

Dashes and Hyphens

Although both types of punctuation use the little line, dashes and hyphens serve opposite purposes. Dashes separate words. Hyphens join words into one.

Hyphens (-) USED TO MAKE COMPOUND ADJECTIVES THAT MODIFY NOUNS

The girl's blue-green eyes matched the sea. (not blue eyes or green eyes, but blue-green eyes)

Four architects submitted small-scale designs. (not scale designs that were small)

The pottery collection included a hand-painted bowl. (not a painted bowl, but a hand-painted bowl)

Americans tend to have a bigger-is-better attitude and to love extremes.

Dashes (--) USED TO SET OFF EXTRA INFORMATION (explanatory or parenthetical)

The writer—a journalist by trade—has written sixteen historical novels.

Socialism—often used interchangeably with communism—was a popular liberal philosophy in the 1920s.

Air pollution—airborne particulate matter—can be dangerous for people with asthma or emphysema.

Practice:

1. I was owed twenty six dollars for mowing lawns on Saturday.

2. Jane's grandfather—on her mother's side—served in combat during WWI.

3. Sally's better late than never attitude shows in her always being late to events and late on due dates.

4. Four members of the cross country squad, Mark, Frank, Joey, and Tom, are on the injured list.

5. Jim's new Cadillac ordered online still has that new car smell.
