

## Hyphens

A hyphen (-) is a punctuation mark used to join words together. It is a short horizontal line which is not separated by spaces.

Hyphens may look like dashes, but they are used differently. Hyphens glue two or more words together while dashes separate words into parenthetical remarks. The dash may or may not have a space on either side of it.

### Functions of Hyphens

- **Hyphens to make compound modifiers before nouns**

Use a hyphen when compound modifiers come before a noun.

Examples:

*an off-site meeting*

*a well-known scientist*

*the 40-year-old man*

*a brown-eyed girl*

When a compound adjective follows a noun, a hyphen is usually not necessary.

*The meeting is off site*

*The scientist is well known.*

*The man is 40 years old.*

*The girl was brown eyed.*

- **Hyphens for compound numbers**

If the numbers expressed were compound, hyphenate them.

Example:

Forty-eight

Ninety-nine

Sixty-seven

Eighty-eight

Always hyphenate numbers when you are describing compound numbers between 21 and 99 (except 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80 and 90). Numbers higher than 99 do not need a hyphen.

- **Hyphens to avoid confusing word combinations.**

When words to be combined could create different meaning, a hyphen could be used to avoid any confusion.

Examples:

### 1. Re-create vs. recreate

Recreate definition, to refresh by means of relaxation and enjoyment, as restore physically or mentally

Re-create means to create again

### 2. Re-sign vs. resign

Resign means to quit.

Re-sign means to sign again.

**Use a hyphen after a prefix followed by a proper noun or proper adjective.**

Examples:

mid-July      pre-Victorian

**Use a hyphen in words beginning with the prefixes all-, ex- (meaning "former"), and self- and in words ending with the suffix -elect.**

Examples:

1. All-knowing
2. ex-wife
3. self-propelled

- Hyphens to separate syllables

Examples:

- |              |             |
|--------------|-------------|
| 1. Reference | re-fe-rence |
| 2. Beautiful | beau-ti-ful |
| 3. Computer  | com-pu-ter  |
| 4. Keyboard  | key-board   |

- Used when forming original compound verbs  
Use a hyphen when forming original compound verbs.

Examples:

Double-click the icon to open the app.

The supervisor sweet-talked them into working.

I air-conditioned the room of our baby.

- Hyphens to show single entities of compound nouns.

Examples:

*Tomorrow is my mother-in-law's birthday.*

*Birds-of-prey*

*Higher-ups*

*Check-in*

*passer-by*

*red-orange*

*laughing-gas*

- Hyphens when writing age expressions.

Basic rule is to use hyphens when writing about years, months, or any other period of time unless the time expressions are in plural form (years, months, weeks, days).

Examples:

1. With hyphens: *I have a six-year-old son.*

*I have a six-year-old.*

2. *NO hyphens: My son is six years old.*

*Exception: My son is one year old.*

*My son is one month old.*

3. Three-year-old daughter

4. Ten-year-old students

## EXERCISES

- **Hyphens to make compound modifiers before nouns**

Use a hyphen when a compound modifiers come before a noun.

Underline the word that needs a hyphen.

1. The guy wore a dark blue uniform.
2. We found an old looking building near the city center.
3. The cake tastes like a home made cake.
4. The beautiful green eyed lady walked like a model.
5. The blue uniformed soldier was running after the snatcher.
6. I don't want to hear any heart breaking story.

- **Hyphens for compound numbers**

If the numbers expressed were compound, hyphenate them.

Supply the gap with the missing words based on the number given in the parenthesis.

1. His favorite number is \_\_\_\_\_ (57).

2. He lives near \_\_\_\_\_ (78) street, California.
3. He has \_\_\_\_\_ (21) phones in his drawers.
4. The kid has counted \_\_\_\_\_ (99) sheep just to fall asleep.
5. My brother has collected \_\_\_\_\_ (35) Lego toys.
6. I have collected \_\_\_\_\_ (45) pairs of shoes.

- Hyphens to avoid confusing word combinations.

When words to be combined could create different meaning, a hyphen could be used to avoid any confusion.

Choose the word that best represents the context.

1. I must (re-sign, resign) the document as the ink was not that clear.
2. The woman gave me a (shell-like, shelllike) stone.
3. I need to (re-sign, resign) from my job. It has been a difficult life.
4. I am (reengineering, re-engineering) the old house.
5. The game master tried to (deactivate, de-activate) the digital timer.
6. We must try to use the (reenergized, re-energized) battery and see if it really works.

