Word for Word

Knock out or knockout?

Knock down or knockdown?

*Knock out* and *knock down* are examples of phrasal verbs—verbs that contain more than 1 word.¹

When a phrasal verb consists of a verb plus a preposition, the verb and the preposition should be treated as 2 separate words.¹

**Examples:**

**Incorrect:** RNA interference was used to knockdown gene expression.

**Correct:** RNA interference was used to knock down gene expression.

**Incorrect:** We used the CRISPR/Cas9 system to knock-out *BRCA2*.

**Correct:** We used the CRISPR/Cas9 system to knock out *BRCA2*.

*Knockdown* and *knockout* are nouns formed from the phrasal verbs above. Nouns formed from phrasal verbs are treated as single words.

**Correct examples:**
Knockout of the gene in these mice produced an unusual phenotype. We have developed a series of knockout mice for the proposed experiments. (Here, the noun **knockout** is being used as an adjective to describe the mice.)

Phrasal verbs are very common in English. Some others that you have probably seen include **check up**, **spill over**, **take off**, and **work out**.

**References**


--Stephanie Deming, ELS

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