The formation of compound adjectives

A compound adjective is an adjective consisting of more than one word.

Compound adjectives formed with:

- past participles:

  a ***candle-lit*** *table* / *a* ***self-employed*** *author*

- present participles:

  a ***long-suffering*** *parent* / *a* ***time-consuming*** *job*

- *-ed* words that look like participles although they are formed from nouns:

  left-handed / open-minded

Compound adjectives of measurement

Cardinal numbers combine with nouns (usually singular):

- Age: *a three-year-old building, a twenty-year-old man*
- Duration: *a four-hour meeting, a two-day conference*
- Time/distance: *a ten-minute walk a three-hour journey*
- Weight: *a five-kilo bag of flour*

Ordinal numbers can be used in compounds:

*a **second-hand** / car a **third-floor** flat / a **nineteenth-century** novel*

When should you include the hyphen in compound adjectives?

When the compound adjective comes before the noun, that is, in the attributive position:

*the **well-known** actress*

When it comes after the word it modifies, don't hyphenate it:

the actress is well known

However, this is only a general rule.