ply (several plies)
non-civil-service position
non-tumor-bearing tissue
pre-midcourse review
pre-position (before)
pro-choice
pro-life

re-cover (cover again)
re-creation (create again)
re-lay (lay again)
re-sorting (sort again)
re-treat (treat again)
un-ionized
un-uniformity

but
rereferred
rereviewed

6.33. Use a hyphen to join duplicated prefixes.

re-redirect

sub-subcommittee

super-superlative

6.34. Print with a hyphen the prefixes *ex*, *self*, and *quasi*.

ex-governor

ex-serviceman

ex-son-in-law

ex-vice-president

self-control

self-educated

quasi-academic

quasi-argument

quasi-corporation

quasi-young

but

selfhood

selfsame

6.35. Unless usage demands otherwise, use a hyphen to join a prefix or combining form to a capitalized word. (The hyphen is retained in words of this class set in caps.)

anti-American

pro-British

un-American

non-Government

neo-Nazi

post-World War II

or post-Second World War

non-Federal

but

nongovernmental

overanglicize

transatlantic

Numerical compounds

6.36. Print a hyphen between the elements of compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine and in adjective compounds with a numerical first element.

twenty-one

twenty-first

6-footer

6-foot-11-inch man

24-inch ruler

3-week vacation

8-hour day

10-minute delay

20th-century progress

3-to-1 ratio

5-to-4 vote

.22-caliber cartridge

2-cent-per-pound tax

four-in-hand tie

three-and-twenty

two-sided question

multimillion-dollar fund

10-dollar-per-car tax

thirty- (30-) day period

but

one hundred and twenty-one

100-odd

foursome

threescore

foursquare

\$20 million airfield

second grade children

6.37. Print without a hyphen a modifier consisting of a possessive noun preceded by a numeral. (See also rule 8.14.)

1 month's layoff

1 week's pay

2 hours' work

3 weeks' vacation

1 minute's delay

but a 1-minute delay

6.38. Print a hyphen between the elements of a fraction, but omit it between the numerator and the denominator when the hyphen appears in either or in both.

one-thousandth

two-thirds

two one-thousandths

twenty-three thirtieths

twenty-one thirty-seconds

three-fourths of an inch

6.39. A unit modifier following and reading back to the word or words modified takes a hyphen and is printed in the singular.

motor, alternating-current, 3-phase, 60-cycle, 115-volt
 glass jars: 5-gallon, 2-gallon, 1-quart
 belts: 2-inch, 1¼-inch, ½-inch, ¼-inch

Civil and military titles

6.40. Do not hyphenate a civil or military title denoting a single office, but print a double title with a hyphen.

ambassador at large	secretary general
assistant attorney general	secretary-treasurer
commander in chief	treasurer-manager
comptroller general	under secretary
Congressman at Large	<i>but</i> under-secretaryship
major general	vice president
sergeant at arms	<i>but</i> vice-presidency
notary public	

6.41. The adjectives *elect* and *designate*, as the last element of a title, require a hyphen.

President-elect (Federal)	ambassador-designate
Vice-President-elect (Federal)	minister-designate
Secretary of Housing and Urban Development-designate	

Scientific and technical terms

6.42. Do not print a hyphen in scientific terms (names of chemicals, diseases, animals, insects, plants) used as unit modifiers if no hyphen appears in their original form.

carbon monoxide poisoning	whooping cough remedy
guinea pig raising	
hog cholera serum	<i>but</i>
methyl bromide solution	Russian-olive plantings
stem rust control	Douglas-fir tree
equivalent uranium content	

6.43. Chemical elements used in combination with figures use a hyphen, except with superior figures.

Freon-12	uranium-235	Sr ⁹⁰
polonium-210	U ²³⁵	₉₂ U ²³⁴

6.44. Note use of hyphens and closeup punctuation in chemical formulas.

9-nitroanthra(1,9,4,10)bis(1)oxathiazone-2,7-bisdioxide
 Cr-Ni-Mo
 2,4-D

6.45. Print a hyphen between the elements of technical or contrived compound units of measurement.

candela-hour	staff-hour
crop-year	work-year
horsepower-hour	
light-year	<i>but</i> kilowatthour
passenger-mile	

Improvised compounds

6.46. Print with a hyphen the elements of an improvised compound.

blue-pencil (v.)	stick-in-the-mud (n.)
18-year-old (n., u.m.)	let-George-do-it attitude
know-it-all (n.)	how-to-be-beautiful course
know-how (n.)	hard-and-fast rule
lick-the-finger-and-test-the-wind economics	penny-wise and pound-foolish policy
make-believe (n., u.m.)	first-come-first-served basis
one-man-one-vote principle	<i>but</i> a basis of first come, first served
roll-on/roll-off ship	
George "Pay-As-You-Go" Miller	

6.47. Use hyphens in a prepositional-phrase compound noun consisting of three or more words.

cat-o'-nine-tails	man-of-war	<i>but</i>
government-in-exile	mother-in-law	coat of arms
grant-in-aid	mother-of-pearl	heir at law
jack-in-the-box	patent-in-fee	next of kin
		officer in charge

6.48. When the corresponding noun form is printed as separate words, the verb form is always hyphenated.

cold-shoulder	blue-pencil	cross-brace
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6.49. Print a hyphen in a compound formed of repetitive or conflicting terms and in a compound naming the same thing under two aspects.

boogie-woogie	murder-suicide	<i>but</i>
comedy-ballet	nitty-gritty	bowwow
dead-alive	pitter-patter	dillydally
devil-devil	razzle-dazzle	hubbub
even-stephen	walkie-talkie	nitwit
farce-melodrama	willy-nilly	riffraff
fiddle-faddle	young-old	
hanky-panky		

6.50. Use a hyphen in a nonliteral compound expression containing an apostrophe in its first element.

asses'-eyes	bull's-eye	crow's-nest
ass's-foot	cat's-paw	

6.51. Use a hyphen to join a single capital letter to a noun or a participle.

H-bomb	C-chip	S-iron	<i>but</i>
I-beam	C-section	T-square	x ray
T-shaped	V-necked	X-ed out	x raying
U-boat			S turns

6.52. Print idiomatic phrases without hyphens.

come by	insofar as	nowadays
inasmuch as	Monday week	

