

HYPHEN HOUND'S HYPHEN GUIDE

Hyphens are used to connect whole words, words and prefixes, and parts of words, either temporarily or permanently.

The rules for hyphenation can be extremely complicated and complex, but this brief guide should give you a head start.

Hyphens are often used to avoid ambiguity in sentences. Otherwise, how would we know the difference between 'a man-eating shark' (yikes!) and 'a man eating shark' (mmm, that looks tasty).

Creating a compound adjective before a noun:

- The tired-looking teacher slumped at her desk.
- She has greeny-grey eyes.
- The twins are from a single-parent family. [but NOT, despite what you may see in even the best newspapers, "Mrs Jones is a mother-of-one."]

Joining two nouns of equal importance, either to create an adjective or a new noun:

- Our pupil-teacher relationships develop throughout the year.
- Laurence Olivier was known as an actor-director.

Avoiding awkward letter and sound combinations:

- Foundation subjects have been de-emphasised.
- The doctor prescribed anti-inflammatories for my ankle.

Hyphenate when the alternative would have a totally different meaning:

- The ink ran on my contract, so I re-signed it in blood.
- Mr Dracula, my boss, was so demanding that I resigned.
- The Head Teacher retreated to her office after a particularly demanding day.
- The weedkiller hadn't worked, so I re-treated the grass a week later.

Other uses of hyphens

Joining the tens and units in numbers which include 20-99:

- Bill Clinton was the forty-second President of the USA.
- There are three hundred and eighty-two children in our school.

Splitting a long word into two at the end of a line of writing:

- There is such a lot to do during the week, by the week-end I'm exhausted!

With a prefix before a proper noun:

- The ex-Prime Minister left Downing Street today.
- Jumping the queue is very un-British behaviour!

Informal phrases with words not usually used singly:

- Those wishy-washy colours really don't suit you.
- I can't stand her lah-di-dah attitude.

