



Hyphen Usage

A-State Online Writing Center

A hyphen is a punctuation mark that combines two words together to make a compound or compound modifier.

Example: *He purchased a one-way ticket.*

In this case, “one-way” is hyphenated with the hyphen dash punctuation mark. The words “one” and “way” are turned into a compound to modify the word “ticket” so that readers understand the type of ticket the writer is referring to in the sentence. Keep in mind that you use hyphens when the modifiers appear before a noun and not afterward.

Example: *The professor wasn't well loved by his students.*

The modifier appears after the noun “politician”, so you don't need to include a hyphen.

Additionally, compound modifiers with adverbs that end in a “ly” combined with a participle or adjective don't need to be hyphenated.

Example: *He is an incredibly accomplished chef.*

The adverb with the “ly” modifies with the subject without needing a hyphen.

Common Hyphenated Compound Words

There are sometimes debates over whether a specific word needs to be hyphenated, so check a dictionary if you're unsure. However, some words have evolved over the years to remain hyphenated while others have not. Some common hyphenated compound words include:

- mother-in-law
- two-fold
- one-year-old
- editor-in-chief
- check-in

More Common Uses

1. Use a hyphen when spelling out compound numbers between *twenty-one* and *ninety-nine*.
2. Utilize hyphens with these prefixes: ex, all, and self; and with the suffix “elect”.

Examples: *self-published, ex-husband, all-knowing oracle, president-elect*

3. Place a hyphen between a prefix and a capitalized word, and a prefix between dates or letters.

Examples: *mid-June, e-mail, pre-COVID, mid-1700s*

4. Use a hyphen when the first part of a compound adjective is a number followed by a noun.

Example: *She gave a 15-minute presentation.*

Example: *His focus is on 18th-century Irish literature.*

5. To avoid confusion, place a hyphen when discussing fractions as part of a compound adjective.

Example: *Place one-third of a cup of sugar into the bowl.*

Example: *I'm half-tempted to take advantage of the donut sale.*

Sources Consulted

<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/hyphen/>

<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/hyphens-and-dashes/>

<https://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-compounds.html>

More Resources

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/punctuation/hyphen_use.html

<https://www.uhv.edu/university-college/student-success-center/resources/a-d/dashes-use/>