

The Hype about Hyphens

Hyphens are used more commonly than most writers realize. Take a look at these eighteen different uses:

1. When spelling out compound number between twenty-one and ninety-nine:
Thirty-five
Seventy-seven
2. When writing out fractions as modifiers, but not when they're used as nouns:
One-half majority. One half arrived early.
3. To avoid confusion:
Re-create a scene. Recreate outside.
4. To avoid awkward joining of words:
Semi-intelligent
5. After a prefix if the root word starts with a capital letter:
pre-Colonial
6. After the prefixes: *all-*, *ex-*, *quasi-*, *self-*
ex-wife
self-absorbed
7. Between adjective and noun if it comes before a noun:
I found a low-cost treatment.
We had an all-day meeting.
I like my high-speed Internet.
8. Between noun and adjective if it appears before or after a noun:
The kids go to school year-round.
I drive a fuel-efficient car.
9. Between noun and participle if it appears before or after a noun:
I had a mind-boggling experience.
I walked into the smoke-filled bar.
The program is user-friendly.
10. Between adjective and participle if it appears before or after a noun:
He's a smooth-talking guy.
It's a long-standing rule.
Grandma is soft-spoken.
11. Between adjective and noun ending in "ed" if it appears before or after a noun:
He's old-fashioned in his ways.

You can't be thin-skinned and work here.
It's a double-edged sword.

12. Between adverb and participle if it comes before a noun unless the adverb ends in "ly":

The below-mentioned date.

A closed-ended question.

It was poorly built.

13. Between participle and adverb if it comes before a noun:

Those are worn-out clothes.

We have a scaled-down budget.

14. Between two verbs if it comes before a noun:

It's do-or-die time.

This is a pass-fail class.

15. Between verb and adverb if it comes before a noun:

I sent her a get-well card.

Try to avoid run-on sentences.

16. Between verb and noun if it comes before a noun:

It's a take-out restaurant.

This is the drop-off point.

17. In compound phrases if it comes before a noun:

He's a below-the-belt fighter.

That's off-the-shelf equipment.

18. Between parts of some compound nouns:

Mother-in-law

Great-grandma

A nineteenth use is in names. I like my maiden name, so I wanted to keep it. Thus, I am Joanne Hirase-Stacey. However, if I say "hyphen" instead of "dash" when spelling my name, people pause and give me an odd look, or say, "What?"

Maybe only writers understand!