

## Punctuate to clarify meaning: the hyphen (-)

Use a hyphen (-) to join two or more words. Careful placement of hyphens helps your readers know which words are meant to be read as a single unit of meaning.

- 1) Hyphenate a group of words that together modify the noun that follows:

two-year diploma

peer-instruction techniques

five-by-eight-foot rug

problem-based learning

four-credit courses (Notice how this differs from “four credit courses.”)

Sometimes you can omit the second part of the hyphenated expression:

full- and part-time courses

twenty- and thirty-year mortgages

over- and underworked employees (Although the second modifier is not hyphenated, the convention is the same.)

You don't need to use a hyphen if the first term ends with ly:

smoothly flowing river

gently blowing breeze

frantically screaming passenger

- 2) Hyphenate all spelled-out simple fractions and numbers twenty-one through ninety-nine:

seventy-two

two hundred thirty-one

three-quarters

one-third

- 3) Hyphenate words to clarify their meaning and pronunciation. Consider the difference between the following pairs:

re-creation, recreation

co-op, coop



A tip from the BCIT editing community  
– Jim, Kathleen, Gary, Barb

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