use of the dash (em dash) and the en dash

Typing two hyphens, with neither a space between them nor a space on either side of them, forms a dash—just like that. The dash (or em-dash) should be used for a specific reason and not be overused in academic writing.

- Use a dash to take the place of the more formal colon, particularly when you want to emphasize a point:

    Students were asked to bring their own supplies—paper, pencils, and calculator.

- Use a pair of dashes in place of parentheses when you want to place more emphasis on the content:

    The participants—two from group A and two from group B—tested negatively.

- Use a dash at the beginning and end of a series separated by commas:

    The students—Jim, Marla, and Sara—were told they could leave.

- Use a dash to mean *namely, in other words,* or *that is* before an explanation:

    The man—the one with his hand in the air—looks desperate.

- Use a dash to indicate an abrupt break in thought:

    The professor was unwilling to change the due date—not even for a candy bar!

    If the sentence resumes after the break, use a second dash:

    The professor was unwilling—not even for a candy bar!—to change the due date.

    After the professor made her statement—"I'll extend the due date, but just this one time." —we applauded and gave her a candy bar.

- Use a dash to interrupt the main idea in a sentence to insert another, related, idea:

    The student—the one dressed in black, sitting in the corner—let out a cry.

The en dash is used between equal weighted words in a compound adjective. It is made by typing the first adjective, followed by a space, a hyphen, another space, and the second adjective:

…the Yankee – Red Sox rivalry. …the New York – Beijing flight.

Most often the en dash is used to express a range:

pages 10 – 23; 100 – 300 participants; January – May 2009.

It can also stand for the words *and, to,* or *versus* between two words of equal weight:

…the Israeli – Palestinian Peace Conference.