

# Hyphens

## **To hyphenate or not to hyphenate . . . that is the question.**

We use hyphens all the time in our writing—they connect words to make them more understandable. Hyphens are extremely useful but also often misused. Mistakes run the gamut: Some people overuse hyphens, some underuse them, and some confuse them with dashes. Here are three tips that address some of the most common hyphenation errors.

Beyond these basics, there are many, many rules around hyphens—see the Resources section below for a list of more thorough guides.

### **1) Use hyphens to connect compound modifiers (two or more words describing a noun).**

- Cells were grown in 35-mm dishes.
- The handbook covers end-of-life procedures.
- Our group studied the long-term effects.
- We included 6-month-old infants in the control group.

### **2) Do NOT use hyphens with compound modifiers that come AFTER the noun.**

- The diameter of the dish was 35 mm.
- The handbook covers procedures for the end of life.
- Our group studied effects that were long term.
- The infants in the control group were 6 months old.

### **3) Do NOT hyphenate adverbs ending in -ly.**

**NO:** CDC's new leadership has a clearly-defined vision.

**YES:** CDC's new leadership has a clearly defined vision.

## **Practice Exercises:**

Are the following sentences properly punctuated?

- 1) We need to focus on adversely-affected populations.
- 2) The article was very well written.
- 3) The high impact study affected two thirds of the town's population.
- 4) The short-term solution is to cut the program.
- 5) The search continues for a highly skilled team lead.

## **Resources:**

- [Chicago Manual of Style: Hyphens, En Dashes, Em Dashes](#)
- [Grammarly: When to Use a Hyphen](#)
- [Grammarist: Hyphen Rules and Usage with Examples](#)

**Answers:**

- 1) No (Get rid of hyphen.)
- 2) Yes
- 3) No (Add hyphen to high-impact. "Two thirds" is fine as-is.)
- 4) Yes
- 5) Yes