

Hyphens



The Hyphen



A hyphen is a punctuation mark that looks like a little horizontal line.

This is a hyphen. → -

Hyphens join together words or parts of words.

E.g. small-scale, re-formed.

Hyphens are very useful as they can help to clarify the meaning of a word or phrase and avoid ambiguity in writing. Look at the example below:

Paula decided to **resign** from her job.

Steve **re-signed** his contract.



The Hyphen

Creating a Compound Adjective

Hyphens can be used to link two separate words into a compound adjective before a noun.

The terrier padded across the room on its **bear-like** paws.



Georgina hung her **hot-pink** coat on the hook.



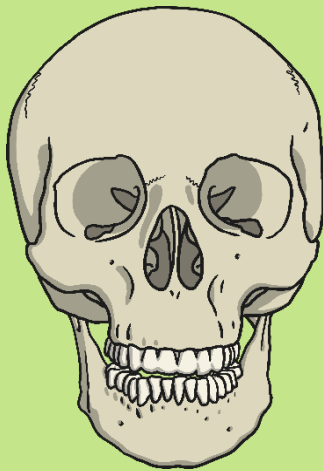
The Hyphen

Joining two nouns

Hyphens can be used to join together two nouns of equal importance to create a new noun or adjective.



Dan hung up a **skeleton-head** garland on Halloween.
(This creates an adjective.)



The **student-teacher** taught the children about hyphens.
(This creates a new noun.)



The Hyphen



Avoiding Awkward Letters or Sound Combinations

Hyphens can be used to avoid combining letters and sounds which could be awkward to say or write without a hyphen.

The children seemed incapable of **co-operating** with each other.



The policeman called for help to **de-escalate** the situation.



Hyphens are often used in this way to join prefixes to words when the prefix ends and the word starts with a vowel.

The Hyphen



Clarifying a Word Meaning

Hyphens can be used to ensure that the meaning of a word is clear. In these examples the words could mean different things without the hyphens.

Bill requested that the email be **re-sent**.



Dad decided to **re-press** his shirt as it was still creased.



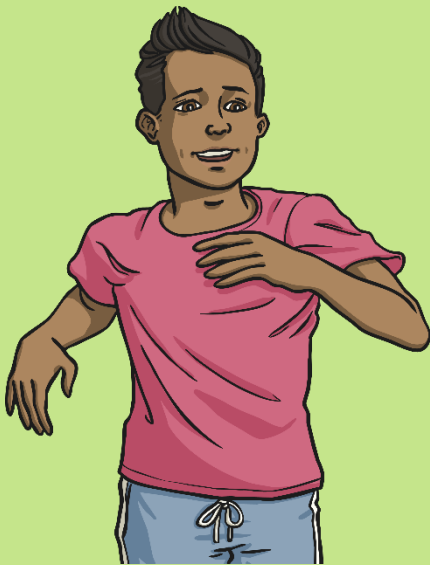
The Hyphen

In Numbers

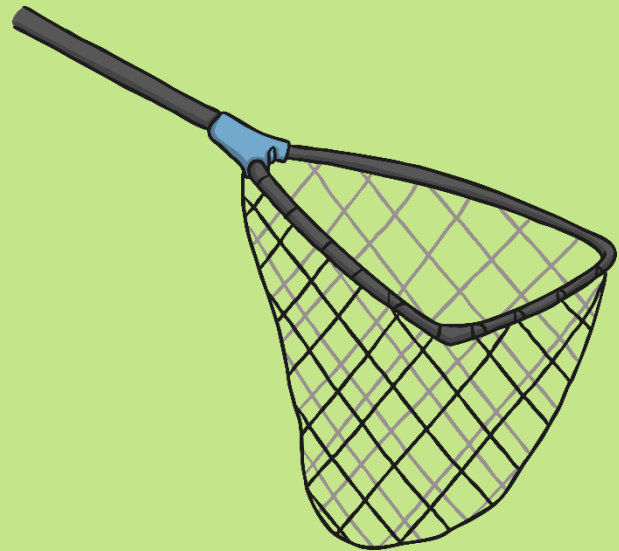
Hyphens should be used to join the tens and units in written numbers 21 – 99.



Sam came first in the marathon in which one hundred and **twenty-seven** people raced.



There are **thirty-two** known species of fish in our school pond.





The Hyphen

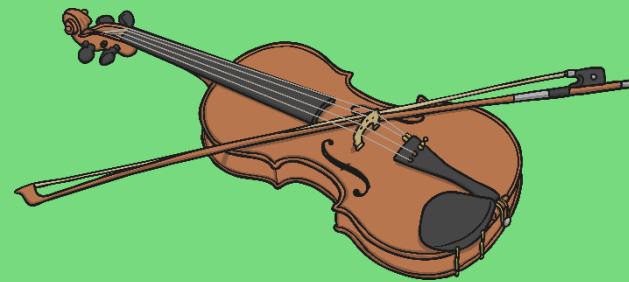
Splitting a Word

Hyphens can be used to indicate that a word is not finished at the end of a line of writing.

Fiona thought that the new James Bond film was **stupendous-ly** enjoyable.



The waiters were asked to provide some light **entertainment** after the meal.



Make sure the word is split in a sensible place if using a hyphen this way.



The Hyphen

Create Informal Words/Phrases

Hyphens can be used in informal phrases to link words which go together to create a unit of meaning.

The song became a bit of a **free-for-all** with everyone singing at once.



The man is an **out-and-out** thief.



Avoiding Ambiguity



Hyphens can be used to avoid ambiguity in sentences. That means they help to make the meaning of the sentence clear.

Read
these two
sentences.

There was a man eating shark in the bay.

There was a man-eating shark in the bay.

Why is the first
sentence ambiguous?

How does the hyphen in the second
sentence help to make the meaning clear?

Complete the hyphens worksheet.