Hyphens

The following guidelines will help you determine when to use a hyphen.

1. A compound adjective that appears before a noun needs a hyphen:
   - the old-fashioned way
   - over-inflated ego
   - cinnamon-coated pretzel

Words ending in -ly do not make a hyphenated compound adjective:

   *The sloppily dressed child*

When compound modifiers come after a noun, they are not hyphenated:

   - His ego was over inflated.
   - The pretzel is cinnamon coated.

2. Use a hyphen with compound numbers and the written form of fractions:
   - thirty-nine
   - one-third

3. Use a hyphen when a series of words is compounded into one term or to express age:
   - holier-than-thou
   - eight-year-olds
   - twenty-year-old cousin

However, leave out the hyphens when age is expressed as a state of being:

   *She was seventy years old.*

4. Use a hyphen to avoid creating a different meaning or repeating letters:
   - co-op (instead of coop)
   - pre-engineered (but premenstrual)
   - animal-like (but childlike)

5. Use a hyphen with the prefixes all-, anti-, ex-, pro-, and self; with the suffix -elect;
   - self-conscious
   - ex-patriot
   - president-elect
   - anti-acne
   - mid-semester
   - all-powerful
   - pro-choice

between a prefix and a capitalized word;

   *anti-Christian*

and with words or prefixes before numbers or letters:

   - T-ball
   - mid-30s

6. Use a hyphen to divide words at the end of a line if necessary, and make the break only between syllables:
   - un-mis-tak-able
   - giv-ing
   - in-cred-ible

When dividing words at the end of a line, only separate already hyphenated words at the hyphen:

   - low-budget
   - semi-sweet

For line breaks in words ending with -ing, if a consonant must be doubled before the suffix can be added, hyphenate between the consonants; otherwise, hyphenate the suffix:

   - swim-ming
   - can-ning
   - carv-ing
   - kill-ing
Exercises: Correct mistakes with hyphens.
1. Many view Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* as an example of anti Semitic literature.
2. He considered himself part of the upper class population.
3. They decided to have an over the hill party for his 60th birthday.
4. He decided to celebrate his twenty first birthday at home.
5. She thought he was intelligent because he professed to be well-read.
6. The bride and groom decided to make the wedding a small, black tie affair.
7. No one knew how he became so self-sufficient.
8. My cousin, who is twenty-years-old, took my three month old niece to the movies.
9. I asked her to resign the contract.
10. He went home to remove his dirty T shirt.

Key:
1. anti-Semitic
2. upper-class
3. over-the-hill
4. twenty-first
5. well read
6. wedding, black-tie
7. self-sufficient
8. twenty years old, three-month-old niece
9. resign
10. T-shirt

Works Consulted


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