

# Using Hyphens

*What is a hyphen?*

A hyphen is a mechanical tool used to divide and connect separate elements of individual words. Though it looks quite similar to a dash, the hyphen is used to clarify meaning in particular words rather than sentences.

*A hyphen is used...*

*A hyphen looks like...*

⇒ **In some compound words**

A compound word is created when two words are combined to make a new word with a new meaning. Incorrect hyphenation can change the meaning of the word(s). Hyphenated compound words are usually used to describe nouns.

• *Look! There's a man eating shark!*

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• *Look! There's a man-eating shark!*

⇒ **In fractions**

In order to designate fractions in writing, we use hyphens.

• *We must add two thirds to get the correct answer.*

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• *We must add two-thirds to get the correct answer.*

⇒ **In numbers twenty-one through ninety-nine**

In English, these numbers require hyphens in writing.

• *I gave the waitress twenty five dollars and she never gave me change!*

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• *I gave the waitress twenty-five dollars and she never gave me change!*

⇒ **To connect prefixes to nouns and adjectives**

A prefix is placed at the beginning of a word to modify or change its meaning. Usually, hyphenated prefixes are used to separate two consecutive vowels to avoid confusion.

• *I need to deice my car.*

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• *I need to de-ice my car.*

⇒ **To connect a single letter to a word**

This rule is usually used to designate an action.

• *We went a caroling on Christmas Eve.*

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• *We went a-caroling on Christmas Eve.*