- Hyphens for words that start with prefixes like pre-, self-, between a prefix following a proper noun, and with figures and letters.

Determine the word that needs to be hyphenated.

1. The guy was offered a long term job at the company.
2. It was around mid70s when my dad met my mum.
3. The semi erected building blocks the view from my room.
4. He believes that extra terrestrial beings walk amongst us.
5. My ex girlfriend tried to contact me last week.
6. The trans Atlantic network provides communication to submarines.

- Hyphens to separate syllables

Syllabicate the words by putting hyphens between them.

1. Ephemeral
2. Astonished
3. Distressed
4. Leverage
5. Synthetic
6. Influence

- Used when forming original compound verbs  
Use a hyphen when forming original compound verbs.

Determine whether the words need a hyphen or not.

1. I (color coded, color-coded) my flight schedules.
2. I (dry-cleaned, dry cleaned) my clothes.
3. They usually (handpick, hand-pick) the best gown for me.
4. I did not allow them to (downgrade, down-grade) the operating system.
5. My sister likes to (window-shop, window shop) with her friends.
6. My supervisor asked me to (proof-read, proofread) my thesis.

- Hyphens to show single entities of compound nouns.

Choose the word that matches the best,

| Word 1     | Word 2       | Compound Noun |
|------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Check-  | a. being     |               |
| 2. Passer- | b. president |               |
| 3. Vice-   | c. half      |               |
| 4. One-    | d. being     |               |
| 5. Runner- | e. in        |               |
| 6. Well-   | f. up        |               |

- Hyphens when writing age expressions.

Basic rule is to use hyphens when writing about years, months, or any other period of time unless the time expressions are in plural form (years, months, weeks, days).

Hyphenate the words that require it.

1. The five year old kid went to the school alone.
2. I have to attend a two week meeting abroad.
3. The car injured a twenty year old lady.
4. The five minute report is due on Monday.
5. She took the five month old flower in the garden.
6. I wonder how this fifty year old company survived this crisis.

## ANSWER KEY

- **Hyphens to make compound modifiers before nouns**

Use a hyphen when compound modifiers come before a noun.

Underline the word that needs a hyphen.

ANSWERS:

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2. We found an old looking building near the city center.
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- **Hyphens for compound numbers**

If the numbers expressed were compound, hyphenate them.

Supply the gap with the missing words based on the number given in the parenthesis.

ANSWERS:

1. Fifty-seven
2. Seventy-eight
3. Twenty-one
4. Ninety-nine
5. Thirty-five
6. Forty-five

- **Hyphens to avoid confusing word combinations.**

When words to be combined could create different meaning, a hyphen could be used to avoid any confusion.

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ANSWERS:

1. I must (**re-sign**, reassign) the document as the ink was not that clear.
2. The woman gave me a (**shell-like**, shelllike) stone.
3. I need to (re-sign, **resign**) from my job. It has been a difficult life.
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works.

- Hyphens for words that start with prefixes like pre-, self-, between a prefix following a proper noun, and with figures and letters.

Determine the word that needs to be hyphenated.

ANSWERS:

1. The guy was offered a **long-term** job at the company.
2. It was around the **mid-70s** when my dad met my mum.
3. The **semi-erected** building blocks the view from my room.
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6. The **trans-Atlantic** network provides communication to submarines.

- Hyphens to separate syllables

Syllabicate the words by putting hyphens between them.

Answers:

1. E-phe-me-ral
2. As-to-nished
3. Dis-tressed
4. Le-ve-rage
5. Syn-the-tic
6. In-flu-ence

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ANSWER:

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- Hyphens to show single entities of compound nouns.

Choose the word that matches the best,

ANSWERS:

| Word 1      | Word 2       | Compound Noun         |
|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| 7. Check-   | g. being     | <i>Check-in</i>       |
| 8. Passer-  | h. president | <i>Passer-by</i>      |
| 9. Vice-    | i. half      | <i>Vice-president</i> |
| 10. One-    | j. being     | <i>One-half</i>       |
| 11. Runner- | k. in        | <i>Runner-up</i>      |
| 12. Well-   | l. up        | <i>Well-being</i>     |

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ANSWERS:

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