

## The Dash

The dash (—) is completely different than the hyphen (-). The dash usually replaces other forms of punctuation to emphasize certain words or improve the clarity of a sentence. To form a dash in Microsoft Word, type a word followed by two hyphens and another word—when you press space, it should create a dash. Here are some uses for the dash:

### Replacing other punctuation for emphasis

Dashes can replace commas, semicolons, colons, and parentheses to create extra emphasis and a more dramatic effect. Dashes are more informal than the other forms of punctuation, so use them sparingly in these situations. You will weaken their effect if you use them too often.

#### Comma

My brother, the only good player on the team, scored 3 goals.

My brother—the only good player on the team—scored 3 goals.

#### Semicolon

He beat me at cards; he beat me at everything.

He beat me at cards—he beat me at everything.

#### Colon

He thought of his greatest fear: snakes

He thought of his greatest fear—snakes.

#### Parentheses

We turned off the television (there was nothing good on) and had a quiet chat.

We turned off the television—there was nothing good on—and had a quiet chat.

### Setting off explanations or interrupting thoughts

You can use dashes to set off a phrase or clause that interrupts or explains the main part of the sentence. Dashes call attention to whatever is between them, so use them only if this information is important enough to emphasize.

**Example** Yesterday—the best day of my life—I won the lottery, met the woman of my dreams, and discovered the meaning of life.

**Example** If Chris had passed his calculus course—he failed it miserably—he would have graduated last year.

## Setting off lists in the middle of a sentence

Use dashes instead of commas to separate a list in the middle of a sentence. This helps avoid having too many commas, which can clutter the sentence and create confusion about where the list starts and ends.

**Example** My favorite foods, chili, pizza, and pasta, are great for sharing. **(Confusing)**

**Example** My favorite foods—chili, pizza, and pasta—are great for sharing. **(Clear)**

**Example** The three men, Tom, Bill, and Daniel, took a trip to London. **(Confusing)**

**Example** The three men—Tom, Bill, and Daniel—took a trip to London. **(Clear)**

## Introduce a list followed by an explanation

Use a dash if you begin the sentence with a word or list that you are going to explain with the rest of the sentence.

**Example** Love—it is the most essential human emotion.

**Example** Spare clothes, a tent, and lots of junk food—Jill's camping supplies were prepared.