

Lesson seven: Stress in compound words

Compound words are formed by two separate words. The meaning of a compound word usually differs from the original meaning of each word.

Word 1	Word 2	Compound word
Paper /'peɪpə(r)/	Boy /bɔɪ/	Paperboy /'peɪpə bɔɪ/

Types of compound words:

- 1) **Open compounds:** compound words written as two separate words. For example: credit card; high school; light bulb; post office.
- 2) **Closed compounds (solid compounds/ established compounds):** compound words written as one word. For example: airplane, highland, lighthouse, railroad.
- 3) **Hyphenated compounds:** Compound words written with a hyphen. For example: bad-tempered; good-looking; high-minded; light-hearted.

Most compound words have two stresses: a primary stress, and a secondary stress. Depending on how compound words function in the sentence (Nouns, Adjective, Adverbs, or Verbs), the following stress patterns are found:

Grammatical function	Stress placement rules	Examples
Compound nouns	General rule If the compound word functions as a noun (noun + noun or gerund + noun), the primary stress falls on the first element and the secondary stress falls on the second element (regardless of the grammatical category of the individual component parts).	Football /'fʊtbɔ:l/ Armchair /'ɑ:mtʃeə(r)/ Mailbox /'meɪlbɒks/ Highway /'haɪweɪ/ Goldfish /'gəʊldfɪʃ/ Training shoe /'treɪnɪŋ ʃuː/ Swimming-pool /'swɪmɪŋ pu:l/
	<i>Exceptions</i>	Mankind /mæn'kaɪnd/ Headmaster /hed'mɑ:stə(r)/
	Compounds which include past participle + noun are stressed on the second element	Inverted commas /ɪn'vɜ:tɪd 'kɒməz/ Lost property /lɒst 'prɒpəti/
Compound adjectives	General rule Primary stress on the second element, secondary stress on the first element	Blue-eyed /,blu: 'aɪd/ Dark-green /,dɑ:k 'grɪ:n/ Open-minded /,əʊpən 'maɪndɪd/ Kindhearted /,kaɪnd 'hɑ:tɪd/ Well-known /,wel 'nəʊn/
	If one of the components in a two-word adjective is a noun , stronger stress may fall on the noun irrespective of whether it is first or second component.	Homesick /'həʊmsɪk/ Handmade /,hænd'meɪd/ Law-abiding /'lɔ: əbaɪdɪŋ/ Low-cost /,ləʊ 'kɒst/ Waterproof /'wɔ:təpru:f/ High-class /,haɪ 'klɑ:s/ Color-blind /'klɒlə blaɪnd/

	Compound words composed of adjective and ' ed ' at the end receive stress on the second element.	Bad-tempered / ,bæd 'tempəd/ Well-educated / ,wel 'edʒukətɪd/ Well-dressed / ,wel 'drest/
	Compound words composed of an adjective and a gerund (-ing) at the end receive stress on the second element.	Good-looking / ,gʊd 'lʊkɪŋ/ Easy going / ,i:zi 'gəʊɪŋ/ Global warming / ,glɒsbɪ 'wɔ:mɪŋ/ Central heating / ,sentrəl 'hi:tɪŋ/
	Compound adjectives in which the first element is a number receive stress on the second element	Second class / ,sekənd 'klɑ:s/ One-eyed / ,wʌn- 'aɪd/ three-cornered / ,θri: 'kɔ:nəd/
Compound adverbs	General rule Compounds functioning as adverbs are usually finally stressed.	North-east / ,nɔ:θ 'i:st/ Downstream / ,daʊn'stri:m/ Above-mentioned / ə ,bʌv 'menʃnd/
Compound verbs	General rule Primary stress on the second element, secondary stress on the first element	Overboil / ,əʊvə 'bɔɪl/ Underestimate / ,ʌndə 'rɛstɪmət/ Outrun / aʊt 'rʌn/ Overtake / ,əʊvə 'teɪk/
	Compound words which function as verbs and have an adverbial element first take final stress.	Ill-treat / ,ɪl 'tri:t/ Back-pedal / ,bæk 'pedl/ Downgrade / ,daʊn'greɪd/ Upside down / ,ʌpsaɪd 'daʊn/
	Phrasal verbs are stressed on the second element.	Let down / ,let 'daʊn/ Takeover / ,teɪk 'əʊvə/ Turn off / ,tɜ:n 'ɒf/

PRACTICE

Transcribe the following compound words phonemically and identify the primary stress placement (').

Words	Transcription & stress	Words	Transcription & stress
1. Upstairs (adverb)		11. Part-time (adj)	
2. Two-edged (adj)		12. Wristwatch (noun)	
3. Uphill (adverb)		13. Dress up (P.V)	
4. Half-hearted (adj)		14. Overrun (verb)	
5. Two-handed (adj)		15. Dropout (noun)	
6. Hereby (adverb)		16. Barefooted (adj)	
7. High school (noun)		17. Two-faced (adj)	
8. Under-represented (adj)		18. Outside (adverb)	
9. Long-sighted (adj)		19. Backache (noun)	
10. Three-dimensional (adj)		20. Copyright (noun)	