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**  
- **in-laws**  
- **merry-go-round**  
- **up-to-date**  
- **brother(s)/father(s)/mother(s)/sister(s)-in-law**  
- **editor-in-chief**  
- **t-shirt**  

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