

## Compound nouns and noun phrases

A

In a compound consisting of **noun + noun**, often the second noun gives the general class of things to which the compound belongs and the first noun indicates the type within this class. The first noun usually has a singular form:

Reminder → H4- H12

- an address book** (= a book for addresses; *not* an addresses book)

However, there are a number of exceptions. These include –

☆ when the first noun only has a plural form:

- a savings account**    **a customs officer**    **a clothes shop** (compare **a shoe shop**)  
**the arms trade** (arms = weapons)    **a glasses case** (glasses = spectacles. Compare 'a glass case' = a case made of glass)    **an arts festival** (arts = music, drama, film, dance, painting, etc. Compare 'an art festival'; art = painting, drawing and sculpture)

☆ when we refer to an institution (an industry, department, etc.), such as

- the building materials industry**    **the publications department**  
which deals with more than one kind of item or activity (different types of building material, different forms of publication).

Note that to make a compound noun plural we usually make the second noun plural:

- coal mine(s)**    **office-worker(s)**    **tea leaf / leaves**

B

Sometimes a **noun + noun** is not appropriate and instead we use **noun + -'s + noun** (possessive form) or **noun + preposition + noun**. In general, we prefer **noun + -'s + noun** –

☆ when the first noun is the user (a person or animal) of the item in the second noun:

- a baby's bedroom**    **a lion's den**    **a women's clinic**    **a girls' school**    **birds' nests**

☆ when the item in the second noun is produced by the thing (often an animal) in the first:

- goat's cheese**    **duck's eggs**    **cow's milk** (but note **lamb chops** and **chicken drumsticks**)

☆ when we talk about parts of people or animals; but we usually use **noun + noun** to talk about parts of things. Compare:

- a woman's face**    **a boy's arm**    *but*    **a pen top**    **a computer keyboard**

We prefer **noun + preposition + noun** –

☆ when we talk about some kind of container together with its contents. Compare:

- a cup of tea** (= a cup with tea in it)    *and*    **a tea cup** (= a cup for drinking tea from)

☆ when the combination of nouns does not refer to a well-known class of items. Compare:

- income tax** (a recognised class of tax)    *and*    **a tax on children's clothes** (*rather than* 'a children's clothes tax')

C

Some compound nouns are made up of verbs and prepositions or adverbs, and may be related to a two- or three-word verb (see Unit 94). Compare:

- Mansen **broke out** of the prison by dressing as a woman. (= escaped) *and*
- There was a major **break-out** from the prison last night. (= prisoners escaped)

Countable compound nouns like this have a plural form ending in **-s**:

- read-out(s)**    **push-up(s)**    **intake(s)**    **outcome(s)**

However, there are exceptions. For example:

- looker(s)-on** (*or onlooker[s]*)    **runner(s)-up**    **passer(s)-by**    **hanger(s)-on**

D

We can form other kinds of hyphenated phrases that are placed before nouns to say more precisely what the noun refers to:

- a **state-of-the-art** (= very modern) tablet PC    **up-to-date** information

## Exercises

43.1 If necessary, correct the italicised words. **A & B**

- 1 Ali worked for a long time in (a) *the parks department*, but a few years ago he retrained, and now he's (b) *a computers programmer*. Of course, what he really wants to be is (c) *a films star!*
- 2 I was waiting at (a) *the bus stop* this morning when a cyclist on her way to the (b) *girl school* up the road got knocked off her bike. Someone got out of a car without looking and (c) *the car's door* hit her. She was very lucky not to be badly hurt, although she did have (d) *a head cut*.
- 3 I shouldn't be long at (a) *the corner shop*. I've just got three things on my (b) *shopping list* – (c) *a milk bottle*, (d) *a biscuit packet*, and (e) *some toothpaste*. I'll also look for (f) *some goat's cheese*, but I don't think they'll have any.
- 4 The tracks on his latest CD range from (a) *love songs* to (b) *pollution songs*.
- 5 Marta hated going into her grandfather's old (a) *tools shed*. It was full of (b) *spider webs*.
- 6 When Jake was cleaning his (a) *armschair*, he found a lot of things that had slipped down the back. There was an old (b) *pen top*, a piece from (c) *the 500-pieces jigsaw puzzle* that his daughter had been doing, and his (d) *glass case* with his sunglasses inside.

