

### Handout Topic: Dashes

#### What is a dash?

A dash is a punctuation mark that allows the writer to add information into a complete sentence to serve the purpose of: a hesitation in speech, an explanation, a commentary on a list, an illustration, an introduction for a list, emphasis, a shift in tone, an unfinished thought or a break in thought.

Dashes are found in sentences in two forms:

1. A pair of dashes found in the middle of a sentence.
2. A single dash usually found near the end of a sentence.

N.B. Dashes are longer than hyphens, and should be typed to reflect this fact. Whereas hyphens are typed as one mark (-), dashes are typed by using two hyphens together (—). Some word-processing programs auto-format a dash only if you type a space after two consecutive hyphens; however, spaces are not needed before or after a dash in a sentence.

#### How to use a dash:

##### Hesitation in speech

e.g. “Wait—I know the answer,” he said triumphantly.

##### Explanation

e.g. I can’t go out tonight—I have a date—but I am free Saturday.

##### Commenting on a list

e.g. Eggs, milk, and flour—how am I supposed to make spaghetti with these ingredients?

##### Illustration

e.g. John liberally applied his cologne—which smelled like pure gasoline—before his first date with Tina.

##### Introducing a list

**e.g.** Jim Morrison's stage performance had everything—poetry, theatrics, dancing and mysticism.

**Emphasis**

**e.g.** He sits in that chair—everyday—during the evening news hour.

**Shift in tone**

**e.g.** Everyone paused to look—stop staring at me!—when I walked through the door.

**An unfinished thought**

**e.g.** I remember a time when I was young—perhaps I should tell you this story when you are older.

**A break in thought**

**e.g.** I watched as Frank went around the corner—where was he going?

**Exercises:** *Place a dash or dashes in the correct location(s).*

1. We all went home after a couple of hours it was getting late and went to bed.
2. They all whined like little children when the teacher said they had to stay.
3. I had too much for supper steak, potatoes, salad, corn and coleslaw.
4. She smiles at me which makes me blush every time she walks by.
5. Lights, camera, action that's a Hollywood catchphrase.