

# Hyphens, Dashes and Brackets: Top Tips

## 1. Hyphens (clarify meaning in words)

Examples:

- Man eating lion seen prowling the woods. (A man eating a lion!)
- Man-eating lion seen prowling the woods. (A lion)

Hyphens **link words**, where no link originally existed: daughter-in-law, life-like, happy-go-lucky

Hyphens create **compound words**: burn-out, crack-down, ex-husband, semi-skimmed

Hyphens create **compound numbers**: Twenty-one, three-quarters, a ten-pound note

## 2. Dashes (construct meaning in sentences) This comes directly after the person, people or thing/s that own/s something.

They can take the place of brackets or commas to **insert additional information** in sentences. However, you **should not** over use them in academic assignments.

**Example:** The plants are so hardy – they are impossible to kill – that the variety makes an ideal gift for a lazy friend.

Dashes can add an afterthought:

**Example:** I'll meet you at seven tonight – if I can get away early.

## 3. Round brackets ( )

Round brackets (or parentheses) are used to include relevant (but not essential) information.

**Example:** James Dean (1931-1955) died tragically in a car crash.

Round brackets are also used to enclose details of your source for Harvard referencing. See your module handbooks or the Skills Guide, *Harvard Referencing* for guidance.

### 4. Square brackets [ ]

These are used to include your own words within a quote to make the meaning clear.

**Example:** Only [Miss] Smith agreed with the decision.

**Example:** It is important to get students in the 'right mood to think [by] gaining their attention' (Cowley, 2004:8).

If there is an error or an unconventional spelling in a direct quote you are using, write [sic] after it. Sic is Latin for 'thus' and is a way of showing that the error is not yours.

**Example:** 'The children did not receive [sic] any rewards for this' (Green, 2002:19). (Receive is misspelt.)

### 5. Braces { } < >

Brace brackets {**these**} or angle brackets <**these**> should only be used in specialist texts (maths, tabulations etc.).