43.2 Underline the two-word verbs in sentences 1–4, then complete sentences 5–8 with the corresponding compound nouns. **C**

- 1 Nathan tried to cover up the fact that he had gambled and lost most of his money.
- 2 It is reported that cholera has broken out in the refugee camp.
- 3 I'm flying to Sydney, but I'm stopping over in Singapore for a few days on the way.
- 4 On the first Friday of each month, a few of us get together and go ten-pin bowling.
- 5 The minister was taken ill in Iceland during a short \_\_\_\_\_ on his way back to Canada.
- 6 We didn't have a big party for Jo's 50th birthday, just a family \_\_\_\_\_.
- 7 Allegations of a \_\_\_\_\_ of a major leak of radioactive waste from the nuclear power plant have been strongly denied by the Energy Ministry.
- 8 Only two years ago there was a serious \_\_\_\_\_ of malaria in the town.

43.3 Match the halves of these phrases, then use them to complete the sentences below. The meaning of the correct phrase is given in brackets. **D**

~~day-to-~~    ~~down-to-~~    larger-than-    man / woman-in-the-  
once-in-a-    step-by-    middle-of-the-    round-the

clock    ~~day~~    earth    life    lifetime    road    step    street

- 1 Although the Managing Director of Transcom was involved in major decisions, she left the day-to-day running of the company to her staff. (*routine*)
- 2 The party will never regain power unless it can persuade \_\_\_\_\_ voters that it has rid itself of corruption. (*not politically extreme*)
- 3 Since the attempt to assassinate him last year, the Defence Minister has been given \_\_\_\_\_ protection by the police. (*all day and all night*)
- 4 The bookcase came with simple, \_\_\_\_\_ instructions on how to assemble it. (*progressing from one stage to the next*)
- 5 When the comet passes close to Earth next week, scientists will have a \_\_\_\_\_ opportunity to study its effects on our atmosphere. (*very rare*)
- 6 Eleni has a refreshing, \_\_\_\_\_ approach to management. She's much less concerned with theory than with getting things done in the most efficient way possible. (*practical*)
- 7 The \_\_\_\_\_ isn't interested in the finer points of the government's tax policy. They just want to know if they are going to take home more or less pay. (*ordinary person*)
- 8 Her father was a \_\_\_\_\_ character who was well known throughout the village for his eccentric way of dressing and outspoken views. (*more exaggerated than usual*)

## A / an and one

A

We use **a** before nouns and noun phrases that begin with a consonant sound. If the noun or noun phrase starts with a vowel *letter* but begins with a consonant *sound*, we also use **a**:

**a** university (/ə ju:n .../)    **a** European (/ə jʊər .../)    **a** one-parent family (/ə wʌn .../)

We use **an** before words that begin with a vowel sound, including a silent letter 'h':

**an** orange    **an** Italian    **an** umbrella    **an** hour    **an** honour

and abbreviations said as individual letters that begin with A, E, F, H, I, L, M, N, O, R, S or X:

**an** MP (/ən em pi:z/)    **an** FBI agent (/ən ef bi: ai .../)    **an** IOU (/ən ai əʊ ju: /)

But compare abbreviations said as words:

**a** NATO general (/ə neɪtəʊ ... /)    **a** FIFA official (/ə fi:fə ... /)    but **an** OPEC meeting (/ən əʊpek ... /)

Note that we say:

**a** history (book)    but **an** (or **a**) historical (novel)

B

We use **a / an** (not **one**) to talk about a particular but unspecified person, thing or event:

- I really need **a** cup of coffee.
- You never see **a** police officer in this part of town, do you?

We also use **a / an**, not **one**, in number and quantity expressions such as:

- three times **a** year    half **an** hour    a quarter of **an** hour    a day or so (= 'about a day')
- 50 cents **a** (= each) litre (note we can also say '50 cents for one litre')
- a** week or two (= between one and two weeks; note we can also say 'one or two weeks')
- a** few    **a** little    **a** huge number of ...

We use **a** rather than **one** in the pattern **a ... of ...** with possessives, as in:

- She's **a** colleague **of** mine.
- That's **a** friend **of** Gabriel's.

C

Before a singular countable noun **one** and **a / an** both refer to one thing:

- We'll be in Australia for **one** year. (or ... **a** year.)
- Wait here for **one** minute, and I'll be with you. (or ... **a** minute ...)

