
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Vocabulary

Compound adjectives



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

Finn

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute Vocabulary. I'm Finn...

Catherine

And I'm Catherine. In today's programme we're looking at compound adjectives, like in a 22-hour journey.

Finn

We'll look at what compound adjectives are...

Catherine

... we'll see how to use them...

Finn

There'll be a punctuation tip and a quiz...

Catherine

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

Finn

But first, let's hear from Rob. Rob's a racing driver and he's being interviewed after a race.

Catherine

And here's a question to think about while you listen: how fast was Rob's lap time?

Finn

Let's find out.

INSERT

Interviewer

Rob, congratulations on your latest win. What did that last victory mean to you?

Rob

Honestly, I expected to win. I mean, you don't come second in a high-quality vehicle like mine.

Interviewer

That's true – it's an impressive motor – but what you did was amazing: your fastest lap time was truly incredible.

Rob

Well, you're right. You don't see a seventy-second lap every day.

Interviewer

Thanks for your time Rob. Well, this year the drivers are hoping to complete the four-kilometre course in an even faster time...

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Finn

So, Rob the racing driver did a seventy-second lap.

Catherine

Well done to you if you got that right.

Finn

And that's our first example of a compound adjective. It's made with a number, like **seventy**, and a noun, like **second**. **Seventy-second**. We put seventy-second in front of another noun, like **lap**, making a compound adjective which describes a noun. **A seventy-second lap**.

Catherine

Let's hear another example, again starting with a number, but this time the noun describes length instead of time.

INSERT

Interviewer

Well, this year the drivers are hoping to complete the **four-kilometre** course in an even faster time.

Finn

So the number **four**, with the noun **kilometre**, go together to make an adjective: **four-kilometre**. And take note: there's no **s** at the end of **kilometre**.

Catherine

That's right: there's no **s** because the word **kilometre** functions as an adjective here – and we can't make adjectives plural. The adjective **four-kilometre** describes the noun **course**. **A four-kilometre course**.

Finn

That's right. Some more examples with length are...

Catherine

A 26-mile race; a six-foot man.

Finn

Now for a punctuation note. When you write a number-noun compound adjective, you need to join the two parts together with a hyphen – a little horizontal line between the two words.

Catherine

That's right. So you write a **'seventy hyphen second' lap**. A **'six hyphen foot' man**.

IDENT

You're listening to BBC Learning English.

Finn

And we're talking about compound adjectives. Here's Rob again. Listen out for another type of compound adjective.

INSERT

Rob

Honestly, I expected to win. I mean, you don't come second in a high-quality vehicle like mine.

Catherine

Did you get that? It was **high-quality**. A **high-quality vehicle**.

Finn

So, as well as using numbers, we can also make compound adjectives with the words **high** or **low** plus a noun.

Catherine

High plus **quality** equals **high-quality**. Like **high-quality vehicle**.

Finn

Low plus **cost** equals **low-cost**. Like **low-cost airline**. How do you feel about low-cost airlines, Catherine?

Catherine

Well, after my last experience, never again... Some more examples are, Finn?

Finn

High-speed. A **high-speed motorbike**.

Catherine

And **low-fat**. A **low-fat yoghurt**. And if you're writing, don't forget – join the 2 parts together with a hyphen.

Finn

And now it's quiz time. Complete these sentences. Catherine will tell you the answers. Ready? Number one. In a balanced diet, it's important to eat ... a) high-quality carbohydrates or b) high-qualities carbohydrates.

Catherine

It's a) **high-quality carbohydrates**.

Finn

Well done if you got that. Number two. The flight from London to New York is ... a) a nines-hour trip or b) a nine-hour trip.

Catherine

The answer's b) **a nine-hour trip**.

Finn

Number three. Every morning, Catherine goes for... a) a six-mile run or b) a six-miles run.

Catherine

The answer's a) **a six-mile run**. But I don't.

Finn

You don't really, do you? In any case, well done if you got those right at home. And we're almost at the end of the show. But before we go, here's today's top tip for learning vocabulary, which is, Catherine...

Catherine

If you use social media, join an English learning group. When you learn a new word, try to include it in at least 3 of your posts. That will help you remember the word.

Finn

And there's more about this at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again for more 6 Minute Vocabulary.

Both

Bye!

Vocabulary points to take away

Compound adjectives can be formed in different ways. One of these is a combination of a number and a noun. Compound adjectives like this are usually used to describe the duration of an activity – the amount of time it takes – or a distance or length. For example:

*A **seventy-second** lap*

*A **six-foot** man*

The number comes first and then the noun. For compound adjectives describing amount of time, this will be a word like *second, minute, hour* or *day*. For distance or length, it will be a word like *foot, metre, kilometre* or *mile*.

Another way to form compound adjectives is by using the words *high* or *low* followed by a noun.

*A **high-speed** motorbike*

*A **low-fat** yoghurt*

The two words that make up each of these compound adjectives are joined together with a hyphen, a small horizontal line between the words with no spaces.

Here are some more examples of these compound adjectives:

Compound adjectives with numbers	a 22-hour journey a 70-second lap a four-kilometre course a six-foot man a nine-hour trip a six-mile run
Compound adjectives with high and low	a low-cost airline low-fat yoghurt a high-quality vehicle a high-speed motorbike high-quality carbohydrates