Special Punctuation

Slash: /

- Indicate a choice between the words it separates

  Example: The Praxis test is pass/fail; he needs to retake the test next month.

  To avoid gender problems, some writers use he/she, his/her, and him/her to indicate that either gender is applicable in the sentence.

  *Notice there is no space between the slash and the letters on either side of it

- Divide lines of poetry quoted within a sentence. A slash in this context indicates each time there is a line break in the poem. Add a space before and after the slash.

  Example: Wordsworth’s lines: “There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream, / The earth, and every common sight, / To me did seem / Apparell’d in celestial light” begin one of his most memorable poems.

Parenthesis: ()

- Use () to include words that you would not normally fit into the flow of your text but you want to include nonetheless

  *If the words within the parentheses appear within a sentence, do not use a capital letter or period, even if the material is itself a complete sentence. If the words in the parentheses are written as a separate sentence (not included within another sentence), punctuate it as if it were a separate sentence.

  Example: John Ritter (we remember him as Jack on Three’s Company) died in surgery after doctors misdiagnosed him.

  Example: John Ritter died in surgery after the doctors misdiagnosed him. (We remember him as Jack on Three’s Company.)
Dash: —

- Use – (or two hyphens) to set off parenthetical elements, especially if those elements contain internal forms of punctuation.

  Example: All four of them—Kayla, Sam, Derek, and Patrick—passed their driver’s test on the first try.

  *Notice there is no space between the dash and the letters on either side of it

  *Do not use the dash when the comma will work for you.

- The Dash in Dialogue: Use – to show breaks in thought and shifts in tone.

  Example: “Not to do what?” I asked. “Not to — oh heck, I forget!”

Hyphens: -

- Use to create compound words, particularly with modifiers before nouns

  Example: the well-known comedian, my seven-year-old cousin, the out-of-date textbook

- Use to write numbers

  Example: twenty-one to ninety-nine and fractions (five-eighths, one-fourth)

- Use to create compounds

  Example: on-the-go menu

- Use to add certain prefixes to words

  Example: non-English, T-formation

- The prefixes self-, all-, and ex- almost always require a hyphen (ex-wife, all-inclusive, self-made), and when the prefix ends with the same letter that begins the word, you will often use a hyphen (de-emphasize, re-examine), but not always (unnatural).

  *Notice there is no space between a hyphen and the letters on either side of it

- Suspended Compounds: With a series of nearly identical compounds, we allow the hyphen to act as a place holder.

  Examples: Both full- and part-time employers have the same health coverage.

  The new preschool has activities for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children in Tulsa, OK.

  *Be careful not to overuse this hyphen