



## Writing Centre

# Hyphens and Dashes

---

### Hyphens are used

1. In compound words to show a combined meaning.  
For example: My mother-in-law is an amazing artist.
2. To link two adjectives together to form a compound adjective when both adjectives immediately precede the noun and neither one ends in the letters *ly*.  
For example: Keiran is a well-respected tutor at the Writing Centre.
3. To join prefixes to other words, especially when the prefix ends in a vowel and the next word begins with a vowel.  
For example: re-creation vs. recreation, co-own, pre-eminent

**Warning:** *It is not always easy to know whether or not a hyphen is required, you must consult a dictionary if you are uncertain.*

### Dashes are used

1. In place of parentheses to set of material that merits strong emphasis.  
For examples: We would be spending a week in Paris—the most romantic of all cities—while on vacation.
2. In place of a colon as an informal way to introduce a list.  
For example: The airplane was full of three things—roasted almonds, bad films and crying babies.
3. To indicate a dramatic shift in tone.  
Vancouver's shiny condominium towers are praised by city planners—the dark truth though is that the cost of housing is unaffordable and thousands of people are homeless.

**Warning:** *The dash tends to be used more in informal styles of writing. Make sure that its use is appropriate for what you are working on, and even then, use it sparingly.*