

Now this may sound a little odd, but when I'm trying to decide whether I need a hyphen in a compound adjective, I use what I call "the pink test". You can choose your own colour, but what I essentially do is I replace the words that I'm worried about with the word "pink" to try and decide if I need a hyphen. I suppose I'm deciding if it's an adjective. So, "a long-standing arrangement" – "a pink arrangement". So that to me means it's an adjective; it needs a hyphen to join those words together. Whereas "an arrangement of long standing" (no hyphen because it's after the noun) – "an arrangement of pink"? Makes no sense at all, does it?

So you might think it's a little odd, but I quite regularly get emails from people saying "Dear Cathy, sorry to bother you, but is this pink?" So I know people are using it, and I hope it might be helpful for you."