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handsome: a derived adjective or a compound one? ===== I'm Italian, so sorry for my English, but I have a question about the word "handsome." Does it qualify as a compound adjective or a derived one? I find it odd that hand and some have different meanings, yet when combined, handsome represents good-looking. Let's dive into its etymology to determine if there's a connection between these words. As it turns out, according to Etymonline, the word "handsome" originated in the 14th century as a compound of "hand" and "some." Initially, it meant "easy to handle," showing a clear link with the noun "hand." However, over time, its meaning expanded beyond physical characteristics, adopting the suffix "-some," which is often used to form adjectives characterizing something. This suffix is also seen in other words like "awesome" and "wholesome." Given this, it's reasonable to consider "handsome" a derived adjective, as it has been transformed from a noun by adding an adjective suffix. The Oxford English Dictionary online provides further support for this classification. Its etymological entry suggests that handsome is indeed a derived word, with the suffix "-some" being a bound morpheme used to form adjectives from nouns or other adjectives. While some people might argue that "handsome" should be considered a compound adjective due to its composition of two words, this classification seems less accurate. A compound noun typically forms a unitary expression, whereas in the case of "handsome," we have a word with multiple meanings stemming from different roots. In conclusion, my research confirms that "handsome" is likely a derived adjective rather than a compound one. The presence of the "-some" suffix and its etymological connection to other words like "awesome" support this classification. Regarding using hyphens between words in compounds, some people prefer them for consistency or style reasons, while others argue it's unnecessary or even incorrect. While the Oxford English Dictionary has examples with hyphens, such as "pen-case," it also acknowledges that not all cases require them. In general, whether to use a hyphen depends on how we perceive the individual words and their relationships within the compound expression. If the two nouns are distinct, as in "pencil" + "case," then using hyphens might create unnecessary confusion. On the other hand, when both components form a cohesive unit, like in "pencil-case" or "suitcase," it's more acceptable to include hyphens without them. Ultimately, whether to use hyphens between words is a matter of personal preference and style. I hope this answer confirms what I'm looking for: handsome is indeed a derived adjective. Thank you very much for your answers, as I am studying at university and my English teacher considers it a compound adjective. A pencil case is, by definition, a case for pencils. It's not an umbrella stand, and the presence or absence of a hyphen doesn't change that. The rule that writers whose last names start with letters 'A' through 'M' should use a hyphen in their words is a guideline, but it has exceptions. Some compounds, like golf trolley, don't need a hyphen, while others, like pen-case, do. The OED gives examples of all three forms - pen case, pen-case, and pencase - because they show that language evolves and changes over time. The editor's opinion on the origin of words is valuable, but it's not absolute. I understand tests for compoundhood, but labels like 'preposition' or 'compound noun' are just that - labels. Grammar is meant to help us understand and communicate effectively in Standard English. If you're unsure about a rule or test, it's okay to ask questions or seek clarification. I disagree with your comments because they imply that grammar should be imposed on everyone, which isn't the case. The name for that thing is a compound noun. I'm not surprised that people around here disagree with me! Note that the routine use of two adjacent but separate words together does not mean they form a compound. For example "gas" and "cooker" regularly occur together, but "gas cooker" is not a compound noun. It's a syntactic construction consisting of modifier + head. Likewise "cooking apple", "blackcurrant sorbet", "television screen" and so on. The presence or absence of a hyphen is beside the point. Some compounds have a hyphen, some do not. No it's not beside the point. A compound word is a single word, a single constituent, sometimes hyphenated. If two words are not conjoined/hyphenated they do not form a compound word, but a syntactic construction, as in the "gas cooker" etc. examples I gave above. Whose opinion shall I take to guide me? That of billj, or that of editor of the OED? The OP obviously felt it worthwhile to ask us rather than / as well as consulting a dictionary. Are you denying members the right to give the OP answers that they believe to be correct? Last edited by a moderator: Dec 7, 2019 Careful speakers abide by the rules, which generally serve to mark grammaticality in Standard English. They do not necessarily abide by rules which appear to have no basis in the language people actually use. Note that the routine use of two adjacent but separate words together does not mean they form a compound. For example "gas" and "cooker" regularly occur together, but "gas cooker" is not a compound noun. It's a syntactic construction consisting of modifier + head. Likewise "cooking apple", "blackcurrant sorbet", "television screen" and so on. This Cambridge Dictionary article considers car park, bottle opener and Prime Minister to be compound nouns. It doesn't specifically mention gas cooker, but that would seem to be a similar type. Are you denying members the right to give the OP answers that they believe to be correct? No. If you read more carefully, you might see that I am exercising my right to disagree with you. The OP asked if hyphenated "pencil-case" is acceptable. I, and several others, think it is. You don't, and you rely on prescriptivism as your justification ("should not"). My response is to observe that I disagree with your prescriptive approach, given that it is not supported by the work of recognised writers or by the highly reputable OED. That's the OED, by the way, which describes "gas cooker" as a noun, not as a syntactic construction. It depends on whether the two nouns are considered to form a compound noun. Without the hyphen it is a syntactic construction (head + dependent) as opposed to a morphological compound consisting of two bases. ... so strictly speaking "pencil" + "case" does not form a compound and hence should not be hyphenated. Interestingly, the Oxford Dictionary has "pen-case", but "pencil case", which shows a degree of inconsistency. And then we have the impertinent inconsistency of the general populace (who have no idea what syntactic constructions and morphological compounds might be) in compounding "case". Should their performance be considered when attempting to derive "rules", rather than saying they "should not do that"? Suitcase and bookcase have wiped out both two-word and hyphenated versions, so Tuna's comment seems to be right on the money: They do not necessarily abide by rules which appear to have no basis in the language people actually use. The transition from two words, to a hyphenated form and then to one word seems to be on a case-by-case basis rather than following a rule. And while we are on rules: This rule, like all rules that govern English usage is subject to exceptions, though this rule might have more exceptions than most. From another thread where a prescriptivist argued vehemently against the correctness of common usage, I dragged out one of my favourite quotes: William Safire wrote: When enough of them are wrong they're right! Please, I need to know if the correct spelling for "fairy tale" is "fairy tale" or "fairytale". Are the two options correct? Thanks, Elisangela They are both acceptable as nouns, although if you want an adjective it would be fairy-tale or fairytale (eg a fairy-tale/fairytale romance). Both forms are given in the WR Dictionary (= Concise Oxford Dictionary). There may be a difference between AE and BE here. Both are equally correct and so is the third alternative fairy-tale. There is rarely any one correct answer for simple noun + noun compounds like this: in English, it just doesn't matter much which you write. I hyphenate (or combine when possible) when using the whole phrase as a modifier; keep as two words when using as a noun. I believe it to be 2 words, however things like the Pogues song, "Fairytale of New York" try to convince me otherwise. Thoughts?