

Editorial Graphics and Publishing Services

7 Tips on Using the Hyphen

A hyphen is a very useful type of punctuation that helps clear up uncertainty in meaning (e.g., little used car and little-used car have different meanings). Following are some tips on using the hyphen in your work.

1. Use Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (11th Edition) as your primary tool for hyphenating a word at the end of a line and as a compound word.
2. At the end of a line, break the word according to how it is broken in Webster's dictionary. Use the dot after each syllable as your guide (e.g., par•ti•cle).
3. An e-mail address or URL that contains a hyphen should not be broken at a hyphen, nor should a hyphen be added to break an address. Where should you break an e-mail address or URL at the end of a line:
After a colon
After a double back slash
 - Before or after an equals (=) sign or ampersand (&)
 - Before a single slash or period or any other punctuation or symbol
4. Use a hyphen to separate numbers that are not inclusive (e.g., a phone number, or an identification number); also, use it to spell out words (e.g., Grammar is spelled g-r-a-m-m-a-r).
5. A compound word (two or more words that gang up to describe a noun) is hyphenated based on popular usage over time. Use a hyphen if there is a chance that the compound word would be misread (e.g., debt-ceiling talks, computer-literate people).
6. Most words formed with a prefix (e.g., co, anti, extra, micro, over, pre, sub, post) are not hyphenated (e.g., subdivision, extracurricular, postgraduate). *Exception:* if the prefix comes before a capitalized word (proper noun) it must be hyphenated (e.g., mid-April, pre-World War II).
7. Use suspended hyphenation when you have two adjectives that describe a noun in the same sentence (e.g., short- and long-term housing is available).

For more information on how to use the hyphen and other dashes (en, em, 3-em, etc.), contact the [Editorial Help Desk](#).