

Dashes: Em and En

Dashes are substitutes for commas, semicolons, colons, and parentheses. They come in three varieties: one en, two em, and three em.

Let's look at them a little more closely:

1. A one-en dash is used in place of the word *to*:
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2. Two-em dashes are called such because they create a dash as large as a capital M. To create one, simply type two one-en dashes with no spaces before or after—like this.

They may be used instead of commas to highlight a nonessential element, or to give emphasis to a point:

The entire collection—including rare vases—will be auctioned off.
I don't trust him—and he knows why.

They may be used instead of semicolons between related independent clauses:
They think they deserve a raise—we know they aren't giving us 100% effort.

They may be used instead of colons to introduce words, phrases, or clauses:
My work is simple—I tell people what to do, and they do it.

They may be used instead of parentheses to give a nonessential element more weight than parentheses do:
Talk to James Curtin—our corporate attorney—and get this straightened out.

They are also used to show an abrupt break or hesitation:
“We should tell him, or—”
“Should we tell him or—? Maybe we should let it go.”

3. Three-em dashes are used to show that a word has been omitted or needs to be provided. To create one, type three hyphens with a space before and after, like this: — If you can't get your computer to create a three-em dash, use six one-en dashes: -----
This is how it would look in a sentence:
My goal is to increase sales — % by the end of the year.

Three-em dashes are also used in bibliographies to indicate an author's name in any subsequent entry after the first entry where the author's name is printed in full:

Hirase, Joanne, *The Internment of Japanese Americans: The Constitutional Threat Fifty Years Later*, *Journal of Contemporary Law* Vol. 19, No. 1 1993.

—, *State ex. rel. v. E.G.T., Waiving Childhood Goodbye*, *Journal of Contemporary Law* Vol. 18, No. 1 1992.

Remember that dashes are not the same as hyphens—each has its own purpose. Otherwise, dashes would be called hyphens!