

Hyphens

Use a hyphen (-) to join two or more words used as a single adjective before a noun.

We were delayed by a slow-moving train.

Do not use a hyphen when the compound adjective follows the noun or the first word is an adverb ending in *ly*.

The highway was well paved.

The neatly cut lawn was much admired.

A hyphen is used in some compound words and with some prefixes (all-, ex-, self-) and suffixes.

My impatient sister-in-law was really upset.

All students in my math class appeared to be self-motivated.

The U.S. Army All-American Bowl is a football game held annually in Texas.

Ex-President Hoover started his term in 1929.

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*).

It is used with compound numbers from 21 to 99 and with fractions.

Everyone was supposed to read pages 24-94 over the weekend.

All twenty-one students were present.

It is used with compound adjectives containing numbers.

The ten-year-old boy played fetch with his dog.

It is used to avoid ambiguity.

Along came fifty foot soldiers. (Unclear)

Along came fifty foot-soldiers. (Clear)

It is used for syllabication (use hyphens between syllables when a word is di-vided between lines)

Dashes

A dash (--) indicates a dramatic pause or special emphasis. Dashes are used to emphasize information that interrupts the flow of a sentence.

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

It can be used to show a sudden break in thought.

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

A dash can also be used to highlight a special comment or shift in meaning at the end of a sentence.

I knew the material perfectly--until test day.

A dash is also found before a summarizing phrase or clause that follows a list.

Math, English, psychology, communications--I have a busy schedule this quarter.

Note: the dash should not be used haphazardly as a substitute for commas, periods, or semicolons. Do not overuse it!

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 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.