

## One Word or Two? How to Avoid These Common Mistakes

I often see a single word used when it should be two words. Here are some of the more common examples. Get a [PDF version](#) of this post here.

### Awhile and A While

*A while* is a noun phrase and means “a period of time.” It often follows a preposition. “He will be gone for a while.” One way to remember this is to substitute another noun for “while.” If it makes sense, use two words. “He will be gone for a month.”

*Awhile* is an adverb, which means “for a time.” “She plans to be gone awhile.”

### Anyway and Any Way

*Anyway* is an adverb that means “in any case.” “I am going to the party anyway.”

*Anyway* is also used as a transition between topics. “Anyway, I have to go now.”

*Any way* means an unspecified manner or method.” “Is there any way you could drive me to the party?”



### Backup and Back Up

*Backup* is a noun, often referring to digital files that have been saved elsewhere. “My backup was corrupted.”

*Backup* can also be an adjective. “It’s important to have a backup plan.”

*Back up* is a verb, referring to an activity. “I am going to back up my computer now.”

*Back up* is never hyphenated.

### Checkout and Check Out



*Checkout* is a noun, generally referring to a place to pay for items. “The supermarket has self-serve checkout.”

The word can also refer to the process of leaving someplace. “I asked the hotel clerk for a late checkout.” The noun form is sometimes written with a hyphen: *check-out*.

*Checkout* can also be an adjective, referring, for example, to a store counter where customers pay. “The cashier is at the checkout counter.”

*Check out* is a verb, which means “to leave.” “He will check out of the hotel.”

*Check out* can also mean to investigate or look at something. “I’m going to check out the new library.”

Many websites use the word incorrectly, directing you to “checkout now.” They should ask you to “check out now.”

## **Cutoff and Cut Off**

*Cutoff* is a noun, meaning a deadline or a point beyond which something can’t happen or won’t be effective. “The cutoff date for applications was Tuesday.”

The hyphenated version of the word (*cut-offs*) generally refers to shorts made from jeans with the legs cut off, leaving a ragged cut edge.

*Cut off* is a verb meaning to stop or separate. “They cut off all our supplies.”

## Checkup and Check Up



*Checkup* is a noun meaning an examination. "I'm going for my dental checkup."

*Check up* is a verb, meaning to examine, review or monitor. "I'm going to check up on the project."

## Everyday and Every Day

*Everyday* is an adjective meaning ordinary or typical. "The store offers everyday values."

*Every day* refers to something that occurs each day. "The store offers values every day."

How can you remember this? If you can replace *every day* with words such as *each day* or *every Tuesday* and the sentence makes sense, use the two-word phrase.

## Login and Log In

*Login* is a noun, describing the procedure used to get access to an operating system.

*Login* can also be used as an adjective, as in the "login procedure."

*Log in* is a verb. "I need to log in with my new password."

The same distinctions apply to "logon" and "log on."

Again, many websites incorrectly use *login* or *logon* as commands. They should be asking you to *log in* or *log on*.



*Follow-up* is a noun, meaning the act of reviewing, updating or improving something. "The report detailed the needed follow-up."

*Follow up* can also be used as an adjective. “The follow-up examination was a week after the surgery.”

*Follow up* is a verb. “I will follow up with you after the meeting.”

How can you remember this? If you can insert “the” before the word, it is a noun and you should use “follow-up.”

## Lookup and Look Up

*Lookup* is a noun, meaning the process of looking something up. The word commonly refers to computer and online searches.

*Look up* is a verb. “I’m going to look up the address.”

## Setup and Set Up

*Setup* is a noun, usually meaning an arrangement. “The setup worked well.”

*Set up* is a verb, meaning to put together or establish something. “He is going to set up shop.”

How can you remember this? Mentally replace *setup* or *set up* with *setting up*. If the sentence makes sense, use two words. If it doesn’t, use the single word. For example, the sentence “he is setting up shop” makes sense. The sentence “the settingup was all wrong” does not.

A note. This article focused on the most common uses of these words. Many of them have less common meanings.

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## About the Author



Kay Paumier works with B2B companies to get the word out and get the leads in through content marketing, public relations and other marketing services. She has a long track record of helping companies be more successful by increasing awareness of their products and services. Her clients praise her ability to

grasp the big picture, deal with the details, and do everything in between. More information is available at [www.communicationsplus.net/about](http://www.communicationsplus.net/about).

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