

Nouns in pairs

This lesson adopts a teach-test-produce format to give students greater confidence in combining nouns in pairs, where the first noun modifies the second, e.g. *government measures* or *computer animation*.

Lesson length: 60 mins

Aim:

1. to review and practise the way in which one noun can pre-modify another
2. to practise using a set of common noun-noun collocations.

Preparation:

You will need a copy of the following for each student:

Worksheet (see end): **Noun-noun pairs** (adapted from *Oxford Grammar for EAP* pages 32, 33, 37, 169 and 171).

1. LEAD-IN: teach and test

- Write the following sentence on the board:
Few measures taken by the government have raised as much opposition from the public as the poll tax of 1989.
Ask students if they know what the poll tax was, and what a ‘measure’ means in this context.
(The poll tax is the popular name for the ‘community charge’, a new local form of taxation - on people rather than property - introduced by a UK Conservative government in 1989, but abolished shortly afterwards. A ‘measure’ here means an ‘action in law’.)
- Ask students how they could reduce the sentence in length from 20 words to 15. (If a prompt is required, draw attention to *measures taken by the government* and *opposition from the public*.
(Answer: *Few government measures have raised as much public opposition as the poll tax of 1989.*)
- Hand out the worksheet. Ask students to shorten the sentences in exercise A in a similar way, working individually, then checking their answers in pairs. Tell them that number 6. may need a bit of extra thinking. Go through answers as a class.

Answers:

1 The 2004 inquiry into **arts funding** criticized the way in which **government grants** had been distributed.

2 Stonebridge (2009) explores the phenomenon of **summer riots** in UK and American cities.

3 **Press freedom** and **human rights** are often linked, argues Hogg (2010).

4 Drivers of **fuel tankers** are required to take a fire safety test.

(Note that you could also say 'Fuel tanker drivers ...' - and that 'fire safety test' is itself another example of three nouns together.)

5 **Plastic products** are rarely biodegradable.

6 Reliable statistics for **life expectancy** are not yet available for the island.

(Note that you could also say 'Reliable *life expectancy statistics* ...')

2. GRAMMAR OF NOUN-NOUN PAIRS: teach, test and produce

- In the word pairs *government measures* and *summer riots*, ask students what type of words they are grammatically, and what is the purpose of the first word in each pair. (Answer: they are all nouns, and the first noun in each pair modifies the second/makes the meaning of the second more specific/acts as a kind of adjective.)
- Now ask students if they could do the same thing in their language, i.e. put two nouns together so that the first describes the second. (They could try actually translating the phrases *government measures* and *summer riots* into their own language(s).) Point out to students how this is one of the easy and useful aspects of English - particularly academic English, where you need to convey a lot of information in an economical way.
- Tell the students that although the first noun always modifies the second, the relationship between the two nouns can vary widely (which explains why there are so many noun partnerships). Ask them to complete the table in exercise B on the worksheet.

Answers:

RELATIONSHIP	NOUN PAIR	FULL PHRASE
source	shale gas	gas that comes from shale
purpose	defence systems	systems <i>that are used for defence</i>
specialization	<i>accounts manager</i>	manager who is in charge of accounts
composition	lead walls	<i>walls made of lead</i>
content	<i>linguistics essay</i>	an essay on/about linguistics
<i>location</i>	back pain	<i>pain in the back</i>
<i>time</i>	<i>weekend job</i>	job that takes place at the weekend

- Now write up the following four noun pairs, and ask students to identify two that are wrong:

mathematics seminar trains timetable markets crash sales figures
(Answer: the second and third pair should be *train timetable* and *market crash*)

Explain that the first noun in noun pairs is normally singular, but:

1. nouns that are always plural (e.g. the subjects *mathematics* or *linguistics*) do not change;
 2. a few nouns tend to be used in the plural, e.g. accounts (*accounts manager*), arms (*arms manufacturer*), arts (*arts funding*), sales (*sales figures*).
- Finally, ask the class to call out common nouns from their subject area(s). If you think a noun that is called out has reasonable potential to become the first noun in a noun-noun pair, write it up anywhere on a clean whiteboard. When you have ten or twelve nouns, tell the class that in order to wipe the board clean, they must now give you a meaningful second noun for each of the nouns on the board.

Here's the kind of thing that could happen with a class from different subject areas:

Single nouns: radio, management, sports, media, population, fashion, economy, contract, water, silver.

Noun-noun pairs: radio *station*, management *buy-out*, sports *injury*, media *event*, population *control*, fashion *victim*, economy *seat*, contract *deadline*, water *supplies*, silver *jewellery*.

