



# Hyphens

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# Hyphens



Hyphens (-) are used in several different ways:

**Use 1:** Use a hyphen to connect or “stitch” words together that you want to be read as a unit. These words will form a single concept that describes the following word. However, if this description comes after the word it describes, do not use a hyphen.

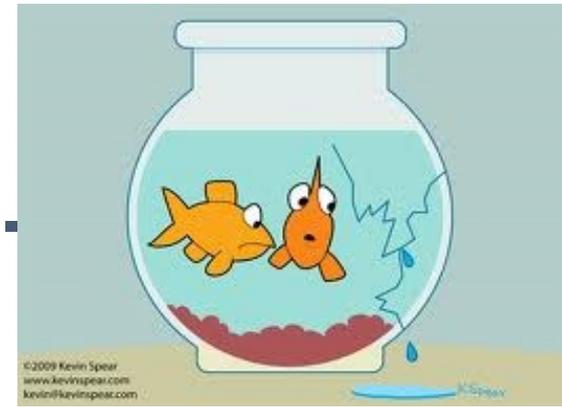
My **eleven-year-old** nephew got a new IPAD, and I am jealous!

>>>In this case, I’m not saying my eleven nephew, my year nephew or my old nephew. I am saying my **eleven-year-old** (one concept) nephew.

My nephew who is eleven years old got a new IPAD, and I am jealous. >>>In this case, since the words describing the noun (nephew) come after the noun, no hyphen is needed.



# Hyphens



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Here is another example:

My new **16-gallon** fish tank exploded all over the floor last night.

>>>In this case, I am not saying a 16 tank or a gallon tank. I am saying a **16-gallon** (one concept) tank.

My new fish tank that is **16 gallons** exploded all over the floor last night.

>>>In this case, since the words describing the noun (fish tank) come after the noun, no hyphen is needed.

# Hyphens

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A quick caution about hyphens:

Hyphens are used with adjectives and nouns, but they are not used with adverbs (words that describe or further define verbs). Even though the hyphen rule *seems* like it should apply here, it doesn't because what is being described is the verb (the action), not the noun (the thing).

The **quickly moving** train flew past the station, and only Denzel Washington could save the day!  
>> You don't need a hyphen here between quickly and moving because quickly is describing the verb **moving**, not the noun train.



My student's hastily written research paper made me want to cry. >> You don't need a hyphen here between hastily and written because hastily is describing the verb **written**, not the noun paper.

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Use 2. Use a hyphen to indicate a group of words that are always joined. Here are some examples: merry-go-round, editor-in-chief, mother-in-law. The best step here is to look up the words in the dictionary to see if they are separate words, words that are hyphenated, or one word. Some words come in a variety of forms. For example, consider these four sentences:

I try to **work out** every other day, at least.

>>> In this sentence, “work out” is used as a verb (an action).

I had a really good **workout** this morning

>>> In this sentence, “workout” is used as a noun (a thing).

These are my favorite **workout** clothes and routines.

>>> In this sentence, “workout” is used as an adjective (a word which further describes the words “clothes and routines.”)

I hope that my husband and I can **work out** our problems.

>>> In this sentence, “work out” is used as a verb (an action).

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Use 3. Use a hyphen to write out numbers and fractions.

Use hyphens for all numbers from twenty-one through ninety-nine.

>>> I can't believe I spent **seventy-five** dollars on a new collar for my dog.



Use hyphens for all spelled-out fractions.

>>> **One-third** of all students who revise their assignments earn one letter grade higher for the entire class.

>>> I asked my hair dresser to cut off **one-half** inch, but she measured incorrectly and cut off **three-and-one-half** inches.

# Do You Still Have Questions?

If you still have questions, please stop by the Writing Lab (DI20).

