

# Word for Word

## Hyphenating temporary compounds: A low-stress guide



A hyphen is needed to join two or more words that function as a modifier for a noun that follows them.

### Examples:

It was a *peer-reviewed* journal.

The patient had *cancer-related* symptoms.

We recommend *breast-conserving* surgery.

I read a *well-written* article.

The old book had *black-and-white* illustrations.

That's simple, right? But there's a twist: When the same words follow the noun that they modify, the hyphen is not needed—unless, of course, the term is normally hyphenated (e.g., right-handed, brother-in-law).

**Examples:**

The journal was *peer reviewed*.

The symptoms were *cancer related*.

The surgery was *breast conserving*.

The article was *well written*.

The illustrations were in *black and white*.

Another complication: A hyphen is not used after an adverb that was formed by adding *-ly* to an adjective (e.g., largely, rapidly).

**Example:**

*highly aggressive* subtype (not *highly-aggressive* subtype)

And there's one more twist: When the modifying words are a commonly used term that is normally written without a hyphen, they are not hyphenated, even when they precede a noun that they modify. A medical dictionary can provide guidance.

**Examples:**

*sickle cell* disease (not *sickle-cell* disease)

*signet ring* cell (not *signet-ring* cell)

## **Bibliography**

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