

Dashes + Parentheses Key

grammar and punctuation and correcting any mistakes you have made. Part of that process is deciding if other punctuation marks might be more effective. The practice exercises in Step Six are meant to help you learn how to edit for proper dash usage.

★ Look at the following sentences. Each sentence can take a dash or a pair of dashes. Determine where the dash(es) might go.

1. The idea that boys are smarter than girls is ridiculous even preposterous.
2. Love, patience, kindness, understanding these are traits that a good parent must possess.
3. It seems that some students do not know how to incorporate research into their documents or even find reliable research for that matter because they have not been thoroughly taught how to do it.
4. I wish you would oh, never mind.
5. Some small businesses will make it through this hard time most will not.
6. The twelve polar bears were large and I mean large!
7. Brendan's latest fling not to be confused with his permanent fling learned that she wasn't the only woman in his life.
8. Superior students notice that I said superior will not have to take the test.
9. All four of them Bob, Jeffrey, Jason, and Brett did well in college.
10. The man the one with his hand in the air looks desperate.
11. The professor was unwilling to change the due date even for a candy bar!
12. This is the end of our sentence or so we thought.
13. The less Bryce thought about his situation, the more he calmed down even relaxed a little.
14. The document needed some additional elements a title page, an abstract, and a reference page.
15. The student the one dressed in black, sitting in the corner let out a cry.
16. Laws now restrict the activities of one of the most cunning predators the telemarketer.

A colon :
would also work.


A colon :
would also
work!

A colon :
would also
work!

Step Seven: Assessing What You Already Know About Parentheses

On the lines below, explain what you already know about parentheses. Don't look ahead or use other sources of information. Try and write something down, but if you feel like you don't know anything about them, then write that you don't know.

Step Eight: Understanding How Parentheses Can Be Used



Parentheses are punctuation marks that enclose supplementary material (explanations, clarifications, or afterthoughts) that doesn't fit into the flow of the text but that you still want to include. The information inside the parentheses is generally information that is interesting to know but does not change the meaning of a sentence in which it is included. Anything that can be removed from the sentence without altering its meaning can be enclosed in parentheses. Take a look at the following examples to get a better idea of what counts as extraneous material.

For the last five years (some say longer), the house on the hill has been haunted.
We read Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" (one of my favorite stories) this semester.
He finally said (after taking five minutes to think) that he did not understand the question.
Those four boys (without doubt, the guilty ones) damaged my lawn several times.
The weights James was first able to move (not lift, mind you) were measured in ounces.

If the parenthetical element is a complete sentence but is included inside another sentence, do not capitalize the first word of the sentence (unless it is a proper noun) or put a period at the end of the sentence. If the parenthetical element is not a part of another sentence, do capitalize the first word and add the appropriate ending punctuation. Below are two sets of examples to help you see the difference.

Three of my four uncles served with honor in the war (the other was too young to enlist).
Like three of my four uncles (the other was too young), my father served with honor.
Three of my four uncles served with honor. (The other was too young to enlist.)

His dislike for poetry goes back to the fifth grade (his teacher asked him to read a difficult poem aloud) when he had an embarrassing experience in class.
His dislike for poetry goes back to the fifth grade when he had an embarrassing experience in class. (His teacher asked him to read a difficult poem aloud.)

Now, you will learn about five additional uses of parentheses: **to enclose numbers or letters in a series, to indicate the plural of nouns, to indicate an acronym, to enclose dates,**

and to **enclose citations**. Carefully read the explanations and examples below before attempting these techniques yourself in the practice exercises.

1. Use parentheses to enclose numbers or letters in a series.

Three elements of stories include (1) characters, (2) setting, and (3) plot.

2. Use parentheses to indicate the plural of nouns.

In the following section of the exam, circle the error(s) in each of the sentences.

3. Use parentheses to indicate an acronym.

President Eisenhower established the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1958.

The mission of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) is to stop drunk driving completely.

4. Use parentheses to enclose dates.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) is one of my favorite poets.

5. Use parentheses to enclose citations.

As of December 2000, twenty countries were restricting use of cell phones in moving vehicles (Sundeen 8).

Step Nine: Deciding Whether to Use Parentheses or Dashes

Parentheses can be used in place of dashes, but when should they be? Think of parentheses as hiding information (de-emphasizing it) while dashes highlight information—emphasizing it. A dash is quite a dramatic punctuation mark. Notice the differences in these sentences. The parentheses downplay the material inside, while the dashes make it stand out.

The tennis team (especially Jim) played great.

The tennis team—especially Jim—played great.

The tennis team (except for Matt) played great.

The tennis team—except for Matt—played great.

Erica looked beautiful (incredibly beautiful) in her prom gown.

Erica looked beautiful—incredibly beautiful—in her prom gown.

If you eat too much ice cream (as I've done today), you'll get fat.

If you eat too much ice cream—as I've done today—you'll get fat.

parentheses =
de-emphasize

dashes =
emphasize

Step Ten: Understanding How Parentheses Can Be Overused

One last word of warning: as with all things in life (including dashes), use parentheses only in moderation. Even the most tolerant of readers can become irritated by a set of parentheses every other word.

Step Eleven: Editing for Parentheses Usage

Now that you have learned the rules, it's time to apply that knowledge to writing. When you write an essay, you must always edit for mistakes. That means critically looking at your grammar and punctuation and correcting any mistakes you have made. Part of that process is deciding if other punctuation marks might be more effective. The practice exercises in Step Eleven are meant to help you learn how to edit for proper parentheses usage.

Each of the sentences below needs parentheses. Decide where they should go and insert them.

1. We (Anna, Michael, and I) have decided to volunteer for four hours each week, somewhere in the community.
2. The song "Forever Young" (Alphaville's version, not Jay Z's) has been playing in my head for several hours now.
3. While walking down the street (paying more attention to her music than to her feet), Catherine tripped over the curb and sprained her ankle.
4. The cat was sleeping (did you expect anything different?) and was shocked awake when the fire alarm went off.
5. Relative pronouns function as (1) subject, (2) direct objects, (3) prepositional complements, (4) possessive determiners, and (5) adverbials in English grammar.
6. Please review the report (Exhibit A) before today's meeting.
7. Books marked IRMA (Infrequently Requested Materials Area) may be checked out.
8. The library (the six-story building next to the student center) is open 24 hours during finals week.
9. New students (mostly freshmen but some transfer) need information about available parking.
10. My daughter (she goes to Illinois State) plans to become a teacher.
11. I know the answer (I think) to the final question.
12. After taking her vital signs (temperature, pulse, and blood pressure), the nurse made Becky as comfortable as possible.

comma after
parentheses

comma
after
parentheses