Hyphens, En Dashes, and Em Dashes:
What They Are, How They Are Used, and How to Put Them in the Paper†

A. Three lines can appear in print, sometimes all rather loosely called a dash:

- **Hyphen**: a short line with no space, used as a minus sign in math equations, and used between syllables, compound nouns (in-box), compound adjectives (well-known rule), or nouns with prefixes (mid-fall) or suffixes (shell-like).

  – **En dash**: twice as long as the hyphen, the length of *N*, used by professional manuscript editors to signify “through” in a range of numerals, such as years 1980s–90s, timeframe 9:00–11:50 a.m., chapters 40–44, and Genesis 6:13–21. For directions, scores, and votes, the en dash signifies “to”: “The legislature approved the resolution to build a Raleigh–Wilmington train by a vote of 101–12.”
  - See Turabian et al., *A Manual for Writers*, §21.7.2, note 1, which advises that the en dash is a stylistic option but usually reserved for published works; moreover, “authors can generally avoid the en dash and use hyphens instead” (*Chicago Manual of Style*, §2.13).

  — **Em dash**: twice as long as the en dash, the length of *M*, often simply called the dash since it is commonly used in prose and poetry as a highly visible “dramatic comma” with three main uses: (a) to set off parenthetical material—often used in pairs as a set of emphatic parentheses—for material that deserves emphasis; (b) to set off appositive that contain commas; and (c) to introduce a list, a restatement, an amplification, or a dramatic shift in tone or thought.

Neither the hyphen nor the en dash nor the em dash should have a space before or after it.

B. **How to type hyphens and dashes with the keyboard:**

  - For hyphens, the key to the right of zero “0” on a normal keyboard is a hyphen, likewise the minus sign on a numerical keypad.
  - For em dashes, whenever one types a word followed by two hyphens, word-processing programs like Microsoft Word will automatically insert an em dash when one continues typing the following word and adds a space after it.

C. **How to insert dashes from the symbol grouping in word processors:**‡

  - Place your cursor in your text where you want to insert the dash;
  - From the control ribbon, click on the Insert tab;
  - Click on the Symbol group, then More Symbols, then the tab for Special Characters;
  - Finally, find and click on Em Dash or En Dash or Nonbreaking Hyphen, and click on Insert.
  - From this menu you will notice that Word also shows you shortcut keys.

‡ Microsoft Office Online offers tutorials on how to “Insert a symbol or special character” and “Automatically format hyphens as en dashes and em dashes.”