

A guide to the ten types of compound adjectives in English

A guide to the **ten types of compound adjectives** in English—with **usage tips**, **examples with Finnish translations**, sample sentences, and a section on **creating your own ("roll-your-own") compounds** to encourage creativity and flexibility.

COMPOUND ADJECTIVES: A CLOSER LOOK

Definition:

Compound adjectives are adjectives made up of **two or more words**, usually joined by **hyphens** when they come before a noun.

- ◆ *E.g. We stayed in a well-known hotel.*
 - ◆ *(Yövyimme hyvin tunnetussa hotellissa.)*
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1. ADJECTIVE + NOUN

Meaning: Describes a feature or function, often standard or physical.

◆ Examples:

- **full-length** (*kokopitkä*) → *a full-length mirror*
- **blue-collar** (*työläis-*) → *blue-collar jobs*
- **last-minute** (*viime hetken*) → *a last-minute decision*

◆ Sentence:

He made a last-minute change to the speech.
(*Hän teki viime hetken muutoksen puheeseen.*)

2. ADJECTIVE + PRESENT PARTICIPLE (-ing)

Meaning: Often describes behavior, effects, or action in progress.

◆ Examples:

- **good-looking** (*hyvännäköinen*) → *a good-looking man*
- **far-reaching** (*kauaskantoinen*) → *far-reaching reforms*
- **quick-thinking** (*nopeasti ajatteleva*) → *a quick-thinking child*

◆ *Sentence:*

Her quick-thinking saved the day.
(Hänen nopea ajattelunsa pelasti päivän.)

3. ADJECTIVE + PAST PARTICIPLE

Meaning: Describes states, opinions, or personality traits.

◆ *Examples:*

- **old-fashioned** (*vanhanaikainen*) → *an old-fashioned view*
- **narrow-minded** (*ahdasmielinen*) → *a narrow-minded boss*
- **cold-blooded** (*kylmäverinen*) → *a cold-blooded killer*

◆ *Sentence:*

He held some old-fashioned beliefs.
(Hänellä oli vanhanaikaisia uskomuksia.)

4. ADVERB + PAST PARTICIPLE

Meaning: Expresses degree or manner, often used in evaluations or descriptions.

◆ *Examples:*

- **well-prepared** (*hyvin valmisteltu*) → *a well-prepared presentation*
- **deeply-rooted** (*syvään juurtunut*) → *deeply-rooted traditions*
- **highly-respected** (*arvostettu*) → *a highly-respected teacher*

◆ *Sentence:*

The nation has deeply-rooted customs.
(Maassa on syvään juurtuneita tapoja.)

5. IDIOMATIC PHRASES

Meaning: Informal, often fixed expressions used as compound adjectives.

◆ *Examples:*

- **middle-of-the-road** (*maltillinen*) → *middle-of-the-road politics*
- **off-the-rack** (*valmis-, suoraan kaupasta*) → *off-the-rack clothes*
- **over-the-counter** (*reseptivapaa*) → *over-the-counter drugs*

◆ *Sentence:*

He prefers middle-of-the-road music.
(*Hän pitää maltillisesta musiikista.*)

6. NOUN + ADJECTIVE

Meaning: Describes state or quality, where the noun adds meaning.

◆ *Examples:*

- **smoke-free** (*savuton*) → *a smoke-free environment*
- **ice-cold** (*jääkylmä*) → *ice-cold drinks*
- **world-famous** (*maailmankuulu*) → *a world-famous actor*

◆ *Sentence:*

We sat in a smoke-free zone.
(*Istuimme savuttomalla alueella.*)

7. NOUN + PRESENT PARTICIPLE (-ing)

Meaning: Describes something that *does* something, often vividly or creatively.

◆ *Examples:*

- **record-breaking** (*ennätyksiä rikkova*) → *record-breaking performance*
- **mouth-watering** (*vedet kielelle herauttava*) → *mouth-watering food*
- **coal-mining** (*hiilikaivos-*) → *a coal-mining region*

◆ *Sentence:*

They served mouth-watering dishes.
(*He tarjosivat herkullisia ruokia.*)

8. NOUN + PAST PARTICIPLE

Meaning: The noun “does” the action to the participle, often passive in meaning.

◆ *Examples:*

- **sun-dried** (*auringossa kuivattu*) → *sun-dried tomatoes*
- **middle-aged** (*keski-ikäinen*) → *middle-aged people*
- **wind-powered** (*tuulivoimalla toimiva*) → *wind-powered generators*

◆ *Sentence:*

We ate sun-dried fruits.
(Söimme auringossa kuivattuja hedelmiä.)

9. NOUN + NOUN

Meaning: Functional or descriptive, usually forming a “type of thing.”

◆ *Examples:*

- **part-time** (*osa-aikainen*) → *part-time job*
- **apple-pie** (*omenapiirakka*) → *apple-pie crust*
- **coffee-table** (*sohvapöytä-*) → *coffee-table books*

◆ *Sentence:*

She works in a part-time role.
(Hän työskentelee osa-aikaisesti.)

