

ENGLISH TIP

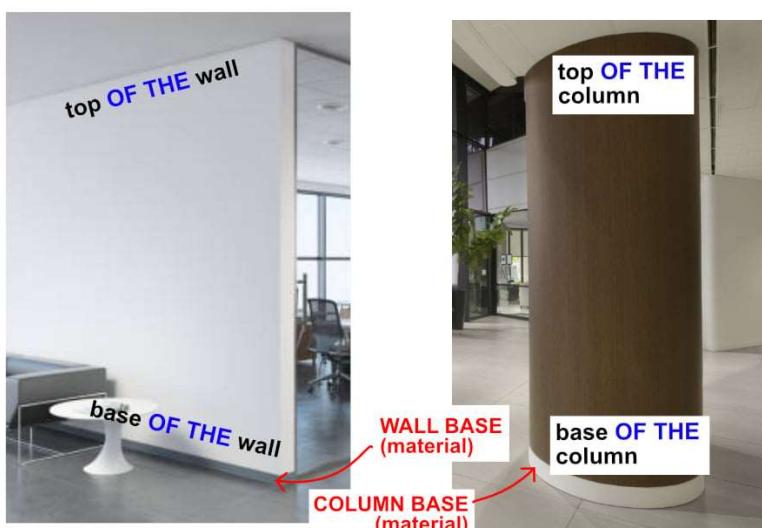
[link to video lesson](#)

Compound Nouns vs. Prepositional Phrases in Construction English

Key Point

Compound nouns (**NOUN + NOUN**) describe specific **technical things, systems and materials**

Prepositional phrases (**_OF THE**) describe **positions and locations**.



Let's look at two ways to describe the same thing: **slab edge** and **edge of the slab**. Both are correct, but we use them differently.

Edge of the Slab (Prepositional Phrase)

When we say "edge **of the slab**," we're focusing on **the slab** and describing **which part** of it. This phrase answers the question: "Where on the slab?" The word "of" is a preposition that helps us be specific about location.

We commonly use this form for **dimensioning**. For example: "The edge of the slab is 400mm from the gridline." In casual speech, native speakers often drop "the" and say "edge of slab."

Slab Edge (Compound Noun)

When we say "slab edge," we're focusing on **the edge** and describing **what type** of edge it is. This compound noun answers the question: "Which edge? What kind of edge?" Here, "slab" works like an adjective to make "edge" more specific.

We typically use this form for **technical terms** – specific systems, materials, or components. For example: "The slab edge has a steel embed."

Other Examples

The same pattern applies to other construction terms:

Door bottom (compound noun) = a specific component: "There's an automatic door bottom for soundproofing"

Bottom of the door (prepositional phrase) = location/position: "The bottom of the door is 2cm above the floor"

PRACTICE ACTIVITY: Compound Nouns vs. Prepositional Phrases

PART 1: Multiple Choice

Choose the correct option for each sentence.

1. The _____ (roof edge / edge of the roof) is 1500mm from the property line.
2. We need to install a _____ (wall base / base of the wall) to protect it from floor maintenance equipment.
3. The _____ (bottom of the cabinet / cabinet bottom) is 20cm above the floor.
4. The _____ (ceiling surface / surface of the ceiling) in the kitchen area must be made from non-combustible materials.
5. The _____ (surface of the wall / wall surface) is recessed to accommodate a light fixture.

PART 2: Fill in the Blank

Write the correct expression using the words provided in parentheses.

6. The _____ has a steel embed plate attached. (slab / edge)
7. Measure from the _____ to the column centerline. (beam / edge)
8. The _____ must have the appropriate clearance. (stair / bottom)
9. The _____ is 150mm below the finished floor level. (foundation / top)
10. The _____ is made of aluminum. (frame / door)

ANSWER KEY

PART 1: Multiple Choice

1. edge of the roof (dimensioning/location)
2. Wall base (technical component)
3. bottom of the cabinet (dimensioning/location)
4. Ceiling surface (technical term/material)
5. surface of the wall (dimensioning/location)

PART 2: Fill in the Blank

6. slab edge (technical component)
7. edge of the beam (dimensioning/location)
8. Bottom of the stair (dimensioning/location)
9. top of the foundation (dimensioning/location)
10. Door frame (technical system/material)