

The Writing Center Washtenaw Community College

The Hyphen and the Dash

Hyphen

Use a hyphen (-) to join words that work together as one concept.

Between two or more words functioning as one adjective before a noun.

Ex.: She is a hard-working executive.

Ex.: Professor Langella has a three-year-old daughter.

Ex.: The lawyer's in-your-face attitude angered the members of the jury.

With written forms of fractions and the numbers 21 through 99.

Ex.: Approximately two-thirds of the students passed the test.

Ex.: Fifty-one percent of American marriages end in divorce.

With prefixes such as “self-” and “ex-” and suffixes such as “-elect.”

Ex.: He's happy that he decided to become self-employed.

Ex.: Her ex-husband lives in Denver now.

Ex.: The mayor-elect will be sworn in later this month.

Dash

Use a dash (—) as an informal or dramatic replacement of a comma, colon, or semicolon.

Ex.: He bought his ticket, packed his bags, and paid the cab driver—
but he missed the boat.

Ex.: Don't ride with Hank—he's a terrible driver.

Ex.: I don't understand grammar—help!

Use dashes to set off an internal list in a sentence.

Ex.: Photos of Ed's favorite jazz artists—John Coltrane, Miles Davis,
and Thelonious Monk—adorned the walls.