Hyphens (–)

Hyphens are used to join two or more words that act as a single term; to form some compound words; to join some prefixes, suffixes, and letters to a word; and to show a series of hyphenated words that have a common ending. Hyphens also indicate where a word may be divided into syllables, and they are sometimes used to separate a word at the end of a typewritten line. In academic writing, however, avoid end–of–line hyphenation. Do not put a space before or after a hyphen.

**Word combinations**

**Rule #1:**

Use a hyphen to join two or more words that precede a noun and act as one descriptive term (compound adjective). DO NOT use a hyphen if the description follows the noun. DO NOT use a hyphen if two or more proper nouns serve as adjectives. DO NOT use a hyphen with adverbs that end in ly. DO NOT use a hyphen in dollar amounts or percentages.

**Examples of Rule #1:**

- He is a stay–at–home person.
- Chelsea Pollock is a well–known pediatrician.
- The pediatrician was very well known.
- Her history studies had a Near Eastern emphasis.
- Tickets for the highly acclaimed movie are now available at the box office.
- Projected spending was $20 million.
- Customers receive a 20 percent discount on purchases.

**Rule #2:**

Often two or more words act as a single noun or verb. Some of these compound nouns or verbs are one word (download), some are two words (voice mail), and some are hyphenated (brother–in–law). Check a current dictionary if you are not certain.

**Rule #3:**

Use a hyphen with words that begin with better, best, ill, lesser, little, well, and all if they act as one term.

**Examples of Rule #3:**

- The security guards work all night patrols. (They do not work any patrols during the day.)
- The security guards work all–night patrols. (They work the entire night. The words all and night act as one term.)

**Rule #4:**

Use a hyphen to separate two colors.

**Example of Rule #4:**
The sky was filled with a red–orange glow.