

# Hyphens, Dashes, Parentheses, and Brackets

## Hyphens (-)

Four of the most common ways to use a hyphen are:

1. At the end of a sentence
  - A. Use for a word that is too long to fit at the end of a sentence. Use the hyphen at the end of a syllable.  
Ex. "First Lieutenant Jimmy Cross carried letters from a girl name Martha, a junior at Mount Sebastian College in New Jersey" (O'Brien 462).
2. With prefixes and suffixes
  - A. For prefixes, use a hyphen with ex-, all-, and self-  
Ex. ex-husband, all-encompassing, etc.
  - B. For suffixes, use a hyphen before -elect  
Ex. governor-elect
3. With compound words  
Ex. mother-in-law
4. With compound numbers
  - A. Use a hyphen with compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine.  
Ex. My sister turned twenty-eight on our grandmother's eighty-second birthday.

## Dashes (-)

1. Use dashes for Special Emphasis
  - A. Use a dash to set off a word or phrase that is not essential to the main idea in order to emphasize.  
  
Ex. "The care-takers—those who are helpers, nurturers, teachers, mothers— are still systematically devalued."  
  
—Ellen Goodman, 'Just Woman's Work'  
(Troyka and Hesse 446)
  - B. Commas or parentheses can also be used in place of dashes. However, they do not provide the same importance or urgency.

## Parentheses ( )

1. As opposed to dashes, parentheses de-emphasize material.
2. Use to off-set information or enclose interrupting words.

Ex. “The sheer decibel level of the noise around us is not enough to make us cranky, irritable, or aggressive. (It can, however, affect our mental and physical health, which is another matter.)

–Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*  
(Troyka and Hesse 449)

3. Use for listed items.

Ex. “Four items are on the agenda for tonight’s meeting: (1) current treasury figures, (2) current membership figures, (3) the budget for renovations, and (4) the campaign for soliciting additional public contributions” (Troyka and Hesse 449).

## Brackets [ ]

1. In direct quotations, use brackets around inserted words or corrections.

Ex. **Original Source**

Current research shows that successful learning takes place in an active environment.

–Deborah Moore, “Facilities and Learning Styles,” p. 22

### Quotation With Brackets

Deborah Moore supports a student-centered curriculum and agrees with “current research [which] shows that successful learning takes place in an active environment” (22). (Troyka and Hesse 450)

2. Use a bracket around the word **[sic]** in a direct quotation to indicate that an error is in the original quotation.

Ex. “A journalist wrote, ‘The judge accepted an [sic] plea of not guilty’ (Troyka and Hesse 451).

### Works Cited

O’Brien, Tim. “The Things They Carried.” *An Introduction to Literature*. 13<sup>th</sup> ed., Edited by Sylvan Barnet, William Burto, and William E. Cain. New York: Longman, 2004, 462-74.

Troyka, Lynn Quitman, and Douglas Hesse. *Simon & Schuster Handbook for Writers*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed., Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005.