

## 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*

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**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 60<sup>th</sup> 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. re-sign
10. T-shirt

#### Works Consulted

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