

How to Use AP Style Hyphens

Hyphens are joiners that aid a readers' comprehension. If a hyphen makes the meaning clearer, use it. If it just adds clutter, don't use it.

AVOID AMBIGUITY

Use a hyphen whenever the meaning of the word may be unclear. Think of the different possible meanings of a word with and without the hyphen.



recovered vs. re-covered

French speaking people vs.
French-speaking people



COMPOUND MODIFIERS

Definition: two or more words that express a single concept

Hyphenate combinations using "well-" before a noun, but not after



a well-known judge vs.
the judge is well known

Use a hyphen in modifiers of three or more words



know-it-all attitude
sink-or-swim moment

Use a hyphen if confusion could result while using longer or not as commonly used modifiers

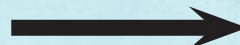


The technology is state-of-the-art.
The test was fill-in-the-blank.

PRO TIP: Hyphens are a great tool, but it's often the better choice to rephrase, even if it means using a few more words.

PREFIXES AND SUFFIXES

Certain prefixes and suffixes require the use of hyphens.



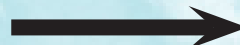
Prefixes: self-, all-, ex-, half-
Suffixes: -free, -based, -elect



SUSPENSIVE HYPHENATION

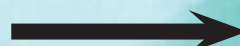
Shortening a compound modifier or a noun phrase that shares a common word.

When plural elements are joined by "and" or "or"



15- or 20-minute intervals
5- and 6-year-olds

When singular elements are joined by "to" or "by"



10-to-15-year prison term
8-by-12-inch pan

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