10. NUMBER + NOUN (always singular)

Meaning: Specifies **exact quantity + unit/type** (always hyphenated).

◆ *Examples:*

- **ten-minute** (*kymmenen minuutin*) → *a ten-minute walk*
- **five-star** (*viiden tähden*) → *a five-star hotel*
- **twenty-storey** (*20-kerroksinen*) → *a twenty-storey tower*

◆ *Sentence:*

We had a two-hour meeting.
(Meillä oli kahden tunnin kokous.)



CAN YOU ROLL YOUR OWN? YES, YOU CAN!

English **loves creativity**—as long as it's **clear** and **readable**. Inventing your own compound adjectives is a powerful tool in writing and speech.



Examples of student-invented compounds:

- “a never-ending-to-do-list day”
- “post-holiday-blues mood”
- “sleep-deprived-zombie teacher”
- “fresh-out-of-ideas moment”



Finnish Tip: These playful compounds can be compared to how Finnish creates long words like “työuupumuskoeviikkomieliä”.

Rule of thumb: If it helps the reader get the picture faster, go ahead—just hyphenate properly and don't overdo it.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY IDEA

Ask students to:

- Invent three new compound adjectives.
- Translate them into Finnish.
- Use them in sentences.
- Share and discuss the most creative/funniest/clearest ones.



E.g. A “can't-be-bothered” attitude is dangerous in group work.
(“Ei-voi-kiinnostaa”-asenne on vaarallinen ryhmätyössä.)

COMPOUND ADJECTIVES IN ENGLISH

Compound adjectives are made up of two or more words, usually joined by hyphens when they come before a noun.

Example: *It was a well-known fact. (Se oli hyvin tunnettu asia.)*

1. ADJECTIVE + NOUN

Examples: full-length (kokopitkä), blue-collar (työläis-), last-minute (viime hetken)

Sentence: He made a last-minute decision. (*Hän teki viime hetken päätöksen.*)

2. ADJECTIVE + PRESENT PARTICIPLE (-ing)

Examples: good-looking (hyvännäköinen), far-reaching (kauaskantoinen), quick-thinking (nopeasti ajatteleva)

Sentence: Her quick-thinking saved the child. (*Hänen nopea ajattelunsa pelasti lapsen.*)

3. ADJECTIVE + PAST PARTICIPLE

Examples: old-fashioned (vanhanaikainen), narrow-minded (ahdasmielinen), cold-blooded (kylmäverinen)

Sentence: He held old-fashioned views. (*Hänellä oli vanhanaikaisia näkemyksiä.*)

4. ADVERB + PAST PARTICIPLE

Examples: well-prepared (hyvin valmisteltu), deeply-rooted (syvään juurtunut), highly-respected (arvostettu)

Sentence: They have deeply-rooted traditions. (*Heillä on syvään juurtuneita perinteitä.*)

5. IDIOMATIC PHRASES

Examples: middle-of-the-road (maltillinen), over-the-counter (reseptivapaa), off-the-rack (valmisvaate)

Sentence: I bought it off-the-rack. (*Ostin sen suoraan kaupasta.*)

6. NOUN + ADJECTIVE

Examples: smoke-free (savuton), ice-cold (jäähylmä), world-famous (maailmankuulu)

Sentence: We sat in a smoke-free area. (*Istuimme savuttomalla alueella.*)

7. NOUN + PRESENT PARTICIPLE (-ing)

Examples: record-breaking (ennätystä rikkova), coal-mining (hiilikaivos-), mouth-watering (vedet kielelle herauttava)

Sentence: The food was mouth-watering. (*Ruoka oli herkullista.*)

8. NOUN + PAST PARTICIPLE

Examples: sun-dried (auringossa kuivattu), middle-aged (keski-ikäinen), wind-powered (tuulivoimalla toimiva)

Sentence: We use wind-powered machines. (*Käytämme tuulivoimalla toimivia koneita.*)

9. NOUN + NOUN

Examples: part-time (osa-aikainen), apple-pie (omenapiirakka), coffee-table (sohvipöytä-)

Sentence: She has a part-time job. (*Hänellä on osa-aikatyö.*)

10. NUMBER + NOUN (singular)

Examples: ten-minute (kymmenen minuutin), five-day (viiden päivän), twenty-storey (20-kerroksinen)

Sentence: We took a ten-minute break. (*Pidimme kymmenen minuutin tauon.*)

BONUS: CREATE YOUR OWN!

English allows creative compound adjectives, especially in informal or humorous contexts:

- *a can't-be-bothered attitude* ("ei-voi-kiinnostaa"-asenne)
- *a sleep-deprived-zombie teacher* (univajeinen zombiopettaja)

Example: This is a no-wifi-survival situation.
(*Tämä on ei-wifi-selviämistilanne.*)

Maxx's Tip: The clearer and more visual your compound, the better it works!