

6. Compounding Rules

(See also Chapter 7 “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 also separates the component words; it 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. Although it is often the case that hyphenated compound words eventually lose their hyphen, many of them start out unhyphenated.
- 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

blood pressure

book value

census taker

day laborer

eye opener

fellow citizen

living costs

palm oil

patent right

real estate

rock candy

training ship

violin teacher

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

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

coldbloodedness	outlawry	Y-shaped
footnoting	praiseworthiness	
ill-advisedly	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	semi-independent	shell-like
deemphasis	brass-smith	hull-less
preexisting	Inverness-shire	<i>but</i>
anti-inflation	thimble-eye	co-occupant
micro-organism	ultra-atomic	cross section

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	footnote
bathroom	dressmaker	locksmith
bookseller	fishmonger	workman

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

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

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

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

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

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

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	oneself	yourself
himself	ourselves	yourselves
itself	themselves	
myself	thysself	

- 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	Federal-State-local cooperation
Baltimore-Washington road	German-English descent
collective-bargaining talks	guided-missile program
contested-election case	hearing-impaired class
contract-bar rule	high-speed line
cost-of-living increase	large-scale project
drought-stricken area	law-abiding citizen
English-speaking nation	long-term loan
fire-tested material	line-item veto

long-term-payment loan	U.S.-owned property; U.S.-flagship
low-cost housing	1-inch diameter; 2-inch-diameter
lump-sum payment	pipe
most-favored-nation clause	a 4-percent increase, the 10-percent
multiple-purpose uses	rise
no-par-value stock	
one-on-one situation	<i>but</i>
part-time personnel	4 percent citric acid
rust-resistant covering	4 percent interest. (Note the absence
service-connected disability	of an article: <i>a</i> , <i>an</i> , or <i>the</i> . The
state-of-the-art technology	word <i>of</i> is understood here.)
supply-side economics	
tool-and-die maker	
up-or-down vote	

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

- 6.17.** Print without a hyphen a compound predicate (either adjective or noun) whose second element 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.

- 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	Seventh-day Adventists
North Carolina roads	<i>but</i>
a Mexican-American	Minneapolis-St. Paul region
South American trade	North American-South American
Spanish-American pride	sphere
Winston-Salem festival	French-English descent
African-American program	Washington-Wilkes-Barre route
Anglo-Saxon period	or Washington/Wilkes-Barre
Franco-Prussian War	route

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

elderly clothesman	well-trained schoolteacher
old-clothes man	elementary school teacher
competent shoemaker	preschool children (kindergarten)
wooden-shoe maker	pre-school children (before school)
field canning factory	rezoned wastesite
tomato-canning factory	hazardous-waste site
brave servicemen	
service men and women	<i>but</i>
light blue hat (weight)	common stockholder
light-blue hat (color)	stock ownership
average taxpayer	small businessman
income-tax payer	working men and women
American flagship (military)	steam powerplant site
American-flagship	meat packinghouse owner

6.23. Where two or more hyphenated compounds have a common basic element but 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.

<i>afterbirth</i>	<i>infrared</i>	<i>peripatetic</i>
<i>Anglomania</i>	<i>interview</i>	<i>planoconvex</i>
<i>antedate</i>	<i>intraspinal</i>	<i>polynodal</i>
<i>antislavery</i>	<i>introvert</i>	<i>postscript</i>
<i>biweekly</i>	<i>isometric</i>	<i>preexist</i>
<i>bylaw</i>	<i>macroanalysis</i>	<i>proconsul</i>
<i>circumnavigation</i>	<i>mesothorax</i>	<i>pseudoscholastic</i>
<i>cisalpine</i>	<i>metagenesis</i>	<i>reenact</i>
<i>cooperate</i>	<i>microphone</i>	<i>retrospect</i>
<i>contraposition</i>	<i>misstate</i>	<i>semiofficial</i>
<i>countercase</i>	<i>monogram</i>	<i>stepfather</i>
<i>deenergize</i>	<i>multicolor</i>	<i>subsecretary</i>
<i>demitasse</i>	<i>neophyte</i>	<i>supermarket</i>
<i>excommunicate</i>	<i>nonneutral</i>	<i>thermocouple</i>
<i>extracurricular</i>	<i>offset</i>	<i>transonic</i>
<i>foretell</i>	<i>outbake</i>	<i>transship</i>
<i>heroicomic</i>	<i>overactive</i>	<i>tricolor</i>
<i>hypersensitive</i>	<i>pancosmic</i>	<i>ultraviolet</i>
<i>hypocid</i>	<i>paracentric</i>	<i>unnecessary</i>
<i>inbound</i>	<i>particoated</i>	<i>underflow</i>

