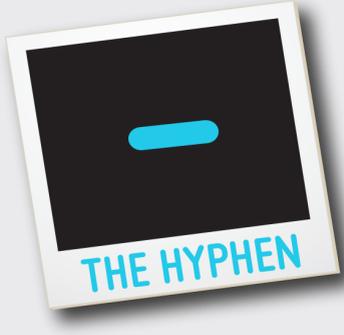


Q: WHEN SHOULD I USE A HYPHEN?



Many writers live in fear of the dreaded hyphen and it is common for these small punctuation marks to be either massively overused or completely omitted; in both cases this is often jeopardizes the meaning of a sentence. The truth is that **hyphens aren't actually that complicated** and, once you've mastered some basic rules pertaining to their usage, you will find that the concepts relating to hyphen use are actually pretty straightforward. Here are the **basic dos and don'ts of the hyphenation rules**.

DOS

Use a hyphen with **compound words**



"The emu had **hand-picked** his backgammon team and was confident that he would win this year's trophy."

"The prospect of spending an entire weekend with his **mother-in-law** was enough to make the giant mole shake in his boots."

Use a hyphen when **two or more words are linked with each other** to describe a single quality and they are **directly followed by a noun** (a person, place, or thing).



"The **snotty-nosed** teenager."
"The **hairy-knuckled** oaf."
"The **blonde-haired** girl."
"The **red-hot** poker."

Use a hyphen where **age indicators are used as nouns**.



"The **seven-year** itch."
"The **five-year-old** gargoyle started to sprout a few grey hairs."

Use a hyphen when **adverbs that don't end in -ly are used as compound words**.



"The **long-awaited** mud slide was finally open to the public."
"The furry dog got a **much-needed** hair cut."

Use a hyphen for all **compound numbers from twenty-one through to ninety-nine**.



"The **ninety-eight** year old cheese was extremely smelly."
"The hobgoblin taught **forty-nine** students how to play Twister."

Use a hyphen for all **spelled-out fractions when they are used as adjectives**.



"The sickly toffee has **two-thirds** of a cup of sugar in it."
"I could only manage to eat **two-quarters** of the huge pizza."

Use a hyphen with the following **prefixes**:



- Prefixes that come before proper nouns: "**un-American**."
- Hyphenate prefixes ending in an a or i only when the root word begins with the same letter: "**ultra-ambitious**."
- All words beginning with self except for selfish and selfless: "**self-righteous**," "**self-loathing**," "**self-assured**."
- With the prefix ex: "The giant's **ex-wife** cleared out the cave and took all his possessions."

DON'TS

Use a hyphen **when words end in -ly**.



"The squid's homework was beautifully presented."

Use a hyphen **between two adjectives** when the word "and" could have been placed between them.



"The skink received a lovely, fragrant bouquet on Valentine's Day."

Use a hyphen **when nouns are followed by their modifiers**.



"The walls were paper thin."
"The cheese is nine years old."

Use a hyphen **when fractions are used as nouns**.



"When the cake came, I grabbed my one quarter slice immediately."

