

chicago manual of style hyphenation rules

Chicago Manual of Style Hyphenation Rules: A Comprehensive Guide

Chicago Manual of Style hyphenation rules are a cornerstone of clear and consistent writing, particularly in academic, publishing, and professional contexts. Mastering these guidelines ensures your prose is not only grammatically sound but also aesthetically pleasing and easy for your readers to process. This guide delves deep into the intricacies of hyphenation as prescribed by the Chicago Manual of Style, exploring its foundational principles, common applications, and nuanced exceptions. We will cover everything from compound modifiers and prefixes to numbers and adverbs, providing clear explanations and practical examples to help you navigate this essential aspect of effective communication. Understanding these rules will elevate your writing, minimizing ambiguity and enhancing the overall professionalism of your work.

Table of Contents

- Understanding the Purpose of Hyphens
- Compound Modifiers: The Core of Chicago Hyphenation
- Hyphenating Prefixes and Suffixes
- Hyphenation with Numbers and Units
- Special Cases and Exceptions in Chicago Style
- When to Use a Hyphen vs. an Em Dash or En Dash
- Resources for Chicago Manual of Style Hyphenation

Understanding the Purpose of Hyphens

The primary function of a hyphen in the Chicago Manual of Style is to connect words that, when combined, function as a single unit of meaning. This connection is crucial for clarity, especially when words might otherwise be misinterpreted. A hyphen acts as a visual cue, signaling to the reader that two or more words are working together to modify another word or to form a new concept. Without hyphens, the relationships between words can become ambiguous, leading to potential confusion and misreading.

Chicago style prioritizes clarity and readability above all else. Therefore, its hyphenation rules are designed to prevent awkward phrasing and potential misunderstandings. The manual often advocates for hyphenating compound modifiers when they precede the noun they modify, but generally advises against hyphenating them when they follow the noun. This distinction is a key principle that underlies many of the specific rules and examples presented throughout the style guide.

Compound Modifiers: The Core of Chicago Hyphenation

Compound modifiers are perhaps the most frequent area where hyphenation rules come into play within the Chicago Manual of Style. These are two or more words that function together as a single adjective to modify a noun. The general rule is to hyphenate compound modifiers when they come before the noun they modify, but not when they come after the noun.

Compound Adjectives Before a Noun

When a compound adjective precedes the noun it modifies, it should typically be hyphenated to show that the words are working as a unit. For instance, in the phrase "a well-known author," "well" and "known" together describe "author." Hyphenating them as "well-known" prevents the reader from wondering if the author is known in some unspecified way, separate from being well-known. Similarly, "state-of-the-art technology" uses hyphens to link "state," "of," "the," and "art" into a single descriptive unit.

Consider the following examples:

- a **fast-moving** train
- a **long-term** investment
- a **brand-new** car
- a **twelve-year-old** child

Compound Adjectives After a Noun

In contrast, when the compound modifier appears after the noun it modifies, it is generally not hyphenated. This is because the noun has already been established, and the modifiers following it are understood to be descriptive of that noun. The separation by the noun itself clarifies the grammatical relationship. For example, "The author is **well known**" and "The technology is **state of the art**" are correct without hyphens because the modifiers follow the noun.

This rule also applies to adverbs ending in -ly. Adverbs ending in -ly that modify an adjective or another adverb are typically not hyphenated, even when they precede the modified word. For instance, "a **highly effective** strategy"

is correct; there is no need to hyphenate "highly effective" because "highly" already clearly modifies "effective."

Exceptions to Compound Modifier Rules

There are, of course, exceptions. Some commonly used compound modifiers have become so integrated into the language that they are treated as single words and do not require hyphens, regardless of their position. Chicago style often advises consulting a dictionary for such cases. Furthermore, when the first word of a compound modifier is an adverb ending in -ly, a hyphen is generally not used, as previously noted. Additionally, certain proper nouns and established phrases may have their own customary hyphenation patterns.

