

Noun + Noun (*a tennis ball / a headache, etc.*)

A We often use two nouns together (*noun + noun*) to mean one thing/person/idea, etc. For example:

a tennis ball a bank manager a car accident income tax the water temperature

The first noun is like an *adjective* – it tells us what kind of thing/person/idea, etc. For example:

a tennis ball = a ball used to play tennis

a car accident = an accident that happens while driving in a car

income tax = tax that you pay on your income

a Boston doctor = a doctor from Boston

the water temperature = the temperature of the water (in an ocean, a lake, etc.)

So you can say:

a television camera a television program a television studio a television producer
(all of these different things or people have to do with television)

language problems marriage problems health problems work problems
(all of these are different kinds of problems)

Compare:

garden vegetables (= vegetables that are grown in a garden)

a vegetable garden (= a garden where vegetables are grown)

Often the first word ends in *-ing*. Usually these are things used for doing something. For example:

a frying pan (a pan for frying) a washing machine a swimming pool a dining room

Sometimes there are more than two nouns together:

- I waited at the hotel reception desk.
- We watched the World Swimming Championships on television.
- Everyone is talking about the government corruption scandal.

B When nouns are together like this, sometimes we write them as one word and sometimes as two separate words. For example:

a headache toothpaste a weekend a swimming pool pea soup

There are no clear rules for this. If you are not sure, it is usually better to write two words.

C Note the difference between:

a wineglass (the glass may be empty) and a glass of wine (= a glass with wine in it)

a toolbox (the box may be empty) and a box of tools (= a box full of tools)

D When we use *noun + noun*, the first noun is like an adjective. It is normally *singular*, but the meaning is often *plural*. For example, a bookstore is a store where you can buy books, and an apple tree is a tree that has apples. In the same way we say:

a three-hour trip (*not* a three-hours trip) two 14-year-old girls (*not* years)

a ten-dollar bill (*not* dollars)

a three-page letter (*not* pages)

a four-week English course (*not* weeks)

Compare:

- It was a three-hour trip. *but* The trip took three hours.

For the structure "I need eight hours' sleep a night," see Unit 78E.

Exercises

77.1 What do we call these things and people? Use the structure noun + noun.

1. A ticket for a concert is a concert ticket.
2. A magazine about computers is _____.
3. Pictures taken on your vacation are your _____.
4. Chocolate made with milk is _____.
5. Somebody whose job is to inspect factories is _____.
6. A lawyer from Vancouver is _____.
7. The results of your exams are your _____.
8. A race for horses is _____.
9. A horse that runs in races is _____.
10. The carpet in the dining room is _____.
11. A scandal involving an oil company is _____.
12. A question that has two parts is _____.
13. A girl who is seven years old is _____.
14. A building with five stories is _____.

77.2 Answer the questions using two of the following words each time:

accident	belt	ear	card	credit	editor	forecast
newspaper	number	room	seat	store	weather	window

1. This can be caused by bad driving. a car accident
2. If you're staying at a hotel, you need to remember this. your _____
3. You should wear this when you're in a car. a _____
4. You can often use this to pay for things instead of cash. a _____
5. If you want to know if it's going to rain, you can read or listen to this. the _____
6. This person is a top journalist. a _____
7. You might stop to look in this when you're walking along a street. a _____

77.3 Complete the sentences using one of the following:

15 minute(s)	60 minute(s)	two hour(s)	five day(s)	two year(s)	500 year(s)
six mile(s)	six mile(s)	20 dollar(s)	five course(s)	ten page(s)	450 page(s)

Sometimes you need the singular (*day/page, etc.*) and sometimes the plural (*days/pages, etc.*).

1. It's a very long book. There are 450 pages.
2. A few days ago I received a ten-page letter from Julia.
3. I didn't have any change. I only had a _____ bill.
4. At work I usually have a _____ coffee break in the morning.
5. There are _____ in an hour.
6. It's only a _____ flight from London to Madrid.
7. It was a big meal. There were _____.
8. Mary has just started a new job. She has a _____ contract.
9. The oldest building in the city is the _____-old castle.
10. I work _____ a week. I'm off on Saturday and Sunday.
11. We went for a _____ walk in the country.
12. We went for a long walk in the country. We walked _____.