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

<i>portable</i>	<i>geography</i>	<i>procurement</i>
<i>coverage</i>	<i>manhood</i>	<i>innermost</i>
<i>operate</i>	<i>selfish</i>	<i>partnership</i>
<i>plebiscite</i>	<i>pumpkin</i>	<i>lonesome</i>
<i>twentyfold</i>	<i>meatless</i>	<i>homestead</i>
<i>spoonful</i>	<i>outlet</i>	<i>northward</i>
<i>kilogram</i>	<i>wavelike</i>	<i>clockwise</i>

- 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.

<i>lifelike</i>	<i>girllike</i>	Scotland-like
<i>lilylike</i>	bell-like	McArtor-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	re-cover (cover again)
co-occurrence	re-creation (create again)
co-op	re-lay (lay again)
mid-decade	re-sorting (sort again)
multi-ply (several plies)	re-treat (treat again)
non-civil-service position	un-ionized
non-tumor-bearing tissue	un-uniformity
pre-midcourse review	
pre-position (before)	<i>but</i>
pro-choice	rereferred
pro-life	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	quasi-argument
ex-serviceman	quasi-corporation
ex-son-in-law	quasi-young
ex-vice-president	
self-control	<i>but</i>
self-educated	selfhood
quasi-academic	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	non-Federal
pro-British	
un-American	<i>but</i>
non-Government	nongovernmental
neo-Nazi	overanglicize
post-World War II	transatlantic
<i>or</i> post-Second World War	

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	three-and-twenty
twenty-first	two-sided question
6-footer	multimillion-dollar fund
6-foot-11-inch man	10-dollar-per-car tax
24-inch ruler	thirty- (30-) day period
3-week vacation	
8-hour day	<i>but</i>
10-minute delay	one hundred twenty-one
20th-century progress	100-odd
3-to-1 ratio	foursome
5-to-4 vote	threescore
.22-caliber cartridge	foursquare
2-cent-per-pound tax	\$20 million airfield
four-in-hand tie	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	3 weeks' vacation
1 week's pay	1 minute's delay
2 hours' work	<i>but</i> 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	twenty-three thirtieths
two-thirds	twenty-one thirty-seconds
two one-thousandths	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-treasurer
assistant attorney general	sergeant at arms
commander in chief	treasurer-manager
comptroller general	under secretary
Congressman at Large	<i>but</i> under-secretaryship
major general	vice president
notary public	<i>but</i> vice-presidency
secretary general	

- 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	<i>but</i>
hog cholera serum	Russian-olive plantings
methyl bromide solution	Douglas-fir tree
stem rust control	
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	light-year	work-year
crop-year	passenger-mile	<i>but</i> kilowatthour
horsepower-hour	staff-hour	

Improvised compounds

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

blue-pencil (v.)	George "Pay-As-You-Go" Miller
18-year-old (n., u.m.)	stick-in-the-mud (n.)
know-it-all (n.)	let-George-do-it attitude
know-how (n.)	how-to-be-beautiful course
lick-the-finger-and-test-the-wind	hard-and-fast rule
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	

- 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	heir at law
grant-in-aid	mother-of-pearl	next of kin
jack-in-the-box	patent-in-fee	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
---------------	-------------	-------------

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

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

- 6.52.** Print idiomatic phrases without hyphens.

come by	insofar as	nowadays
inasmuch as	Monday week	