**Adjectives or Nouns?**

You may be used to labeling any word that precedes a noun and describes it as an adjective. However, there’s evidence that nouns modify nouns too, and that when they do, they do not become adjectives.

the project

the school project

the school lunch project

the school lunch activity project

How can we verify that the words preceding *project* are nouns? Well, each of them can occur after a determiner and can be pluralized, which are both tests for a noun:

that project

our schools

that lunch

these activities

These words can also be modified by adjectives: that *important* school lunch project.

Calling these modifiers nouns is only weird if we’re using a catch-all definition for adjective that it is a describing word. When we focus instead on the morphological and syntactic behavior of adjectives and of nouns, then we see that both of them can serve to modify other nouns. This is especially evident when looking at certain kinds of nouns that are names for materials like *iron, brick, stone*.

a *plastic* toy, a *brick* walkway, an *iron* gate, a *marble* bookend

You can’t have a very plastic toy (using the degree word adjective test) and the gate can’t seem iron (using the linking verb test). These modifiers are good, well-behaved nouns.