Note that students may offer more than one appropriate second noun, and that if the activity goes quickly and well you may want to repeat it, perhaps with a student in your role at the whiteboard.

3. COLLOCATION IN NOUN-NOUN PAIRS: test, teach, test and produce

- Ask the students to do exercise C on the worksheet individually, and then check their answers with a partner. Go through the answers as a class.

Answers:

1 environment	2 animation	3 background	4 grants
5 workers	6 forces		

Ask the students who got these mostly right why they got them right. Among the responses you get, you will probably hear 'I've seen these words together before', or 'The two words seem to fit together'.

- Explain that nouns in pairs collocate with each other ('go together'), just as other types of words collocate (such as adjectives with nouns, e.g. *widespread belief* or

verbs with adverbs, e.g. *respond favourably*). So we say ‘business trip’ rather than ‘business journey’ and ‘research findings’ rather than ‘research discoveries’.

- Ask students to try exercise D on the worksheet with a partner.

Answers:

1 family 2 market 3 health 4 government 5 business
6 research 7 computer

Explain to the class that the ‘head nouns’ (the nouns that come first in pairs) that they have been studying in the last two exercises are ‘productive’ in that they have many useful partners, as they can see from the lists in exercise D.

- Finally, divide the class into four or five groups. Ask each group to prepare two ‘opinion sentences’ (of the type used in essay titles, see examples below), using at least one of the noun-noun pairs from exercise D. Divide the whiteboard into grids (so that more than one student can write at the same time), and get a ‘writer’ from each group to put their two sentences on the board. Correct any mistakes in the final sentences as a class.

(An alternative to using the whiteboard would be to ask students to write their sentences on OHP transparencies and project them for review.)

Sentence examples:

All business empires tend to decline after 10 years of success.

The computer age is in its infancy.

Family businesses are at the heart of a successful economy.

Scientific ignorance allows public health scares to develop.

HOMEWORK

Ask students to write a short essay discussing one of the opinions derived from the activity above. Their piece of writing should contain at least four noun-noun pairs.

Worksheet: Noun-noun pairs

A Make the sentences shorter.

- 1 The 2004 inquiry into funding of the arts criticized the way in which grants awarded by government had been distributed.
- 2 Stonebridge (2009) explores the phenomenon of riots that take place in the summer in UK and American cities.
- 3 Freedom of the press and the rights of humans are often linked, argues Hogg (2010).
- 4 Drivers of tankers that carry fuel are required to take a fire safety test.
- 5 Products made from plastic are rarely biodegradable.
- 6 Reliable statistics for the length of time that people are expected to live are not yet available for the island.

B Complete the table.

RELATIONSHIP	NOUN PAIR	FULL PHRASE
source	shale gas	gas that comes from shale
purpose	defence systems	systems ...
specialization	...	manager who is in charge of accounts
composition	lead walls	...
content	...	an essay on/about linguistics
...	back pain	...
...	...	job that takes place at the weekend

C Circle the most appropriate option.

- 1 Halliwells plc have maintained a solid performance in a very difficult business economy/environment/background.
- 2 The first film to take some advantage of computer studies/entertainment/animation was Westworld (1973).
- 3 Walter Scott's family background/issues/dealings, particularly his grandparents' home at Sandyknowe Farm, played a key role in the development of his romantic imagination.
- 4 The educational work of the charity Mindset has been put at risk by the loss of two substantial government revenues/incomes/grants.
- 5 Syms (2010) emphasizes that rural health workers/doctors/officers in developing countries are the stimulus behind regional progress in medicine.
- 6 With the withdrawal of central funding, many universities will now have to come to terms with working in the commercial world of market issues/forces/problems.

D Put the seven nouns in the box at the front of the groups of nouns with which they collocate.

health	research	computer	business	market	government	family
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1 _____ + business(es), car(s), doctor(s), entertainment, event(s), friend(s), photo(s), problem(s), wedding(s)

2 _____ + crash(es), economy/ies, growth, penetration, potential, rate(s), research, saturation, segmentation

3 _____ + advice, centre(s), concern(s), cuts, hazard(s), industry/ies, issue(s), policy/ies, scare(s), service(s), treatment(s)

4 _____ + agency/ies, approval, bonds, control(s), decision(s), minister(s), official(s), plan(s), policy/ies, regulation(s)

5 _____ + community/ies, dealings, empire(s), interests, objective(s), opportunity/ies, relationship(s), trip(s)

6 _____ + centre(s), data, evidence, funding, grant(s), interests, methods, project(s), proposal(s), scientist(s), team(s)

7 _____ + age, error(s), graphics, hardware, interface, model(s), program(s), problem(s), software, studies