



# Hyphens, Dashes, and Parentheses

Hyphens, dashes, and parentheses are punctuation marks that are often used to join or separate ideas within sentences. They are just a few of the tools that can help give your writing more variety, allowing you to convey subtlety of expression. Although you may not have noticed these devices before, or used them regularly, they are common in many forms of writing. However, when used too often, these tools can run the risk of making your writing look sloppy or too busy. This handout will provide descriptions of hyphens, dashes, and parentheses, along with guidelines for their use and examples. You will also be able to test your knowledge of the use of these punctuation marks with a challenge exercise.

## Hyphen

A hyphen (-) is a punctuation mark that's used to join words, word-parts, or numbers. The most recognizable usage of a hyphen is to create compound words (two words linked to create a new word with its own unique meaning), but hyphens have many uses. Here are a few of the most common uses of hyphens:

**Usage 1:** To create compound words.

**Example:** This project focuses on cross-species disease transmission.

**Note:** In this case, the hyphen is used to clarify what kind of disease transmission the project discusses.

**Usage 2:** To divide a word when it occurs at the end of a line.

**Example:** Though popularized by the musical *Mary Poppins*, the word supercalifragilisticexpialidocious was first recorded in 1931 (though with a different spelling).

**Usage 3:** To separate a prefix, suffix, or medial element from the rest of the word.

**Examples:** Mid-summer, length-wise, will-o'-the-wisp

**Usage 4:** To indicate the tens and ones columns in compound numbers.

**Examples:** forty-two, five hundred sixty-nine

## Parentheses

Parentheses are used to add additional information without garnering focus. Usually, the material in the parentheses is de-emphasized, creating a side note. The information contained within parentheses is not always essential to the meaning of the sentence. Parentheses can enclose reference material: numerals, page numbers, or lists.

**Example:**

The car's parts (carburetor, spark plugs, and hoses) needed to be fixed.

The grammar surrounding parentheses is straightforward. Essentially, a parenthetical note, when inserted into a sentence, acts as an intruder. If the intruder were to be taken out of the sentence, the meaning of the sentence should not change.

**Grammar guideline:**

Periods and commas should occur outside of the parentheses unless they're part of the parenthetical whole.

**Example:**

The U.S. Patent Office (inaugurated in 1838) has granted more patents for mouse traps than any other invention.

The only exception would be if the parentheses hold the position of a sentence. (For example, this would be an example of parentheses acting as a sentence.)

## Dashes

Dashes create emphasis. Use dashes when you want the reader to pay attention to an insertion or an idea that is separate from the main sentence. Dashes and parentheses work the same way in that — between the dashes — you can use whatever sentence construction you like, as long as the material obeys basic grammatical rules.

**Example 1:**

The first stampede attracted legendary cowboys — including Poncho Villas bandits — in pursuit of \$20,000 in prizes and world titles.

**Example 2:**

Former American cowboy, Guy Weadick — promoter of wild west style shows in Canada — developed an annual frontier celebration that became the Calgary Stampede.

Another usage of dashes is to indicate an inclusive range of numbers.

**Example:**

The required reading for this week is pages 40-75 of the course textbook.

## Practice

Use the chart below to practice your hyphen, dash, and parenthesis expertise. Rewrite the sentences on a separate page to incorporate words and phrases in the chart.

### Example sentences

1. City council voted on a bill to restrict housing developments in the SW.
2. A south LRT line could replace bus routes.
3. A vaccine for malaria could reduce deaths.
4. Research suggests that Canadians are consuming excessive sodium.

Hyphens	Dashes	Parentheses
newly-proposed	—an expensive proposal —	(mostly single family homes)
pre-existing	— greatly reducing traffic congestion—	(proposed by Calgary Transit)
ground-breaking	—reported by the New York Times—	(common in several African and South American countries)
seven-tenths (of)	—referenced by stats Canada—	(through their diets)

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