

# Word for Word

Come to terms with *lapse* vs. *elapse* before  
more time elapses!



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The spellings of *lapse* and *elapse* differ by just one letter, but the words themselves usually have very different meanings.

Used as a noun, *lapse* generally indicates an interruption, decline, or cessation.

## Examples:

Increased demand for cronuts has led to a lapse in the supply of the confections.

A brief lapse in security was all it took for the three thieves to breach the bakery's back door.

One of the thieves displayed a lapse in judgment when he chose to break the display case with his forehead.

As a verb, *lapse* tends to indicate a change in the status of a person or thing, usually towards a state of inactivity.

**Examples:**

The unfortunate man lapsed into unconsciousness as the other two thieves stuffed cronuts into their sacks.

Any discussion of retrieving the unconscious Harry from the bakery lapsed as soon as Kevin and Marv were back in the getaway van.

In contrast, *elapse* is almost always used as a verb to describe the passage of time.

**Example:**

Several hours elapsed before the baker discovered the cronut theft and the unconscious criminal.

However, both “lapse” and “elapse” can mean a particular passage of time.

**Examples:**

The other two thieves were apprehended after a lapse of several days.

After an elapse of just a few minutes, the jury found all three men guilty of theft.

## References

Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary. 2022. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lapse>. Accessed January 14, 2022.

Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary. 2022. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/elapse>. Accessed January 14, 2022.

-- Joe Munch

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