

Hyphens

WHAT IS A HYPHEN?

A hyphen (-) is a short line within a word that is used to compound, or join, two separate words or to separate a word at the end of a printed line of text. It is also used with certain prefixes and for clarity.

Hyphen Usage

1. Compound Words

*Hyphenate two words when they are being used as a single adjective before a noun but not after.

She is a well-respected professor.

She is a professor who is well respected.

- Never use a hyphen in conjunction with words ending in *-ly*. In this case, a hyphen is not necessary because it is already known that the adverb is modifying the adjective that it precedes.

Incorrect: This is a poorly-constructed paragraph.

Correct: This is a poorly constructed paragraph.

2. Prefixes/ Suffixes

*Hyphenate words with certain prefixes, including those followed by a proper noun or proper adjective. The most common prefixes are listed below:

ex- (meaning former)

self-

all-

mid-

anti-

pre-

The suffix *-elect* is also hyphenated.

The commencement ceremony is held in mid-June.

This article exemplifies a very anti-American sentiment.

Mrs. Lee is the president-elect of our school board.

She has not spoken to her ex-boyfriend since graduation.

3. Avoiding Confusion

*Hyphenate words to avoid unintended meaning or to separate same consecutive letters.

I re-sent that last e-mail. (Resent is different!)

He is ready to re-sign his contract. (Resign could mean the opposite.)

They would vote to re-form the community.
(as opposed to reform, or change, it)

- A phrase like “*ten gallon bottles*” needs clarification. Are they *ten-gallon bottles* of an unspecified number or ten containers with a capacity of a gallon each (“*ten gallon-bottles*”)?
- Two or more of the same letters in a row are customarily made less awkward by being separated with a hyphen, for example: *semi-independent shell-like*

4. Compound Numbers

*Use a hyphen between tens and ones places only. Hyphenate written fractions only when used as adjectives.

This May his girlfriend will be twenty-one.

We had to add thirty-five people to the growing guest list.

They won their proposal by a two-thirds vote.

5. End of a Line of Text

*Use a hyphen to divide a word at the end of a line of text if necessary. Always separate between syllables and, in the case of already hyphenated words, only where the hyphen occurs naturally.

Examples: eval-u-ate pref-er-ence self-conscious (already hyphenated)

- DO NOT hyphenate a word to the next page and do not leave a single letter at the end of a line or the beginning of a new one. DO NOT leave two-letter suffixes at the start of a line.
- DO NOT hyphenate proper nouns or proper adjectives.

Incorrect: He is a South-American exchange student. (proper adjective)
In 1981, Greece joined the Common-Market. (proper noun)

- In the case of *-ing* endings, always divide the word there unless the root word that precedes it has an added double consonant. If it does, the word should be divided between the two consonants.

Examples: **call-ing** (double consonant is part of root)
 driv-ing **run-ning** (added double consonant)

Common Hyphenated Words

black-and-blue

brother(s)/father(s)/mother(s)/sister(s)-in-law

in-laws

editor-in-chief

merry-go-round

t-shirt

up-to-date