

AMA Manual of Style

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Hyphens and Dashes

Cheryl Iverson

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Hyphens and dashes are internal punctuation marks used for linkage and clarity of expression. | The hyphen is a connector; it may join “what is similar and also what is disjunctive....it divides as well as marries.” The hyphen connects words, prefixes, and suffixes permanently or temporarily. Certain compound words always contain hyphens. Such hyphens are called orthographic. Examples are merry-go-round, free-for-all, and mother-in-law. For temporary connections, hyphens help prevent ambiguity, clarify meaning, and indicate word breaks at the end of a line. In general, when not otherwise specified, hyphens should be used only as an aid to the reader’s understanding,

Hyphen

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The hyphen is a connector; it may join “what is similar and also what is disjunctive....it divides as well as marries.” The hyphen connects words, prefixes, and suffixes permanently or temporarily. Certain compound words always contain hyphens. Such hyphens are called orthographic. Examples are merry-go-round, free-for-all, and mother-in-law. For temporary connections, hyphens help prevent ambiguity, clarify meaning, and indicate word breaks at the end of a line. In general, when not otherwise specified, hyphens should be used only as an aid to the reader’s understanding, primarily to avoid ambiguity. For capitalization of hyphenated compounds in titles, subtitles, subheads, and table

Dashes

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Dashes as another form of internal punctuation convey a particular meaning or emphasize and clarify a certain section of material within a sentence. Compared with parentheses, dashes may convey a less formal or more emphatic “aside.” There are 4 types of dashes that differ in length: the em dash, the most common; the en dash; the 2-em dash; and the 3-em dash. When preparing a manuscript, if symbols for various dashes are not available in the word-processing program, use 2 hyphens to indicate an em dash (--) and 1 for an en dash (-). Em dashes are used to indicate