The Hyphen

When do we use a hyphen? This can be a complicated question, even for professional writers. Consider the following:

• **Compound words.** These words are more a matter of spelling than punctuation. Consult the dictionary to determine how to treat a compound word. If the compound word is not in the dictionary, treat it as two words.

  *water-repellent, waterproof, water table*

• **Use a hyphen to connect two or more words functioning together as an adjective before a noun.**

  *newspaper-wrapped fish, well-known candidate*

• **Hyphenate the written form of fractions and of compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine.**

  *one-fourth, sixty-seven*

• **Use a hyphen with the prefixes all-, ex-, and self- and with the suffix – elect.**

  *self-help, President-elect*

• **A hyphen is used in some words to avoid ambiguity or to separate awkward double or triple letters.**

  *re-creation vs. recreation, anti-intellectual, cross-stitch*

• If a word must be divided by the end of a line, divide it correctly. **Divide words between syllables; never divide a one-syllable word.** When dividing a compound word at the end of a line, either make the break between the words that form the compound or put the whole word on the next line.

• **To divide long e-mail and Internet addresses (URLs), do not use a hyphen. Break an email address after the @ symbol or before a period. Break a URL after a colon, a slash, or a double slash or before a period or other punctuation mark.**

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This handout is adapted from University of Alabama Writing Center Website. Only the format has been changed.