

# Hyphens, Dashes and Brackets

- Understand when to use hyphens, dashes and brackets
- Understand ellipsis

## Hyphens

Hyphens are used to join words. You should use a hyphen:

- When two or more words are made into an adjective: e.g. *state-of-the-art* design, the *friendly-looking* dog.
- When new words are made up, for example in science fiction or humorous writing: e.g. the astronaut *laser-blasted* his way across the planet.
- When an age is made into a noun, e.g. We have a two-year-old; Two-year-old trees.
- When writing compound numbers from 21 to 99: e.g. twenty-one, ninety-nine.
- When writing double-barrelled names: e.g. Claire Houston-Brown.

### Key Point

Hyphens join words together.



## Dashes

**Dashes** should not be confused with hyphens. You should use dashes:

1. When indicating a period between two points in time: e.g. 3.15–4.15, 1919–2014.
2. When words and phrases are dropped into sentences and are not part of the main subject.

### Example

Fred – along with his cat, Poppy – was a frequent visitor.

The dashes show that the words between them could be removed and the sentence would still make sense.

3. When adding **emphasis** by replacing commas.

### Example

He knew what to do, because he was experienced.

He knew what to do – because he was experienced.

### Tip

You can use dashes to add emphasis.

## 4. To show a change of thought.

## Example

He wanted to do the right thing – but what was that?

## Brackets

**Brackets** (parentheses) are used to add in an aside, to add extra information, or to clarify a point. They can be used instead of commas around dropped-in clauses. This creates greater separation between the main message of the sentence and the extra information and makes the extra information seem a bit more important.

## Example

David, because of his interest in photography, bought a new camera.

David (because of his interest in photography) bought a new camera.

## Tip

If the extra information in brackets goes at the end of the sentence, then the full stop goes after the brackets.

← With commas

← With brackets

## Ellipsis

An **ellipsis** (...) is the use of three dots to signify the intentional missing out of a word or idea. It is often used to create tension.



## Quick Test

1. Hyphens join words together. True or false?
2. Hyphens can be used instead of commas on some occasions. True or false?
3. Dashes join words together. True or false?
4. Dashes can be used instead of commas on some occasions. True or false?
5. Brackets can be used instead of commas on some occasions. True or false?

## Key Words

- Dash
- Emphasis
- Brackets
- Parenthesis
- Ellipsis