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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## 6 Minute Vocabulary

### Compound nouns



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*NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript*

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**Alice**

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute Vocabulary with me Alice...

**Finn**

And me, Finn. Today we're looking at compound nouns.

**Alice**

What are you eating, Finn??

**Finn**

Popcorn. I've also got some ice cream – do you want some Alice?

**Alice**

Well, maybe after the show.

**Finn**

[clears throat] Sorry. In today's show, we're looking at compound nouns.

**Alice**

We'll look at what they are, what they mean and how to use them.

**Finn**

There'll be a quiz...

**Alice**

And we'll leave you with a tasty top tip for learning vocabulary.

**Finn**

So, first up: we're going to listen to Bill and his daughter-in-law talking about Bill's computer.

**Alice**

And here's a question to think about while you listen: what's wrong with Bill's laptop?

**Finn**

What's wrong with Bill's laptop? Let's find out.

## **INSERT**

### **Bill**

I'm having problems with this new software.

### **Susan**

Where's Mike? He's good with computers.

### **Bill**

He's buying postcards at the post office, I think.

### **Susan**

Let's have a look then. I think I can fix this.

### **Bill**

Susan, you're my favourite daughter-in-law! But should I buy a new laptop?

### **Susan**

I think you'll have to Bill. This keyboard doesn't work at all.

## **STING**

### **Alice**

So, that's Bill and his daughter-in-law. And we asked you: what's wrong with Bill's laptop?

### **Finn**

And the answer is: the keyboard doesn't work.

### **Alice**

Now, **keyboard** is a key word in today's show because it's an example of a compound noun.

### **Finn**

That's right. In English vocabulary, we often put two or more nouns together to form a new noun, with a meaning that combines the meanings of the two original nouns. We call these words compound nouns.

### **Alice**

For example, **keyboard**. The second part – board – names the thing we are talking about.

### **Finn**

The first part tells us what type of thing it is – it's a board with keys.

**Alice**

Now, we usually write **keyboard** as one word. Same with **laptop, software** and **postcard**. But we write others as two words.

**Finn**

For example, **post office** – it's an office where we post things and we write it as two words.

**Alice**

Unfortunately there aren't really any rules about when to write compound nouns as one word and when to write them as two words – so be sure to use a good dictionary!

**IDENT**

You're listening to [bbclearningenglish.com](http://bbclearningenglish.com).

**Alice**

And we're talking about compound nouns. And if you were listening carefully earlier on you might have noticed a few compound nouns right at the start. **Popcorn** was one of them. We also heard **ice cream** - another compound noun!

**Finn**

And you may also have noticed how these words are pronounced. With compound nouns, the stress usually goes on the first part, like this – **popcorn, ice cream, keyboard**. What's our final example, Alice?

**Alice**

**Daughter-in-law**. This compound noun is made of a noun and a prepositional phrase.

**Finn**

Now, when we write three-word compounds, we usually use hyphens – little dashes - between the words. This shows the three words go together.

**Alice**

And the plural is **daughters-in-law**, not **daughter-in-laws**. We are talking about two daughters – so we add the plural 's' to this word.

**Finn**

Do you have any daughters-in-law, Alice?

**Alice**

No I don't Finn. I'm far too young to have any daughters-in-law. But I do have a sister-in-law, and she's a lovely woman. Let's hear about compound nouns again.

**Finn**

They're fixed expressions formed from two or three words linked together in different ways. There are compounds we write as one word, like **keyboard**, **software**, and **popcorn**.

**Alice**

But we write some of them as two separate words, like **post office** and **ice cream**.

**Finn**

Now it's time for a quiz. I'm going to say a compound noun and I'm also going to say whether we write it as one word, two words or with hyphens. You decide if this is true or false. Ready? Number 1. **Popcorn**. Two words.

**Alice**

False. It's one word.

**Finn**

Number 2. **Ice cream**. One word.

**Alice**

False! It's two words.

**Finn**

And number 3. **Daughters-in-law**. With hyphens.

**Alice**

True!

**Finn**

That's right, it has hyphens. Well done if you got those right.

**Alice**

And that brings us almost to the end of the programme.

**Finn**

But just before we finish, here's today's top tip for learning vocabulary: practise the pronunciation of compound nouns. The stress is on the first word. Try saying 'hot dog' with an equal stress on both words: this means a dog that is hot. Then say it again with the stress on the first word: hot dog is a type of sausage snack.

**Alice**

Great, thank you Finn. That's wonderful. There's more about this at [bbclearningenglish.com](http://bbclearningenglish.com). Join us again for more 6 Minute Vocabulary.

**Both**

Goodbye!

## Vocabulary points to take away

**Compound nouns** are nouns that are made up of a combination of two (or sometimes more) nouns or a combination of a noun and a prepositional phrase. Some examples of these are:

- popcorn
- keyboard
- hot dog
- ice cream
- daughter-in-law
- father-in-law

There are three ways that compound nouns can be written: with the two nouns making up the compound noun placed together **without a space** between them, with the two nouns **separated by a space**, and with the words **connected by hyphens** (a hyphen is this punctuation mark - )

There are no rules for the first two ways of writing compound nouns (with or without a space between the two nouns), so it is a good idea to check in a good dictionary. You can also check whether you can write plural forms of these compound nouns (e.g. **keyboards**)

### Form

Without a space:

- pop + corn = popcorn
- key + board = keyboard
- post + card = postcard

With a space:

- hot + dog = hot dog
- ice + cream = ice cream
- alarm + clock = alarm clock

The third way of writing compounds here is a combination of a **noun** (daughter) and a **prepositional phrase** (-in-law). When we write these the form is:

- daughter + -in-law = daughter-in-law
- father + -in-law = father-in-law

### Pronunciation

We pronounce most compound nouns, especially those made up of two nouns, with the **stress on the first syllable**. This is important as it can change the meaning.

**hot dog** (the same stress on each word) = a dog that is hot

**hot dog** (more stress on the first word) = a snack made from a bread bun and a sausage