

# 11 Hyphens, Dashes, Parentheses, Brackets

## HYPHENS (-)

Hyphens are a punctuation mark that can be used in several ways. Here are three of their most common uses.

- Use a hyphen at the end of a syllable of a word that is too long to fit at the end of a line. Never hyphenate a word with only one syllable. When in doubt as to where syllables begin and end, check your dictionary. *Example:* Haiti is very beautiful, but it is also one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere.
- Use a hyphen with the prefixes *ex-*, *all-*, *self-*, and with any prefix that comes before names of specific groups and geographical locations. *Examples:* ex-mayor, all-knowing god, self-defense, trans-Siberian route.
- Use a hyphen with compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine. *Example:* I was twenty-one on my grandfather's seventy-fifth birthday.

## EXERCISES

A. Suppose you wanted to divide the following words because you could not fit the entire word on a line. Rewrite each of the following words, using a hyphen between any two syllables of each word.

1. confederate \_\_\_\_\_
2. slavery \_\_\_\_\_
3. plantation \_\_\_\_\_
4. secession \_\_\_\_\_

B. Certain words in the following sentences need hyphens. In the space provided, rewrite, with correct hyphenation, each of these words.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ President Theodore Roosevelt was very sickly as a child and very robust as an adult.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Joel Levinson was an antiNazi in 1939.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ The proAlaskan pipeline forces won the vote.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ In my nineteen years in television, yours was the first of fiftytwo proposals.

## DASHES (—)

• Use dashes to set off a sudden break in thought or any group of words used for emphasis but not absolutely essential to the main idea. On the typewriter, a dash is made by striking two hyphens, with no space before or after them. In writing, draw a line about twice the width of a hyphen to indicate a dash. *Examples:* It's hard to explain the way—oops, excuse me. (*break in thought*) The stock market goes down—at least that's what we

always heard—when the war news is bad. (*around words used for emphasis but not essential*).

- Commas or parentheses are also used for these purposes but do not give the same urgency or importance to the information as dashes give.
- In general, do not overuse dashes in formal writing. Unless you intend a really dramatic break in thought, it is better to use commas as the mark of punctuation.

## EXERCISES

Insert dashes wherever they are appropriate in the following sentences.

1. John, do you think you could give hey, look out!
2. We will return a verdict of guilty unless anyone has any doubts when we return to the courtroom.
3. The decision to withdraw from the war the very opposite of what the president wanted came as a shock.
4. I've been trying to figure out wait, I've got it!

## PARENTHESES ( )

- Parentheses may be used to add information, to enclose letters or numbers, or to illustrate a point with a specific bit of material. *Examples:* Jan Vermeer (1632–75) was an important Dutch painter as any good student (and Gordon is certainly one of them) knows. There are three things I will need from the store: (1) a camel, (2) a goat, and (3) some rubber cement.
- In formal writing you should not use parentheses frequently. Usually commas can serve to set off parenthetical material (see Card 5).

## EXERCISES

Insert parentheses in the appropriate places below.

1. Willie Mays alias the Say-Hey Kid was Cliff's favorite baseball player.
2. We will lower the country's high unemployment rate 6.65% only with your help.
3. After the battleship *Maine* was blown up February 15, 1898 the Spanish American War began.
4. Olivia de Haviland Joan Fontaine's sister is still making movies.

## BRACKETS [ ]

Use brackets to set off corrections or inserts you make in a direct quotation. *Examples:* "They [the victims] will receive government aid." "On his pillow, he found this note: 'Tomorrow i [sic] will be gone.'" (A bracketed *sic* indicates the error was in the original and is not a misprint or typographical error.) "He inquired about the *probability* of unemployment [emphasis mine]."

## EXERCISES

On separate paper, write three sentences in which you use brackets correctly.