

# What is a HYPHEN?



WAIT!  
Aren't hyphens  
and dashes the  
same thing?

No! The dash (–) and the hyphen (-) are two different punctuation marks and they serve different purposes. Notice how a dash is slightly longer than a hyphen?

## Hyphen (-)

Hyphens are small lines written in the middle of a line (*not as low down as an underscore*). They are not all that common today, but there are three main situations where you should use them:

### TO FORM COMPOUND WORDS:

*We use hyphens to join together separate words, to make compound words. This serves to indicate that the joint words have a combined meaning.*

For example: *A sugar-free product*  
*The good-looking man*

*This can be helpful when clarifying which qualifier is describing which word. Can you see the difference in the following?*

*The ancient literature professor*  
*The ancient-literature professor*

### TO JOIN PREFIXES TO WORDS:

*We use hyphens to join a prefix to another word, especially between two vowels (e.g. pre-existing or co-own). This is changing, though, and one-word forms are becoming more common (e.g. preoccupied or cooperate).*

For example: *anti-aging / pre-ordain / post-dated*

### TO SHOW WORD BREAKS:

*If you can't fit a whole word at the end of a line, you use a hyphen to split the word. However, this is less commonly used now as computers and word processors automatically adjust line spacing to make sure that words do not get broken up.*

For example: *The young boy was extremely dis-appointed in his father.*

### INTERESTINGLY...

*There are many phrasal verbs which can be turned into nouns – and when they are, we hyphenate them.*

*Sand builds up in the filter. → There is a build-up of sand in the filter.*

*You must check in before 12pm. → Check-in was a simple process.*

*You can go ahead with the project. → The project was given the go-ahead.*

