General Information on Dashes

A dash is typed as two hyphens with no spaces--

Many computers convert the -- to — which is acceptable as well. Do not put spaces before or after your dashes.

Dashes are more informal than commas, so dashes are not used as often in formal writing.

Dashes work in three key ways:

- To emphasize parenthetical material.
- To set off appositives, especially appositives that contain commas.
- To indicate a change in thought, tone, or feeling.
Use Dashes in the following ways...

1. To emphasize parenthetical material.

Example:
Workplace stress--from long hours to fear of being downsized--is reducing the productivity of the American white-collar worker.

2. To set off appositives, especially appositives that contain commas.

Examples:
China--the most densely populated nation on earth--has only about two percent of the land suitable for growing in the world.

The naval tour included four ships--two destroyers, an aircraft carrier, and a submarine.

The equipment needed for the computer lab--12 tables and chairs, 14 computers, and two printers--is on order.

3. To indicate a change in thought, tone, or feeling.

Examples:
She said he lied--as if he doesn't always--only to protect her reputation.

Her musical talent--genius is perhaps a more accurate word--is wasted by simply teaching and never performing.

You can find more mini-lessons online http://dept.kent.edu/english/WritingCent/mini.htm