

The Dash

Two hyphens typed together (--) form the dash. There are no spaces before or after the dash.

The dash is often used incorrectly, but has several very specific functions in writing.

APPROPRIATE USES FOR THE DASH

1. To set off parenthetical material for emphasis.

Ex: Everything that went wrong--from the barking dog last night to his head-on collision this morning--was blamed on me.

2. To set off appositives containing commas.

Ex: In Oklahoma, the necessities--food, clothing, and shelter--are less costly than in California.

3. To prepare for a list, an amplification, or a dramatic shift in tone or thought.

Ex: Along the wall were all kinds of cloth--silk, velvet, damask, cotton and linen.

Ex: Kailey took a few steps back, started running at full speed--and tripped over the first hurdle.

Occasionally, the dash can also be used as a substitute for the colon. The colon is considered more formal and less dramatic than the dash. Be sure to discover your teacher's preferences concerning this usage of the dash.