Using **one** gives a little more emphasis to the length of time, quantity, amount, etc.:

- He weighs **one** hundred and twenty kilos! Would you believe it! (using **one** emphasises the weight more than using **a**)

However, we use **one** rather than **a / an** if we want to emphasise that we are talking about *only* one thing or person rather than two or more:

- Do you want **one** sandwich or two?
- Are you staying only **one** night?
- I just took **one** look at her and she started crying.

We use **one**, not **a / an**, in the pattern **one ... other / another**:

- Close **one** eye, and then the **other**.
- Bees carry pollen from **one** plant to **another**.

We also use **one** in phrases such as **one day**, **one evening**, **one spring**, etc. to mean a particular, but unspecified, day, evening, spring, etc.:

- Hope to see you again **one day**.
- One evening**, while he was working late at the office ...



## Exercises

## 44.1 Write a or an in the spaces. A

- |                           |                            |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 ..... unpaid bill       | 8 ..... U-turn             |
| 2 ..... DIY shop          | 9 ..... heirloom           |
| 3 ..... MP3 player        | 10 ..... NASA space launch |
| 4 ..... Euro              | 11 ..... UN decision       |
| 5 ..... MiG fighter plane | 12 ..... SOS message       |
| 6 ..... Olympic medal     | 13 ..... F grade           |
| 7 ..... AGM               | 14 ..... hero              |

## 44.2 If necessary, correct a / an or one in these sentences, or write ✓. In which sentences are a / an and one both possible? B &amp; C

- I usually go to the gym four times one week.
- There's more than one way to solve the problem.
- I phoned the council to complain, but just got passed on from a person to another.
- The rate of pay is really good here. You can earn over £20 one hour.
- Maybe we could go skiing one winter.
- The apples are 90 cents one kilo.
- Are you hungry? Would you like one piece of cake?
- The rules say that there is only one vote per member.
- You can get seven hours of recording on one disc.
- a: What would Moritz like for his birthday?  
b: Why don't you ask Leah? She's one good friend of his and will have some ideas.
- There's one pen on the floor. Is it yours?
- The library books are due back in one month.
- Do you want some of my chips? There are too many here for a person.
- I'm going to London for one day or two.
- Either I'll work late tonight or I'll come in early tomorrow, but the report's got to be finished by lunchtime a way or another.
- It will take more than one morning to finish the decorating.

## 44.3 Which is more appropriate, a / an or one? If both a / an and one are possible, write them both. B &amp; C

- If you wait ..... second I'll get my coat and come too.
- I want to see the river ..... last time before I leave.
- The President is visiting the city ..... day in November.
- It was announced that the plane would be approximately ..... hour late.
- I could hear the sound of ..... helicopter in the distance.
- I'd just like to say ..... thing before I go.
- Misaki's baby is ..... year old already.
- Dinner should be ready in ..... hour or so.
- Hugo came over ..... evening last week.
- I've painted ..... wall already and I'll do the other tomorrow.
- I'd like to make ..... point here, Carlos, if I may.
- ..... large number of people had gathered in the square.



## There is, there was, etc.

A

When we introduce a new person or thing – to say that this person or thing exists, happens, or is found in a particular place – we can use a sentence beginning **There + be**:

- There was** a loud bang from upstairs. (*not* A loud bang was from upstairs.)
- There's** nothing to eat. (*not* Nothing is to eat.)

We invert this pattern in questions to ask about the existence etc. of people and things:

- Is there** anybody in here?

We can also use **there** with auxiliary and modal verbs with **be** (e.g. **has been, can be**):

- There must be** some way of contacting her.

with **verb + to be** (e.g. **used to be, is supposed to be, tends to be, appears to be, seems to be**):

- There appears to be** a major disagreement between the two presidents.

and some other verbs that indicate existence (e.g. **arise, emerge, exist, remain**):

- During the 1990s **there arose** a demand for organic food.

Because we use **there** in this way to *introduce* topics, the noun after **there + be** often has an indefinite or non-specific meaning. So we often use **a / an, zero article, any(one)** (+ noun), or **some(thing), no(body)**, etc. rather than **the, this, my, your** (+ noun), or a **name**, which give the noun a more definite or specific meaning. Compare:

- There's** *nobody* here.
- There was** *something* strange about her. *and*
- The cat* was in the kitchen. (*more usual than* There was the cat in the kitchen.; *but compare* **There was** a cat in the kitchen.)
- Jan* is waiting for me outside. (*more usual than* There is Jan waiting for me outside.)

