

Hyphen and Dash

Use a hyphen:

1. To divide a word that cannot be completed before the end of a line. Split the word properly between syllables, using a dictionary if unsure of correct divisions.
2. To divide the parts of certain compound words. Check the dictionary to determine if a compound word needs a hyphen.
3. To join two or more words serving as a single adjective before a noun. No hyphen is used if the adjectives come after the word they describe.

i.e. "We have an up-to-date computer system."
"Our computer system is up to date."

4. To spell out the written form of fractions (one-half, two-thirds) and compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine.
5. With the prefixes all-, ex-, and self-, and with the suffix -elect. Also, in a series, hyphens are suspended for each item.

i.e. Do you prefer first-, second-, or third-class tickets?

Note: Do not insert a hyphen to divide a long Internet address at the end of a line, because a hyphen could appear to be part of the address.

Use a dash:

1. To set off a sudden break in thought or an abrupt change in tone.
Example: "The large house—and make no mistake, it was large—burned to the ground."
2. To show faltering speech in a dialogue.
Example: "Would—would you please help me?" he asked quietly.
3. Between an introductory series and that main part of the sentence that explains or amplifies the series.

Example: "Marble-topped tables, two Singer sewing machines, a big vase of pampas grass—everything was rich and grand," wrote Carson McCullers in her book.

4. To set off a noun or noun phrase that already contains commas.
Example: The basic needs of people—food, clothing, and shelter—are costly in big cities like Los Angeles.
5. Before the name of an author after a quotation taken from his or her writings.
Example: "Gladly would he teach and gladly learn." —Geoffrey Chaucer.

Note: In typing, use two hyphens with no space in between. In writing, use one long, horizontal line. Dashes should also be used sparingly to avoid creating a choppy effect.