Ms. Particular Presents: Setup vs. Set up

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“Setup” (written closed) is a noun

Use it to describe a collection of equipment designed to perform a specific function or the way something is organized or arranged

Think: an apparatus is a setup—they’re both one-word nouns

Fig. 1. Vacuum setup in the DeMarco lab. The vacuum system is pumped by 20-l/s and 40-l/s ion pumps and a Ti sublimation pump.
“Set up” (written open) is a verb

Use it to describe how an action is performed

If it comes after a “to be” verb, or if you can insert “it” between “set” and “up” and still have the phrase make sense—write it as two separate words

Fig. 2. The system is set up so that magnetic trap lifetimes in the science cell are >5 min.