When we use **there + be + the**, this is often done to show a change of topic. Choosing **the, that**, etc. + **noun** indicates that we think the topic is already known to the listener or reader:

- ... And then **there is the** question of who is going to pay.

B

The verb **be** should agree with the noun that comes after it:

- There is** a very good *reason* for my decision.
- There were** too many *people* trying to get into the football stadium.

However, in informal speech we sometimes use **there's** before a plural noun:

- 'Anything to eat?' 'Well, **there's** *some apples* on the table.'

If the noun phrase consists of two or more nouns in a list, we use a singular verb if the first noun is singular or uncountable, and a plural verb if the first noun is plural:

- When I opened the fridge **there was** only a *bottle of milk*, some eggs, and butter.
- When I opened the fridge **there were** only *some eggs*, a bottle of milk, and butter.

C

**There + be** is also used with nouns followed by a **that-, wh-, to-infinitive** or **-ing** clause:

- Is there** a *chance* (*that*) Kim could arrive this afternoon?
- There is** no *reason* (*why*) I can't see you tomorrow.
- There is** a *small stream* (*which / that*) runs at the bottom of the garden.
- There was** an *attempt* to *resolve* the dispute at the factory.
- There was** a *taxi* *waiting* outside the hotel.

We don't usually leave out a relative pronoun when it is the *subject* of the following finite verb, but can leave it out when it is the *object* (see Unit 53).

D

In formal English we can use a clause with **there being** to introduce a reason for something:

- There being** no evidence against him, he was released. (= Because there was no evidence).
- There being** no reports of adverse reactions, the drug is to be sold more widely.

## Exercises

**95.1** Rewrite these sentences using **there only** if the answer is likely. Consider why some answers are not likely. **A**

- 1 Coffee was spilt on the table. *There was coffee spilt on the table.*
- 2 Your dinner is in the oven. *(A sentence with 'There ...' is unlikely.)*
- 3 Is something bothering you?
- 4 A barrier was across the road.
- 5 The doctor is free to see you now.
- 6 The problem of what to do with nuclear waste remains.
- 7 My son is at university.
- 8 A video is supposed to be on the website, but it doesn't work.
- 9 No petrol was available anywhere in the city.
- 10 Can anyone help me?
- 11 You can follow some general rules.
- 12 An art gallery used to be around here.

**95.2** The sentences below are all taken from written English. Which is correct or more likely in the space – **is** or **are**? **A**

- 1 There ..... two pubs and a church on the village green.
- 2 There ..... other possible locations for the car park, but the central one is preferred.
- 3 There ..... no direct rail link between the cities.
- 4 There ..... further rain and strong winds forecast for the next three days.
- 5 There ..... chocolate bars, crisps, and a bottle of cola in the bag if you get hungry.
- 6 There ..... substantial evidence to suggest that the Robinsons lied to the police.
- 7 There ..... no easy answers to the problem of climate change.
- 8 There ..... a shower, television, and two single beds in each room.

**95.3** Join the matching sentence halves using an appropriate relative pronoun (**that**, **which**, or **who**). Write the relative pronoun in brackets if it can be left out. **C & Unit 53**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 There were a lot of people at the party        | a an election will be held next month.    |
| 2 There's a cake in the kitchen                  | b are harder-working than Kristin.        |
| 3 There was never any doubt                      | c I've made especially for your birthday. |
| 4 There have been suggestions                    | d I could do to prevent him falling.      |
| 5 There aren't many people alive today           | e <del>hadn't been invited.</del>         |
| 6 There are still some old houses in the village | f haven't watched TV.                     |
| 7 There was absolutely nothing                   | g don't have electricity.                 |
| 8 There are few people in the company            | h Bruno would get the job.                |

1 + e *There were a lot of people at the party who / that hadn't been invited.*

**95.4** Write new sentences with similar meanings beginning **There being ...** **D**

- 1 As there was no food in the house, they went to a local restaurant.  
*There being no food in the house, they went to a local restaurant.*
- 2 There was no further business, so the meeting closed at 12:30.  
.....
- 3 The patients were sent home because there was no doctor available.  
.....
- 4 Because the facilities were inadequate at the hotel, the conference was relocated to a nearby university.  
.....

It ... 1

A

We can use an introductory **it** at the beginning of a sentence –

☆ to place long or grammatically complex sentence elements at the end (the usual place for them in English). Compare:

- To drive without a licence is illegal. and*
- It is illegal** to drive without a licence.

