

Noun as Adjective

As you know, a noun is a person, place or thing, and an adjective is a word that describes a noun:

adjective	noun
clever	teacher
small	office
black	horse

Sometimes we use a noun to describe another noun. In that case, the first noun "acts as" an adjective.

noun as adjective	noun
history	teacher
ticket	office
race	horse

The "noun as adjective" always comes first

If you remember this, it will help you to understand what is being talked about:

- a **race horse** is a **horse** that runs in races
- a **horse race** is a **race** for horses
- a **boat race** is a **race** for boats
- a **love story** is a **story** about love
- a **war story** is a **story** about war
- a **tennis ball** is a **ball** for playing tennis
- **tennis shoes** are **shoes** for playing tennis
- a **computer exhibition** is an **exhibition** of computers
- a **bicycle shop** is a **shop** that sells bicycles

The "noun as adjective" is singular

Just like a real adjective, the "noun as adjective" is invariable. It is usually in the singular form.

Right		Wrong
boat race	boat races	NOT boats race, boats races
toothbrush	toothbrushes	NOT teethbrush, teethbrushes
shoe-lace	shoe-laces	NOT shoes lace, shoes laces
cigarette packet	cigarette packets	NOT cigarettes packet, cigarettes packets

In other words, if there is a plural it is on the real noun only.

A few nouns look plural but we usually treat them as singular (for example news, billiards, athletics). When we use these nouns "as adjectives" they are unchanged:

- a news reporter, three news reporters
- one billiards table, four billiards tables
- an athletics trainer, fifty athletics trainers

Exceptions: When we use certain nouns "as adjectives" (clothes, sports, customs, accounts, arms), we use them in the plural form:

- clothes shop, clothes shops
- sports club, sports clubs
- customs duty, customs duties
- accounts department, accounts departments
- arms production

How do we write the "noun as adjective"?

We write the "noun as adjective" and the real noun in several different ways:

- two separate words (car door)
- two hyphenated words (book-case)
- one word (bathroom)

There are no easy rules for this. We even write some combinations in two or all three different ways: (head master, head-master, headmaster)

How do we say the "noun as adjective"?

For pronunciation, we usually stress the first word:

- shoe shop
- boat-race
- bathroom

Can we have more than one "noun as adjective"?

Yes. Just like adjectives, we often use more than one "noun as adjective" together. Look at these examples:

car production costs: we are talking about the costs of producing cars

noun as adjective	noun as adjective	noun
		costs
	production	costs
car	production	costs

England football team coach: we are talking about the coach who trains the team that plays football for England

noun as adjective	noun as adjective	noun as adjective	noun
			coach
		team	coach

noun as adjective	noun as adjective	noun as adjective	noun
	football	team	coach
England	football	team	coach
England	football	team	coaches

Note: in **England football team coach** can you see a "hidden" "noun as adjective"? Look at the word "football" (foot-ball). These two nouns (foot+ball) have developed into a single noun (football). This is one way that words evolve. Many word combinations that use a "noun as adjective" are regarded as nouns in their own right, with their own dictionary definition. But not all dictionaries agree with each other. For example, some dictionaries list "tennis ball" as a noun and other dictionaries do not.

government road accident research centre: we are talking about a centre that researches into accidents on the road for the government

noun as adjective	noun as adjective	noun as adjective	noun as adjective	noun
				centre
			research	centre
		accident	research	centre

noun as adjective	noun as adjective	noun as adjective	noun as adjective	noun
	road	accident	research	centre
government	road	accident	research	centre