

¶847

Compound Computer Terms

847 The free spirits who coin most computer terms typically feel no obligation to follow the standard rules for the treatment of compound words. Consider the term *World Wide Web*. According to ¶820e, *worldwide* should be a solid word, but actual usage—in this case, *World Wide*—must always take precedence over rules. Indeed, the rules merely represent an attempt to impose some order and consistency on a language that cheerfully persists in disorder and inconsistency.

The problem is especially severe in the treatment of compound words in computer terminology, where changes occur so rapidly that it is impossible to establish a style that one can confidently expect to last for several years. What's more, at any given time a particular word may be in a state of unsettled transition and appear in several ways—hyphenated, spaced, and solid. The general tendency is for hyphenated forms to give way to either spaced or solid forms and for the spaced forms to give way to solid forms.

Consider the word *e-mail*. Initially presented as *electronic mail*, the term evolved into *E-mail*, and conservative writers still write the word with a capital *E*. Writers on the cutting edge, who continually press for fewer hyphens and less capitalization, converted the term to *email* some time ago. Those currently occupying the middle ground treat the word as *e-mail*, but with the passage of time (two years? four years? six months?) *email* may become the standard form. (See ¶847g, note.)

Dictionaries typically show the more conservative spellings, because they cannot keep pace with the changes rapidly taking place in this field. Where, then, do you turn for up-to-date guidance? The best places to look are (1) the magazines and dictionaries devoted to computer and Internet technology and (2) the manuals and style guides published by industry insiders. If you are writing for a knowledgeable audience of computer users, you can choose the emerging style for the treatment of compound words. If, on the other hand, you are writing for readers who are not immersed in the field, you may find it safer to stay with the more conservative treatment of these words, because such readers will more easily grasp, say, *file name* than *filename*.

The following paragraphs provide some guidelines on the current treatment of compound computer terms.

a. In the following list, the two-word forms (shown first) are still more common, but the one-word forms are starting to take hold.

file name	OR:	filename	screen saver	OR:	screensaver
home page	OR:	homepage	spell checker	OR:	spellchecker
menu bar	OR:	menubar	voice mail	OR:	voicemail

b. In the following list, the one-word forms (shown first) are more common, but the spaced or hyphenated forms are still being used.

barcode	OR:	bar code	logoff (n.)	OR:	log-off
handheld	OR:	hand-held	BUT:	log off (v.)	
hardwired	OR:	hard-wired	logon (n.)	OR:	log-on
offline	OR:	off-line	BUT:	log on (v.)	

offscreen	OR: off-screen	touchpad	OR: touch pad
online	OR: on-line	touchscreen	OR: touch screen
onscreen	OR: on-screen	wordwrap	OR: word wrap

- c. In the following list, the two-word forms (shown first) are more common, but the hyphenated forms (which follow the standard rules) are also being used.

dot matrix printers	OR: dot-matrix printers
local area networks	OR: local-area networks
wide area networks	OR: wide-area networks

- d. In the following list, the hyphenated forms (shown first) are more common, but the solid or spaced forms (if given) are used in materials aimed at industry insiders.

dot-com	drop-down menu	OR: dropdown menu
pop-up window	pull-down menu	OR: pulldown menu
read-only memory	ink-jet printer	OR: inkjet printer
write-only files	random-access memory	OR: random access memory

- e. The following compound words are solid except in a few special cases.

backup (n. & adj.)	lookup (n.)	trackball
BUT: back up (v.)	BUT: look up (v.)	trackpad
desktop	newsgroup	uplink (n. & v.)
downlink (n. & v.)	newsreader	upload (n. & v.)
download (n. & v.)	BUT: news server	userid (derived from <i>user ID</i>)
keyword	palmtop	whois (derived from <i>who is</i>)
laptop	toolbar	workstation

- f. Compound words beginning with *Web* are usually two words.

Web site	Web server	BUT: Webmaster
Web page	Web browser	Webcasting
Web surfer	Web directory	Webzine
Web index	Web clipping	Weblog
Web cam	Web terminal	Webinar

NOTE: The term *Web site* is still most commonly written as two words with a capital *W*. However, along with a few other Web compounds, it has started to appear as a solid word without an initial cap (*website*). In order to maintain a consistent style, it is better to retain the capital *W* until a majority of these terms (such as the *World Wide Web* and *the Web*) lose their initial cap as well.

- g. Compound words beginning with the prefix *e* are usually hyphenated.

e-banking	e-credit	e-tail OR: e-tailing
e-book	e-currency	e-text
e-business	e-dress (an e-mail address)	e-wallet
e-cash	e-lance	BUT: eBay (see ¶ 363c)
e-commerce	e-learning	eDonkey
e-economy	e-money	eHarmony

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NOTE: The term *e-mail* can still be seen as *E-mail* (the original form of the word) and also as *email* (without the hyphen), but the hyphenated form is still the one most commonly used. In order to maintain a consistent style, it is better to retain the hyphen in *e-mail* until many of the other *e* words start to drop the hyphen as well.

- h.** The prefix *i* (which refers to the Internet) appears both with and without a hyphen when it is attached to a base word.

iPod	i-Lighter
iMac	i-Newswire
iTunes	i-flex solutions
iPhone	i-Safe
iTools	BUT: I-80 (here <i>I</i> stands for Interstate)

- i.** The prefix *m* (which refers to the use of mobile phones) is usually followed by a hyphen when it is attached to a base word.

m-business	m-commerce
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Sometimes One Word, Sometimes Two Words

848 A number of common words may be written either as one solid word or as two separate words, depending on the meaning. See individual entries listed alphabetically in ¶1101 (unless otherwise indicated) for the following words:

Almost—all most	Indirect—in direct
Already—all ready	Into—in to (see <i>In</i>)
Altogether—all together	Maybe—may be
Always—all ways	Nobody—no body
Anymore—any more	None—no one (see ¶1013a–b)
Anyone—any one (see ¶1010, note)	Onto—on to (see <i>On</i>)
Anytime—any time	Someday—some day
Anyway—any way	Someone—some one (see ¶1010, note)
Awhile—a while	Sometime—sometimes—some time
Everyday—every day	Upon—up on (see <i>On</i>)
Everyone—every one (see ¶1010, note)	Whatever—what ever
Indifferent—in different	Whoever—who ever

➡ *Hyphens in spelled-out numbers: see ¶¶427, 465.*

Hyphens in spelled-out dates: see ¶411a.

Hyphens in spelled-out amounts of money: see ¶420b.

Hyphens in spelled-out fractions: see ¶427.

Hyphens in numbers representing a continuous sequence: see ¶¶459–460.