

Hyphens can be used to break up words. For example, hyphens are used when a word has to be split because it can't fit on one line or page (e.g. repu-tation). Hyphens are also used to separate a prefix from the root if that prefix might cause confusion or make the word difficult to read (e.g. de-ice, non-unionized, re-enter).

Hyphens can also join two words together to form a compound noun (e.g. self-confidence), although a hyphen isn't always needed (e.g. bathtub). Use a dictionary to check whether or not a compound word should be hyphenated.

Elsewhere, hyphens are used to join together words that are working together to describe a noun. Below are some guidelines for hyphenating words like these.

Hyphenate words that come before a noun and that are working together to describe that noun.

- e.g. twentieth-century literature
- e.g. cutting-edge technology

However, don't hyphenate those words if they came *after* the noun.

- e.g. literature from the twentieth century
- e.g. technology that is cutting edge

Don't hyphenate words that *aren't* working together, i.e., don't hyphenate adjectives that describe separate qualities.

- e.g. big blue couch (NOT big-blue couch)

Don't need to hyphenate these words if they often appear together and won't cause confusion without the hyphen.

- e.g. high school diploma
- e.g. income tax refund

Don't hyphenate words if one is an adverb ending in *-ly*.

- e.g. recently renovated kitchen
- e.g. hugely popular show

Hyphenate phrases when they are being used as adjectives and come before the noun.

- e.g. black-and-white film
- e.g. out-of-the-box solution

Hyphenate adjectives of quantity (i.e. that involve numbers) that come before the noun.

e.g. 700-page novel

e.g. fifth-floor apartment

e.g. four-year-old boy

e.g. two-thirds full

e.g. fifty-kilometer race

But don't hyphenate if using an abbreviated unit of measurement.

e.g. 50 km race