

Punctuation

Hyphen - Compounding:

Note the difference between a hyphen - (N Dash) and a dash — (M dash).

Use the hyphen to join the segments of a compound idea that is not a single word. All compound ideas are first expressed with multiple words. Over time, many such ideas have evolved into single-word expressions:

	Original	Hyphenated	Modern,
single word			
courthouse	court house	court-house	
hardware	hard ware	hard-ware	
firefighter	fire fighter	fire-fighter	

There is still disagreement in many cases as to whether certain compound expressions are words or not:

jack-boot, fishhawk (Webster's 1947)

jackboot, fish hawk (Webster's 1983)

NOTE: Since the rules regarding hyphenation are not static, always use a CURRENT dictionary for reference.

The meaning of words can be altered through use of the hyphen to more strongly link them:

A fat cat is an obese feline.

A fat-cat is a successful capitalist.

Use the hyphen in certain prepositional phrases that function as one entity:

brother-in-law, cheek-to-cheek

NOTE: Once again, exceptions abound; this rule is impossible to apply without the help of a good, CURRENT dictionary for reference.

Use the hyphen to create compound adjectives and adverbs:

big-time gambler, hot-shot player

fast- and junk-food outlets

Do not use the hyphen if the adjective follows the noun or predicate:

outlets for junk food

players, hot shot and otherwise

Do not use the hyphen if the adverb modifying the adjective ends in ly:

perfectly balanced checkbook

Do not use the hyphen to separate proper nouns when used adjectivally:

Southern California beaches

Prince Albert oil spill

Use the hyphen to form compounds of prefixes and proper nouns:

anti-American, pre-Colombian

Do not use the hyphen if the stem is not a proper noun:

antigravity, interactive

Use the hyphen to separate vowels that are incidentally doubled (aa, ee, etc.) in forming compound words:

pre-election

Hyphen - Dividing:

Most word-processing programs are equipped to automatically hyphenate words when they must be divided at the end of a line of text. Whether the division of words is performed manually or automatically, the following rules apply:

Divide words only at syllables.

Do not divide monosyllables.

Do not divide short words (4 letters or less).

Do not divide words into segments of fewer than three letters.

When possible, divide words at their prefixes or suffixes.

Do not divide these suffixes from their stems:

cial, tial, cion, sion, tion

cious, geous, gious, tious

However, these suffixes may be divided from their stems:

ance, ence, ant, ent

able, ible, tave, tive

Divide a word between consecutive vowels when both are pronounced:

pale-olithic

Do not separate consecutive vowels that are pronounced as a single sound:

appear-ance

-NOT-

appe-arance

Divide words between double consonants (rr,ss, etc.), except when the stem ends in the double consonant:

embar-rass,

-BUT-

dress-ing, not dres-sing

When a word must be divided at a single consonant, and the preceding vowel is short, the consonant remains with that syllable. But when the preceding vowel is long, the consonant goes with the following syllable:

bal-ance, oppo-nent

Do not divide proper nouns.

Do not separate initials, titles, or capitalized forms of address from the names to which they refer.

Do not divide a word at the end of a paragraph or page.

Do not add a hyphen to divide a word that is already hyphenated.

Do not let more than two consecutive lines end in a hyphen.

NOTE: The last rule is difficult to apply when using auto-hyphenation in a word-processing environment. But, since too many adjacent lines ending with hyphens can make an otherwise neat document look ragged, try a little rewording to avoid the problem.

Hyphen - Names:

Hyphenated surnames are treated as one name:

Elizabeth Barklay-Petersen

Hyphen - Numbers:

Use the hyphen to express compound numbers:

twenty-one, one hundred and fifty-six,
twenty-five thousands

Use the hyphen to join numbers with other words when they are used as adjectives:

six-o'clock express, ten-foot wall
—BUT—
the express at six o'clock

the eight-thirty show

—BUT—

the show at eight thirty

five-, ten-, or even twenty-horsepower motor
—BUT—
a motor of twenty horsepower

Fractions are hyphenated when they are used as adjectives, but not when they are nouns:

three-quarter turn
—BUT—
less than one half

Hyphen - Titles:

Military rank and civil titles are not hyphenated:

Sergeant Major, Vice President

But when the office itself is referred to, use the hyphen:

the vice-presidency

Use the hyphen with "elect" or "ex":

Mayor-elect, ex-President

Parentheses - Explanations:

Use parentheses when inserting a nonessential explanation into text:

(a He listened to language tapes on his long commute
round distance of eighty miles) and became an
accomplished linguist.

They went on daily visits (just he and his language
tapes) to Asia, Mexico, and Greece.

Parentheses - To Set Off:

Use parentheses to set off information that helps to clarify, but is not essential to the meaning of the sentence:

became Commuting (though a crashing bore to most)
his escape valve in a hectic and demanding world.

Will Rogers (1879-1935) was one of America's most popular philosophers and humorists.

Parentheses - With Other Punctuation:

An exclamation point or question mark within parentheses can denote sarcasm, doubt, emphasis, or irony:

His chief attribute was his gift (?) of gab.

The room filled quickly with a pungent (!) aroma.

Do not use a comma, semicolon, or colon behind the parentheses unless it would have been required even in their absence:

A group of the ranch hands (about a dozen) decided to rustle the herd.

Their luck finally ran out (September 7, 1889); they were apprehended and hanged by a posse.

NOTE: Never use a comma, semicolon, or colon immediately in front of parentheses.

Periods and other end punctuation are placed within the parentheses when the matter enclosed is a complete sentence:

They called him "Slugman" because of the way he inched along on his stomach. (He had picked up the trick in the Marines.)

The whole conversation was filled with allusions to her Hollywood career. (Could she really have been in all those films?)

Periods and other end punctuation are placed outside the parentheses when the matter enclosed is only part of the sentence:

The cheapest seats are on Roadways (the bus line).

Why should we care what they do with the darned things (their junk cars)?

If the parenthetical matter is a question or exclamation, the appropriate mark

is inserted within the parentheses:

She said she had been a stand-in for Hepburn (or was it Garbo?) in several epics.

She talked for more than an hour about her stunts (shouting and flapping her arms!) and nearly ruined the party.

Period - Abbreviations:

Use a period at the end of an abbreviation that stands for a single word:

dept. agcy. cntl. Corp. Blvd.

But omit the period if the abbreviation is followed by a final punctuation mark or a colon:

Has he gone to work for the highway dept?

With many abbreviations, the trend is to eliminate the period:

oz, lbs, mpg, rpm

Do not use a period after the letters in abbreviations for agencies or well-known entities:

FDA, FAA, IRS, NBC, ACLU

The period is optional when using initials for people's full names:

J. F. K. or JFK

Period - Decimals:

Use a period for a decimal point in number expression:

22.5 .078 .0003 364.786098

Period - Ending a Sentence:

Use a period at the end of a declarative sentence:

A slender dog runs fastest.

The largest share goes to the winner.

Use a period at the end of an imperative sentence that is not as strong as a command:

Put the cap back on the bottle.

Leave the fish in the water.

Period - Questions:

Use a period at the end of an indirect question:

They could not discover who had done it.

I wonder how that happened.

Use a period after a question that is a request:

Will you please hand me the paper.

May I be excused.