

Two-Word Verbs

Resource: A Commonsense Guide to Grammar and Usage, 5th Edition. (p 357-365).

Two-Word Verbs: verbs that can be combined with an adverb or a preposition to form a two-word verb (also known as a phrasal verb).

- Example 1:
 - Error: Roland called up her.
 - Correction: Roland called her up.
- Example 2:
 - Error: Misako turned down them.
 - Correction: Misako turned them down.

Common Errors:

- It can be difficult to determine the meaning of a two-verb word based on the meanings of its individual words. For example, *come by* means to “get” or “obtain” but one could not know that based on the words *come* and *by*.
 - Example: How did you come by that picture?

Separable two-word verb: the adverb can be separate from the verb and moved to a position immediately after the object.

- **Separable Two-word verb = verb + adverb**

verb adverb

Before: The prince turned down the king.

After: The prince turned the king down.

- Turned down = rejected

Inseparable two-word verb: the preposition cannot be separated from the verb.

- **Inseparable Two-word verb = verb + preposition**

verb preposition

Before: The prince turned against the king.

After: The prince turned the king against.

- Turned against = became an enemy of

How to Fix this error in your writing:

- When you see these most common adverbs in a two-word verb, you can be sure that the verb and adverb are **separable**:
 - Apart, away, down, out, together, around, back, off, over, up

- When a separable two-word verb is followed by a noun, you have the option of separating the verb and the adverb.
- When the two-word verb is followed by a pronoun, then you must separate the verb and the adverb.

Separable two-word verbs

Verb + Adverb	Meaning	Example
Take apart	Disassemble	We took apart the bicycle. We took it apart .
Show around	Give a tour to	We showed around the visitors. We showed them around .
Throw away	Discard	We threw away the boxes. We threw them away .
Put back	replace	We put back the books. We put them back .
Break down	categorize	We broke down the addresses by zip code. We broke them down by zip code.
Call off	cancel	We called off the meeting. We called it off .
Find out	discover	We found out the truth. We found it out .
Talk over	discuss	We talked over the situation. We talked it over .
Keep together	Group/bunch	We kept together all the papers. We kept them together .
Hang up	disconnect	We hung up the phone. We hung it up.

Prepositional Phrase (The Movies)

- If the second word in a two-word verb can be used to form a prepositional phrase with *the movies*, it is a preposition and, thus, inseparable from the verb. If it does not work with *the movies* it is an adverb and, thus, separable from the verb.
 - Example **separable two-word verb**:
Roland called up her.
Tip applied: up the movies
 - Up is an adverb and is separable from the verb, because the object in the sentence is a pronoun (*her*).
 - Example **inseparable two-word verb**:
We stopped at a fast-food restaurant for lunch.
Tip applied: At the movies
 - Since *at* makes sense with *the movies* as an object, *stop at* is inseparable.

***In* and *On* Two-Word Verbs**

- *In* and *on* are commonly used in two-word verbs, either as adverbs in separable or as prepositions in inseparable two-word verbs.
- The movies tip does not help as these words *in* and *on* can be adverbs or prepositions.

In and On as Adverbs (Separable)

Verb + adverb	Meaning	Example
Turn in	Submit	We turned in our papers. We turned them in .
Turn on	Activate	We turned on the radio. We turned it on .

In and On as Prepositions (Inseparable)

Verb + adverb	Meaning	Example
Look into	investigate	The FBI will look into the case. The FBI will look into it.
Call on	visit	We called on some friends. We called on them.