

Johnson County Community College

## HYPHEN and DASH

### HYPHEN

No hyphen is used

when the **compound adjective follows the noun.**

The highway was well paved.

when the **first word is an adverb ending in *ly*.**

The neatly cut lawn was much admired.

The **hyphen** is used

to **join compound words.**

mother-in-law

to **join words used as a single adjective before a noun.**

It was a well-paved highway.

with **compound numbers from 21 to 99 and with fractions.**

twenty-two, fifty-first, three-fourths (some authorities write three fourths--no hyphen), two hundred ten

with **compound adjectives containing numbers.**

a ten-year-old boy, a forty-hour week, the hundred-yard dash, a ten-dollar bill, a two-room apartment, two- and three-story houses

to **avoid ambiguity.**

One sense: She recovered her pillow from the dog.

Other sense: She re-covered her pillow in red silk.

Misleading: Along came fifty foot soldiers.

Clear: Along came fifty foot-soldiers.

with **prefixes** *ex*, *self*, *all*, and the suffix *elect*.

ex-President Hoover  
self-confidence  
all-American  
Senator-elect Smith

NOTE: *Bi* and *tri* are not hyphenated prefixes.

*Semi* is hyphenated only when combined with words beginning with *i* (*semi-independence*) or with a proper noun (*semi-Russian*); otherwise, it is not hyphenated (*semiannually*, *semiprofessional*).  
*Un* is hyphenated in *un-American*.

to **indicate hesitation or stuttering**.

"I'm g-g-g-glad," she said.

to **indicate that words are spelled out**.

"She wants a d-o-l-l," her mother said.

for **syllabication** (use hyphens between syllables when a word is divided between lines).

NOTE: The hyphen is placed at the end of the first line, never at the beginning of the second line. Consult a dictionary if you are uncertain where a word is divided.

Follow these rules for syllabication:

Never divide words of one syllable.

Never divide a word so that a single letter stands alone on a line.

When dividing a compound word that already contains a hyphen, make the break where the hyphen occurs.

You may divide words between double consonants.

## **DASH**

A dramatic mark of punctuation, the dash should not be used as a careless substitute for commas, periods, or semicolons. Do not overuse it. It is created by placing two hyphens in a row (on the computer) with no spaces before or after.

The **dash** is used

**to show a sudden break in thought.**

I'll give--let's see, what can I give?

NOTE: Omit the period or the question mark when the expression ends with a dash.

Well, if that is how you feel--

He began, "May I ask--"

**to set off a parenthetical element.**

He arrived--would you believe it?--in five minutes.

I found--it's hard to believe, but it's true--ten dollars.

**to emphasize an appositive.**

He has only one interest--food.

Teas, dances, blind dates--all are a part of college.

The subjects--English, history, and science--are required.

NOTE: The dashes set off an appositive more emphatically than commas, which may also be used. The colon, which is equally emphatic, has a more formal flavor than the dash.

**to precede the author's name after a direct quotation.**

"True ease in writing comes from art, not chance."--Pope

## Practice Exercises

Punctuate the following sentences with the correct mark of punctuation, hyphens or dashes.

1. I'll play what can I play?
2. At eighty two, Aunt Tilly is still active.
3. Tom rented a two room apartment while he was attending college.
4. Jon received a five dollar bill from his grandma.
5. I need to buy some more up to date clothes.
6. A clear head, a warm heart, and a willing attitude these are essential attributes for being successful.
7. Getting to work at eight o'clock every morning I don't have to remind you how much I hate getting up early seemed almost more than I cared to undertake.
8. His father in law dislikes going to the basketball tournament.
9. The dentist wore his happy to see you smile.
10. We will be working on the project until mid May.