

Use a Dash to Indicate a Pause

Writers often use dashes (–) to represent a pause in a sentence. A dash can show a clear break or set off extra content, such as an aside, an explanation, or additional details, from the rest of the sentence. Remember to use the dash sparingly, and only in cases where emphasis is needed.

If the set-off content is at the beginning or end of a sentence, only one dash is needed. If the set-off content is in the middle of the sentence, two dashes will be needed.



One dash

Julienne studied marine biology and fine art over the summer—a fact that makes sense to the people who have seen her ocean-inspired works of art.

Two dashes

Everything I saw in my new neighborhood—from the graceful elm trees to the stately brick buildings—reminded me of my visit to Massachusetts.

Part 1: Add one dash where it is needed to indicate a pause or break in each sentence.

- 1 Everyone on the speech and debate team enjoyed the bus trips to meets – they were always filled with games and laughter.
- 2 The most popular flavor at Milkshakes on Main Street is chocolate – though I like their blackberry hibiscus best.
- 3 Ariana is inventing a cross between a pogo stick and a unicycle – an idea she thought of when watching dirt-bike riders perform flashy tricks.
- 4 Bring plenty of water, hiking gear, and sun protection when hiking at Chiricahua National Monument – temperature changes and unexpected storms are always possible.
- 5 Though they had just been introduced, Jayla and Carlo talked about everything – music, friends, school, and even their shared tendency to procrastinate.
- 6 Ronaldo was excited and nervous to portray Hamlet – the character with more lines than any other Shakespeare role.

Part 2: Add two dashes where they are needed to indicate a pause or break in each sentence.

- 7 The Mariana Trench – the deepest part of the ocean – is more than a mile deeper than Mount Everest is tall.
- 8 Benjamin's greatest ambition – learning to open-water scuba dive – was about to become a reality.
- 9 Wandering around the ancient city of Rome – where every brick seems to have a story – I was lost in less than an hour.
- 10 Hiking the entirety of the Great Wall of China – more than thirteen thousand miles – would take about a year and a half.
- 11 Wyatt and TaQuira – huge fans of the latest dystopian book series – lined up for movie tickets twelve hours before the theater opened.
- 12 The debris from the rocket – one of the largest items in decades to have an uncontrolled reentry into the atmosphere – landed in the Indian Ocean.