When the First Word is an Adverb Ending in -ly

This is a crucial exception to the compound modifier rule. If the first word in a two-word modifier is an adverb ending in "-ly," a hyphen is not used. The adverb naturally modifies the adjective that follows. For instance, "a **highly regarded** scholar" is correct. "Highly" clearly modifies "regarded," and no hyphen is needed. Similarly, "a **suddenly appearing** object" is correctly written without a hyphen between "suddenly" and "appearing."

Hyphenating Prefixes and Suffixes

The use of hyphens with prefixes and suffixes in Chicago style is primarily driven by the need to avoid awkward letter combinations, to clarify meaning, or to distinguish between different grammatical functions. While many prefixes and suffixes attach directly to the root word, certain situations necessitate a hyphen.

Common Prefixes

Many common prefixes, such as anti-, co-, de-, pre-, pro-, re-, and un-, are usually attached directly to the root word without a hyphen. For example, antibiotic, cooperate, deactivate, predetermine, profound, redo, and unhappy are all formed by simple addition. However, exceptions exist to prevent awkward spelling or to clarify meaning.

Prefixes Requiring Hyphens

A hyphen is generally used with prefixes in the following circumstances:

- When the prefix is attached to a proper noun or a proper adjective: *mid-Victorian*, *pre-Columbian*, *un-American*.
- When the prefix is attached to a word that begins with the same letter as the last letter of the prefix, to avoid a triple letter or awkward sound: *anti-intellectual*, *co-opt*, *re-elect*, *semi-independent*.
- When the prefix is attached to a word beginning with an 'i' or 'u' to avoid awkwardness: *anti-inflationary*, *semi-illiterate*.
- With the prefix *ex-* when it means "former": *ex-wife*, *ex-president*.
- With the prefix *self-*: *self-conscious*, *self-esteem*.

Suffixes

Suffixes are typically appended directly to the base word without a hyphen, forming a single word. For instance, *childhood*, *beautiful*, *quickly*, and *likeness* are formed by straightforward suffixation. Hyphens are rarely used with suffixes in standard English, and Chicago style adheres to this convention.

Hyphenation with Numbers and Units

The Chicago Manual of Style provides specific guidance on hyphenating numbers, especially when they form compound modifiers, and when combining numbers with units of measurement.

Compound Numbers

Compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine are always hyphenated. This includes numbers like twenty-three, sixty-seven, and eighty-one. These hyphenated numbers are treated as single units for clarity.

Fractions as Modifiers

When fractions are used as adjectives or adverbs, they are hyphenated. For example, in "a **two-thirds** majority," the fraction "two-thirds" modifies "majority" and is hyphenated. Similarly, "He ate **one-half** of the pie" uses a hyphenated fraction.

Numbers and Units

When a number precedes a unit of measurement and the combination acts as an adjective modifying a noun, it is hyphenated. This indicates that the numerical unit is functioning as a single descriptive element. For instance, "a **five-mile** run" or "a **ten-foot** pole" uses hyphens to connect the number and the unit. However, if the structure is reversed, and the unit precedes the number, no hyphen is used, such as in "a run of **five miles**."

Examples include:

- a **24-hour** clock
- a **six-cylinder** engine
- a **100-watt** bulb

Special Cases and Exceptions in Chicago Style

Beyond the general rules for compound modifiers and prefixes, Chicago style addresses several special cases and exceptions to ensure consistent and clear writing.

Suspended Hyphens

A suspended hyphen is used when a hyphenated compound adjective is repeated with a shared second element. The hyphen is retained with the first element, followed by a space, and the shared element is provided at the end of the series. For example, "short- and long-term planning" is correct. The hyphen after "short" is necessary, and "term" is understood to apply to both "short" and "long."

Adverbs Modifying Past Participles

While adverbs ending in "-ly" are generally not hyphenated, there are nuances. If an adverb modifies a word that is itself part of a compound adjective, and the entire phrase functions as a pre-noun modifier, it can sometimes lead to confusion. However, Chicago style generally adheres to the "-ly" rule: no hyphen is used when an adverb modifies an adjective or another adverb. The clarity comes from the adverb's natural function.

