GENERAL INFORMATION ON HYPHENS

The hyphen is a punctuation mark used to divide and to connect.

Hyphens are used:

- In compound words.
- In fractions.
- In numbers twenty-one to ninety-nine.
- To connect prefixes (for example, all-, great-, self-, and ex-) to nouns and adjectives.
- Connect a single letter to a word.

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

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USE HYPHENS 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.

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

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

Examples:
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.

For more information, see mini-lesson #2 (“Dashes”) and The Everyday Writer, 3rd edition, Section 57 (pp. 361-364).