TIP Sheet
THE HYPHEN

The hyphen (-) is a mark that joins words or parts of words and is placed directly between letters and with no spaces. As indicated below, the hyphen is used in several ways.

1. Use a hyphen at the end of a line to divide a word where there is not enough space for the whole word. Follow the rules for dividing words correctly.

- Divide a word between syllables. Never divide a one-syllable word.

Correct:

For effective proofreading, certain strategies are recommended.

Incorrect:

After taking the workshop on proofreading, it really seems that I am better at editing my own papers.

- Do not divide a word between syllables if only one letter remains alone or if only two letters begin a line.

Incorrect:

It was difficult to determine whether she was totally afraid of the dark or just trying to gain sympathy.

We realized she was trying to get attention, so we simply ignored her.

In this case, simply move the entire word (afraid or simply) to the next line.

- Always divide a hyphenated compound word at the hyphen.

Incorrect:

She was relieved to have the innocuous title of president-elect rather than to have real responsibility.

Correct:

She was relieved to have the innocuous title of president-elect rather than to have real responsibility.

or

She was relieved to have the innocuous title of
president-elect rather than to have real responsibility.

- Divide compound words between the words that form the compound.
Incorrect:

For Steve's birthday, Annie bought him an electric coffeemaker.

Correct:

For Steve's birthday, Annie bought him an electric coffee-maker.

or

For Steve's birthday, Annie bought him an electric coffeemaker.

2. Use a hyphen to indicate a word spelled out letter by letter.

The correct way to spell that word in English is h-e-l-l-o.

3. Use a hyphen to join two or more words to form compound adjectives that precede a noun. The purpose of joining words to form a compound adjective is to differentiate the meaning from the adjectives used separately, such as *up-to-date merchandise, copper-coated wire, fire-tested material, lump-sum payment*, and *well-stocked cupboard*.

He was proud of his well-stocked cupboards. (The adverb *well* describes *stocked* rather than *cupboards*.)

Cathy drove her seven-year-old son to school every morning. (If the adjectives were written separately, they would describe her son as seven, year, and old. It is only when the words are joined together with a hyphen that they make sense as a single adjective.)

4. Use a hyphen to avoid awkward doubling of vowels.

semi-independence without a hyphen would be written *semiindependence*

re-elect without a hyphen would be written *reelect*

pre-eminent without a hyphen would be *preeminent*

5. Use a hyphen to prevent misreading of certain words.

Re-collect means to collect again; without a hyphen the word *recollect* has a different meaning.

Re-creation means to create again; without a hyphen, the word *recreation* has a different meaning.

Co-respondent without the hyphen could be confused with   *correspondent*.

6. Use a hyphen to join a prefix to a capitalized word.

un-American, pre-Christmas

7. Always use a hyphen with the prefixes all-, ex-, and self-, and with the suffix -elect.

all-inclusive, ex-president, self-righteous, governor-elect

8. Use a hyphen with all compound numbers between twenty-one through ninety-nine, and when writing fractions as words.

fifty-six, two-thirds

 9. Use a hyphen to indicate stammering or sobbing.

"I d-d-didn't m-mean it."