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Grammar Reference

Grammar Reference: Compound Adjectives

Compound adjectives are modifying phrases made up of two or more words. They can be joined by a hyphen, appear as a single word, or appear as two separate words.

There are three common patterns for compound adjectives in English:

Form 1: Adjective + noun + ed

These are usually written with a hyphen unless they are one word when they come before a noun

Example: The manager said Bobby might lose his job because he is an ***absent-minded*** worker.
I can't believe she isn't a cheerleader since she is such a ***high-spirited*** teenager.
He may not look like it, but my father is an extremely ***soft-hearted*** man.

Form 2: Adverb + past participle

Adverbs with ***-ly*** are never hyphenated as a compound, while other adverbs are usually hyphenated before a noun, but never after.

Example: The neighborhood stray dog was ***much-loved*** and never went hungry.
He was a smart and confident man, who was always ***well-dressed***.
This is a ***widely respected*** textbook for learning Chinese.

Form 3: Adjective / Adverb / Noun + present participle

These are usually written with a hyphen unless they are one word when they come before a noun

Example: It has been so fun giving my *easygoing* parents a tour of the city.
Forward-thinking people are always the most adaptable and successful.
 We often have *thought-provoking* discussions in class.

Notes:

The following compound adjectives follow the pattern: noun + past participle.

awestruck	handmade	homemade	sunburned
bloodstained	handwritten	moth-eaten	waterlogged
frostbitten	heartbroken	store-bought	windswept

Example: I could tell she was impressed from the *awestruck* expression on her face.
 If she ever left him he would be *heartbroken*.

The following compound adjectives are found written as one word.

airborn e	barefoote d	downhearte d	lightweigh t	painstakin g
airsick	daylong	hardheaded	newfound	seaworthy

Example: This success is a reflection of their *newfound* confidence.
 I need a *lightweight* jacket for the summer evenings.

In the comparative form of compound adjectives, more and less are not followed by hyphens.

a more forward-looking plan	a less easygoing person	a more highly trained applicant
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Grammar Reference: Superlative Compound Adjectives

Superlative compound adjectives usually follow the same hyphenation rules as compound adjectives.

We form the superlative form of compound adjectives by adding either *the most* or *the least* in front of the compound adjective. There is never a hyphen connecting *most* or *least* to the adjective that follows.

Example: I'm not *the most easily impressed* person.
She is *the most easygoing* person I know.
He's *the most narrow-minded* employee.

When the first word of a compound adjective is a *one-syllable* adjective or adverb, form the superlative form by adding "*the*" to the superlative form of the adjective. The irregular forms of a superlative are used.

Example: He is *the hardest-working* man I know.
She is *the best-looking* actress on the show.

Superlative compound adjectives may also occur after the verb "*be*" without a noun.

Example: Of all the men I know, he is *the hardest* working.

Note:

The following adjectives and adverbs have irregular comparative and superlative forms. They are frequently used in comparative and superlative compound adjectives.

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative
good	better	best
bad	worse	worst
far	farther / further	farthest / furthest

Adverb	Comparative	Superlative
well	better	best
badly	worse	worst
little	less (lesser)	least
much	more	most
far	farther / further	farthest / furthest

As with other superlative adjectives, the article “*the*” is not used when the noun is preceded by a possessive.

Example: Cambodian’s *best-known* architect will show his planning and building design next week.