

Dashes and Parentheses

A writer isn't limited to commas and periods for punctuation. Dashes and parentheses can help vary your sentence structure and create more energy in your writing.

Dashes

The dash is a strong, dramatic mark that is often misused or overused. Generally, dashes are used to expand upon information.

Note: In printed text, the DASH is a continuous line. Microsoft Word will create a full dash when you type two hyphens next to one another, with no space before, between, or after the hyphens.

- A pair of dashes can be used to set off information introduced by phrases such as for example, namely, and that is.

Ex. Students should generally—for example, in essays—have a thesis at the end of an introduction.

- A dash is often used to link clauses, especially if the clause that follows the dash explains, summarizes, or expands the clause in some way.

Ex. The papers were finally graded—every student received a passing grade.

- A dash may introduce a summary statement that follows a series of words or phrases.

Ex. Shopping, arcades, and restaurants—there was something for everyone.

Parentheses

Parentheses generally enclose extra, non-essential material in a main statement. Unlike commas or dashes, an opening parenthesis must always be followed by a closing one.

- Parentheses enclose phrases that provide examples, explanations, or supplemental facts.

Ex. Five of the books (all out-of-print editions) will be replaced.

- Parentheses enclose abbreviations that follow their spelled-out forms.

Ex. The Automotive Association of America (AAA) sponsored the recent study.

- Parentheses sometime enclose phrases introduced by expressions such as namely, that is, e.g., and i.e., especially where parentheses would clarify the sentence.

Ex. In writing the application essay, be as specific as possible (i.e., list your reasons for applying, the classes you've taken, and any relevant experience), but also be concise.

Source: "Dash" and "Parentheses." *Merriam-Webster's Manual for Writers and Editors*. 2nd ed. 1998.