

Dashes

Dashes should be typed (or written) as two hyphens (--). Many word processors today will change this automatically to an a longer dash, technically the emdash (—). You may put spaces before and after the dash, or omit them—but whatever you do, be consistent. There are 3 basic uses for dashes:

1. To break off a thought, or to mark off an aside at the end of the sentence.

Ex: a) *I really think you should study more—but, let's be honest, whom am I to talk!*

b) *Assuming Freddie Kruger was dead, she began to get up and move towards—but wait, Freddie's eyes popped open!*

2. Similar to colons, a dash can be used to explain or amplify a statement. This is especially effective when a list comes first.

Ex: a) *The economy, the threat of terrorism, the international standing of the US—these were all concerns on Jay Mormon's mind as the election approached.*

3. Dashes may be used in place of commas to set off parenthetical elements or an appositive phrase when there are several commas involved, or when you want to emphasize the break more thoroughly than a comma might.

Ex: a) *Nothing—neither rain nor snow—could stop him from making it to class that day.*

b) *Four of my students—Joe, Jim, Amy, and Bob—tied for the top grade in the class.*

c) *You know, Dr. McGlaughlin, I was thinking—that is, if you aren't busy—of stopping by your office to talk about my paper tomorrow.*

NOTE: Don't overuse dashes! A dash is a very strong break in the flow of a sentence. Using too many of them will either be confusing or create a choppy style.