



WRITING CENTER

Hyphens and Dashes

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THE HYPHEN

The hyphen (-) is a short line used to divide words or to combine them.

HYPHEN AS A DIVIDER

As a divider the hyphen is used chiefly to break a word into syllables—usually at the end of a line—because it’s sometimes better to divide words rather than have an uneven paragraph.

Do This When Using a Hyphen as a Divider

1. Divide syllables by pronunciation: **quar-tet, tire-some, mid-dle.**
2. When words exceed two syllables, divide by pronunciation. Be sure to keep a meaningful syllable: **depart-ment, *not* de-partment; hyper-bole, *not* hy-perbole.**
3. When consonants come between vowels, divide between the consonants: **ripple to rip-ple.**
4. Divide after a prefix: **foreman to fore-man.** Common prefixes are **anti-, ante-, be-, con-, de-, ex-, fore-, in-, intro-.**
5. Divide before a suffix: **leading to lead-ing.** Common suffixes are **-able, -fully, -ible, -icle, -ing, -sion, -tion, -tive.**
6. Use a hyphen to show hesitation or stuttering: “I’m **g-g-g-glad,**” she said.
7. Use a hyphen to show words spelled out: “She wants a **d-o-l-l,**” her mother said.
8. Use a hyphen to avoid confusion: “She **re-covered** her pillow in red silk.”, ***not*** “She **recovered** her pillow in red silk.”



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Don't Do This When Using a Hyphen as a Divider

1. Never divide one-syllable words: **wrong, *not* wr-ong; which, *not* wh-ich.**
2. Never divide a word after a single letter: **abroad, *not* a-broad; enough, *not* e-nough.**
3. Never divide on a syllable with a silent vowel: **passed, *not* pass-ed; spelled, *not* spell-ed.**
4. Avoid divisions with two-letter syllables: **until, *not* un-til; money, *not* mon-ey.**
5. Never divide a contraction: couldn't, wouldn't, shouldn't, mustn't.
6. Never divide an abbreviation—UNESCO, ACLU—or acronyms—AWOL, AIDS.
7. Never divide a number with less than ten numerals. If this is the case, divide the number after a comma: **1,000,000,-000, *not* 1,000,0-00,000.**

HYPHEN AS A COMBINER

A hyphen is also used to combine words, fusing the separate words into a new whole.

Do This When Using a Hyphen as a Combiner

1. Hyphenate two or more words used as a single adjective preceding a noun: **iron-clad contract, out-of-date idea.**
2. Hyphenate two or more words used as a single part of speech: **go-between, forget-me-nots.**
3. Hyphenate compound words: **mother-in-law.**
4. Hyphenate compounds in which the first element is self-, all-, or ex-: **self-satisfied, ex-champion, all-knowing.**
5. Hyphenate compound numbers and fractions used as adjectives: pages **21-99, twenty-one** years; **two-thirds** majority.
6. Hyphenate three identical consonants: **hall-lamp, grass-seed, shell-like.**
7. Hyphenate two identical vowels: **pre-eminent, re-emerge.**



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8. Hyphenate a lower-case and a capital letter: **un-American, pre-Christian.**
9. Hyphenate compound adjectives containing numbers: a **ten-year-old** boy, **two-** and **three-story** houses.

Don't Do This When Using a Hyphen as a Combiner

1. Never use a hyphen when the compound adjective follows the noun: The highway was **well paved.**
2. Never use a hyphen when the first word is an adverb ending in ly: The **neatly cut** lawn was much admired.

THE DASH

A dash (—) is a dramatic punctuation mark. It is used to show a sudden break in thought or to set off elements in a sentence.

Note: A dash should not be used as a careless substitute for commas, period, or semicolons.

How to Create a Dash

1. Type a word, with no space after it.
2. Type two hyphens, with no space between or after them.
3. Type another word.
4. Type a space.
5. The two hyphens will merge into a dash.

Do This When Using a Dash

1. Use a dash to show a sudden break in thought. Omit the ending punctuation when the expression ends with a dash:

Example: I'll give—let's see, what can I give?
Well, if that's how you feel—

2. Use a dash to set off a parenthetical element:



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Example: He arrived—would you believe it?—in five minutes.

3. Use a dash when you want to emphasize a word or phrase. Dashes set these off more emphatically than commas:

Example: She has only one interest—food.
The subjects—English, history, and science—are required.

4. Use a dash before the author's name after a direct quotation:

Example: "*True ease in writing comes from art, not chance.*"—Pope

EXERCISES

EXERCISES FOR DIVIDING

Divide the following words according to pronunciation:

happiness _____

persecute _____

perpendicular _____

responsible _____

sophistication _____

pretentious _____

Divide the following words with two consonants standing together between two vowels:

passion _____

sarcasm _____



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mountain_____

structure_____

pasture_____

tripping_____

Among the following words, divide into syllables **only** those words able to be divided if they appear at the end of the line:

buoyant_____

climbed_____

even_____

losses_____

unite_____

often_____

idol_____

excessive_____

criticism_____

EXERCISES FOR COMBINING

Place the hyphen between the words requiring hyphenation.



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1. The mop up over, the victorious leader of the opposition pledged that his government would adopt a pro United States middle road government.
2. Connecticut will turn darkness into daylight on the most heavily traveled section of its new turnpike in the hope of cutting night time accidents by one third.
3. An all night session left the legislators weary, knee deep in unfinished business, and still lacking the two thirds majority to defeat the bill against filibustering.
4. All cargo transport planes offer dependable on time deliveries to eighty six countries and territories on all six continents.
5. My mother in law visited her ten year old grandchild in the hospital.
6. President elect Smith made his way to the rally of foreign born citizens.

EXERCISES FOR DASHES

Punctuate the following sentences with the correct mark for dashes, if applicable.

1. I'll play what can I play?
2. A clear head, a warm heart, and a willing attitude these are essential attributes for being successful.
3. 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.