☆ to focus attention on something by putting it at the end (the usual place for new or important information in English). Compare:

- That she wasn't hurt is a miracle. and*
- It's a miracle** that she wasn't hurt.

Introductory **it** is commonly used when the subject is a **to-infinitive** or **that-clause** (as in the examples above), and also when the subject is a **wh-** or **-ing clause** (see also Unit 25):

- It is clear** why Diego decided to leave Spain.
- It is useless** asking Sophie to help.

B

We often use introductory **it** with **be + adjective / noun** (as in the examples above), but other patterns with an introductory **it** are possible. Here are some common examples–

☆ **it + verb + to-infinitive**

- 'I've got a terrible headache.' **It helps to lie down.**
- If you want someone to help you, **it doesn't do to annoy** them just before you ask. ('[not] do' = (not) advisable, acceptable or enough)

Also: **hurt, pay** (= give an advantage or benefit)

☆ **it + verb + object + to-infinitive**

- It shocked him to see** her looking so ill.
- It means a lot to get** a place at university.

Also: **amaze, annoy, astonish, concern, cost, frighten, hurt, scare, surprise, upset, worry** (most are to do with feelings)

After these verbs the object usually refers to a person.

We can also use **it + take + object + to-infinitive** when we say what is or was needed in a particular activity; for example, time, resources or characteristics needed. Compare:

- It takes a lot of effort to play** the flute. and
- To play the flute takes a lot of effort.

☆ **it + verb + that-clause**

- It seems that** she has lost her memory.
- It emerged that** he already had a criminal record.

Also: **appear, come about, follow, happen, transpire**

☆ **it + verb + object + that-clause**

- It suddenly hit me that** Sara wanted to borrow money. (*less likely is* That Sara wanted to borrow money suddenly hit me.)

Also: **dawn on, not bother, strike** (= occur to), **turn out**, and the highlighted verbs above

The object in this pattern usually refers to a person.

C

We don't usually use an **it ...** pattern as an alternative to a **noun** as subject:

- Their success** was unexpected. (*not* It was unexpected their success.)

However, in informal contexts, particularly in speech, this is quite common in order to give special emphasis to the information immediately following **it ...**:

- It tastes really good**, this new ice cream.

and also to place a longer noun phrase at the end in order to focus attention on it:

- It's ridiculous**, all the bureaucracy involved in running a school these days.

## Exercises

**96.1** Rewrite these sentences beginning **It ... but** only if they would be correct written English; otherwise write **✓** and consider why an **It ...** sentence would be inappropriate. **A & C**

- That we continue to monitor the situation is important.  
*It is important that we continue to monitor the situation.*
- How he stared straight at me was unsettling.
- Francesco's excellent exam result was surprising.
- To be a qualified driver is an advantage in the job.
- Her proposal is quite radical.
- To put carpet on walls is highly unusual.
- Robin's new car is a Ferrari.
- Finding a good plumber is hard these days.

**96.2** Complete the sentences using **it ...** followed by a verb from (i) and an expanded form of the notes in (ii). Include an appropriate object where necessary. **B**

(i)

-appear-	astonish
not bother	concern
hurt	not do
pay	strike
upset	scare

(ii)

pedal / bicycle	seriously injured / back
see / carrying knives	plan your journey ahead
criticise / too much	hadn't even told / when / going away
everyone / see in	discover / also / successful novelist
he / jealous	hear / offended

- When Laura fell heavily and lay completely still,  
*it appeared that she had seriously injured her back.*
- I knew that Lotta was a journalist for the local paper, but ...
- Since I broke my ankle last year, ...
- I told Peter that I had invited Hugo, too. When he became angry ...
- My comment about Ben's baldness was only meant as a joke and ...
- There were no curtains in his house, but ...
- I didn't mind Amy not asking me to go on holiday with her, but ...
- Children need a lot of praise and ...
- The boys walked towards me in a threatening way, and ...
- You can save money by booking tickets in advance, so ...

**96.3** What personal or physical characteristics are needed to ...? Use **It takes ...** in your answers. **B**

- play a musical instrument well  
*It takes a lot of determination to play a musical instrument well.*
- build your own house  
.....
- make a speech in front of a group of strangers  
.....
- explain the rules of cricket to someone who doesn't know the game  
.....

Now suggest completions for these sentences.

- It takes bravery ...  
.....
- It takes a lot of organisation to ...  
.....
- It takes a great deal of time ...  
.....