



## WORDS AND THEIR STORIES

# Seeing 'Double'?

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And now, *Words and Their Stories*, from VOA Learning English.

Today we talk about one of those English words that changes meaning depending on the words added to it. “Double” is just such a word.

It is such a useful word that we should discuss it on the double! That means quickly. If I say, “Get here on the double,” it means get here as soon as you can. Please.

But that is just one of the many uses of this **versatile** word.

“Double” means two of something. So, if you double up on something, you increase the amount by two. For example, if I plan to enter a swimming race, I might want to double up on my training. So, if I train one hour a day, I would increase my training to two hours a day.

Now, if you add “down” to “double” you get something completely different. If you double down, you stick to a position or undertaking even if it is not a good one. You are not willing to change your position at all. For example, instead of apologizing for a poorly worded statement, the politician doubled down and said it again. Here, we could also say he dug in his heels.

Now, if something does double duty it serves two purposes. For example, an exercise bike serves double duty if I can also dry my towels on it. People can also do double duty. That means they do two jobs or the work of two people.

Let’s combine “double” with the word “back.” If you double back, you turn around and come back the same way that you came. One time I took a hike and got a little lost. So, instead of continuing, I just doubled back: I returned the way that I came.

A delayed reaction to something that takes you by surprise is called a double take. We usually say do a double take. For example, I did a double take when I saw my co-worker after a year. She had a new haircut and a **tattoo**. I had to double-check if it was even her. When I looked again and made sure it was my friend, I told her how much I liked her tattoo. Then she doubled over with laughter. As it turns out, it was a temporary tattoo. When we double over, we bend over and cannot stand up straight because of laughter or from pain.

For some reason, certain “double” words are not good.

For example, double-crossing someone means to cheat them. A double-cross is a **betrayal**. We could also use the word double-dealing which has a similar meaning.

Double talk is language that appears to be meaningful but, in fact, is a mixture of sense and nonsense. And doublespeak is language used to trick people by hiding some of the truth.

A double standard is a set of **principles** or rules that apply differently and usually more severely to one group of people than to another. For example, people are not surprised if an older man dates a much younger woman. However, those same people may criticize a woman who dates a much younger man. That is a common double standard because the outcomes are so different.

And that's the end of this *Words and Their Stories*. I hope you enjoyed this exploration of the many word combinations using “double.” You may want to double up on your English lessons by practicing with the combinations of this very useful word.

Until next time ... I'm Anna Matteo.

*Anna Matteo wrote this story for VOA Learning English.*

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## Words in This Story

**versatile** *-adj.* something with many different uses

**dig in** *-v.* to take a position and to be unwilling to give up that position

**tattoo** -*n.* a permanent picture written in ink on a person's skin

**betrayal** -*n.* to hurt someone who trusts you or who can expect you to deal with them honestly or impartially by moral or ethical rules

**principle** -*n.* (*often pl.*) a moral rule or belief that people use to decide what is right and what is wrong

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