

personal english



Grammar Tidbit #20 Compound Nouns

There are three kinds of compound nouns: **open** (written as separate words), **hyphenated** (written with one or more hyphens), and **closed** (written as single words). On account of the modern preference towards avoiding hyphenating words, newly coined compounds tend to develop closed forms. Compound nouns are formed by combining different parts of speech.



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noun + noun
wheeler-dealer
watermelon
sailboat

noun + adjective
attorney general
battle royal
poet laureate

word + preposition + word
free-for-all
mother-in-law
word-of-mouth

adjective + noun
high school
poor loser
redhead

noun + verb
airlift
haircut
snowfall

As for their pluralization, most compound nouns form their plurals like any other noun, that is, by **adding -s to the end of the word**: *wheeler-dealers*, *washing machines*, *onlookers*. **A few do not place the -s at the end, but on the most significant word**: *mothers-in-law*, for instance. However, since there are no hard and fast rules regarding the writing of compound nouns, it is best to consult a dictionary whenever in doubt.