

Hyphens and Dashes

Hyphens (-)

Hyphens are used to connect two or more words (and numbers) into a single concept, such as for building adjectives or occasionally when married people combine last names. Here are some examples:

- Japanese-American communities have decreased in recent decades.
- The family's money-saving measures have helped build their savings.
- The grocery store stopped selling 2-liter bottles.
- I had a conversation with Dr. Johnson-Farr this morning.

Additionally, hyphens are a necessary component when writing the numbers 21 through 99:

- Before the exam, Erica studied for twenty-three hours without sleep.

Although hyphens can be used as substitutes for the word "to" for values ranges, it is more appropriate in formal academic writing to write the word.

- ✓ The high temperature today will be 91 to 93 degrees.
- ✗ The high temperature today will be 91-93 degrees.

Dashes (—)

Dashes can be used to indicate an interruption, particularly in transcribed speech: The history student began to say, "The Peace of Westphalia is regarded as a milestone—" when her cell phone rang.

They can also be used as a substitute for "they are," "it is," and similar expressions. In this way they function like colons, but are not used for lists of multiple items.

- There was only one person suited to do the job—Mr. Caldwell.

Lastly, dashes can also be used as substitutes for parentheses:

- Mr. Caldwell is suited to the job—he has more experience than everybody else in the department—but he has been having some difficulties at home recently, and would probably not be available.