Hyphens

The Hyphen

A hyphen is a punctuation mark that looks like a little horizontal line.

This is a hyphen. → -

Hyphens join together words or parts of words.

E.g. small-scale, re-formed.

Hyphens are very useful as they can help to clarify the meaning of a word or phrase and avoid ambiguity in writing. Look at the example below:

Paula decided to **resign** from her job.

Steve **re-signed** his contract.

The Hyphen

Creating a Compound Adjective

Hyphens can be used to link two separate words into a compound adjective before a noun.

The terrier padded across the room on its **bear-like** paws.

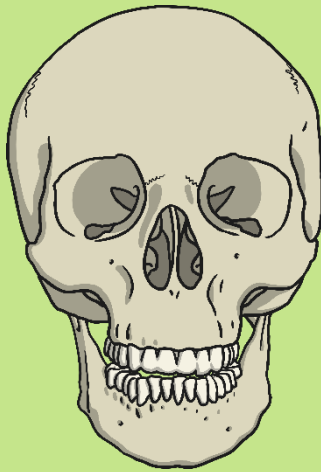Georgina hung her **hot-pink** coat on the hook.

The Hyphen

Joining two nouns

Hyphens can be used to join together two nouns of equal importance to create a new noun or adjective.

Dan hung up a **skeleton-head** garland on Halloween.
(This creates an adjective.)

The **student-teacher** taught the children about hyphens.
(This creates a new noun.)

The Hyphen

Avoiding Awkward Letters or Sound Combinations

Hyphens can be used to avoid combining letters and sounds which could be awkward to say or write without a hyphen.

The children seemed incapable of **co-operating** with each other.

The policeman called for help to **de-escalate** the situation.

Hyphens are often used in this way to join prefixes to words when the prefix ends and the word starts with a vowel.

The Hyphen

Clarifying a Word Meaning

Hyphens can be used to ensure that the meaning of a word is clear. In these examples the words could mean different things without the hyphens.

Bill requested that the email be **re-sent**.

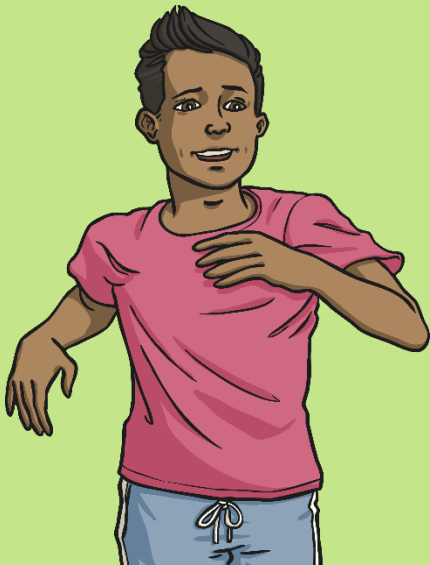Dad decided to **re-press** his shirt as it was still creased.
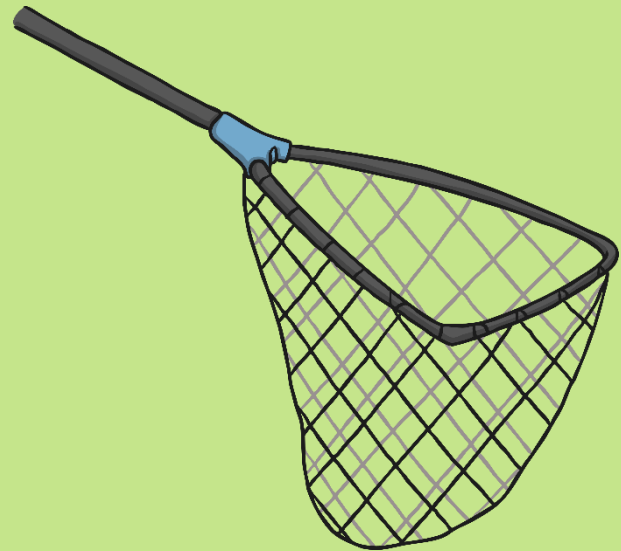
The Hyphen

In Numbers

Hyphens should be used to join the tens and units in written numbers 21 – 99.

Sam came first in the marathon in which one hundred and **twenty-seven** people raced.

There are **thirty-two** known species of fish in our school pond.
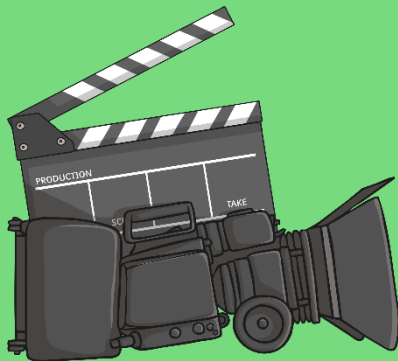
The Hyphen

Splitting a Word

Hyphens can be used to indicate that a word is not finished at the end of a line of writing.

Fiona thought that the new James Bond film was **stupendous-ly** enjoyable.

The waiters were asked to provide some light **entertain-ment** after the meal.

Make sure the word is split in a sensible place if using a hyphen this way.

The Hyphen

Create Informal Words/Phrases

Hyphens can be used in informal phases to link words which go together to create a unit of meaning.

The song became a bit of a **free-for-all** with everyone singing at once.

The man is an **out-and-out** thief.