

Hyphens

Hyphens are the short lines that separate the words in the expressions 'non-English' and 'ex-husband'.

When to use hyphens?

We usually use a hyphen between the two words in a two-part adjective in which the second part ends in -ed or -ing.

Good-looking

Broken-hearted

Blue-eyed

Two-part adjectives which contain the sense of 'between' are also hyphenated.

the India-Pakistan match (= the match between India and Pakistan)

the Anglo-French agreement

A longer phrase used as an adjective before a noun is also hyphenated.

Compare:

An out-of-work singer

He is out of work. (NOT He is out-of-work.)

Prefixes

The prefixes co-, non- and ex- are sometimes separated from the following words by hyphens.

Ex-lover

Non-cooperation

Co-production

Hyphens are also used to separate the parts of a long word at the end of a written or printed line. To see where to divide words look in a good dictionary.

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Are hyphens disappearing?

The rules about the usage of hyphens are very complicated. Needless to say, people seem to be using hyphens less. Many short compound words are now written with no separation between the two parts. Examples are: *weekend, takeover etc.*

Many longer compound words are now written as completely separate words. Examples are: *bus driver, living room etc.*

It is also not unusual to find the same word written in three different ways. Example: *living-room, living room, livingroom*

If you do not know whether to use a hyphen or not, the best thing to do is to write the words without a hyphen.