Compound Nouns

Compound nouns are typically written as single words (e.g., keyboard, sunflower) or as two separate words (e.g., high school, ice cream). Hyphens are less common in compound nouns unless the compound noun itself is acting as an adjective, in which case the rules for compound modifiers apply. Consulting a dictionary is often the best approach for determining the correct form of a compound noun.

Geographical Terms

Certain geographical terms or combinations involving them may have established hyphenation patterns. For instance, terms like midwestern are usually written as one word, but regional variations or specific historical contexts might dictate hyphenation. Always refer to a reputable dictionary or style guide for established terms.

When to Use a Hyphen vs. an Em Dash or En Dash

It is crucial to distinguish between hyphens, en dashes, and em dashes, as they serve different purposes. Misusing these marks can disrupt the flow and clarity of your writing.

Hyphen (-)

The hyphen is the shortest of the three dash marks and is used primarily for joining words to form compound modifiers or for syllabification at the end of a line. As discussed throughout this guide, its main role in Chicago style is to connect elements that function as a single unit of meaning, particularly when they precede a noun.

En Dash (–)

The en dash is longer than a hyphen and shorter than an em dash. It is used to indicate a range or connection between two things, such as in:

- Number ranges: pages 5–10, 2010–2015
- Time ranges: 9:00 AM–5:00 PM
- Connections between words: the North–South divide, the Chicago–New York flight.
- It is also sometimes used in compound adjectives where one part is an open compound: post–World War II era.

Em Dash (—)

The em dash is the longest of the three dashes. It is used to:

- Set off parenthetical information that is more emphatic than commas or parentheses.
- Indicate an abrupt break in thought or a sudden change in direction.
- Introduce a summary or elaboration.
- In Chicago style, em dashes are typically used without spaces around them (e.g., "The results—though surprising—were statistically significant").

Understanding these distinctions is vital for correct punctuation and for adhering to the professional standards set by the Chicago Manual of Style.

Resources for Chicago Manual of Style Hyphenation

Navigating hyphenation can sometimes be complex, even with detailed rules. Fortunately, resources are available to assist writers in making correct decisions. The primary resource, of course, is the official *The Chicago Manual of Style* itself. Its comprehensive index and clear explanations are invaluable.

Beyond the manual, reputable dictionaries are essential tools. Dictionaries will often indicate how compound words are typically formed (as one word, two words, or hyphenated) and may provide guidance on hyphenating specific terms or phrases. Major dictionaries such as Merriam-Webster, Oxford English Dictionary, and others often reflect Chicago style conventions.

For online assistance, many writing centers and university websites offer summaries and quick guides to Chicago style hyphenation. These can be helpful for quick checks, but for definitive answers, the manual or a comprehensive dictionary should be consulted. Consistent application of these rules will enhance the professionalism and readability of your written work.

Q: When should I hyphenate a compound adjective according to Chicago style?

A: You should hyphenate a compound adjective when it precedes the noun it modifies and functions as a single unit of meaning. For example, "a well-written report" is correct, as "well-written" acts as a single adjective describing "report." If the compound adjective follows the noun, it is generally not hyphenated, as in "The report was well written."

Q: Are there exceptions to the rule about hyphenating compound adjectives before a noun?

A: Yes, there are several exceptions. If the first word of the compound modifier is an adverb ending in "-ly," it is typically not hyphenated (e.g., "a highly effective method"). Also, some well-established compound modifiers are treated as single words and do not require hyphens, regardless of position; consulting a dictionary is advised for these cases.

Q: How does Chicago style handle hyphenation with prefixes like "re-" or "co-"?

A: Generally, prefixes like "re-" and "co-" are attached directly to the root word without a hyphen (e.g., "redo," "cooperate"). However, a hyphen is often used to prevent awkward spelling or to clarify meaning. This includes situations where the prefix is attached to a proper noun (e.g., "mid-Victorian"), when it's attached to a word beginning with the same letter (e.g., "re-elect"), or with the prefix "ex-" when it means "former" (e.g., "ex-wife").

Q: What are the rules for hyphenating numbers in Chicago style?

A: Compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine are always hyphenated (e.g., "thirty-five"). When fractions are used as adjectives or adverbs, they are hyphenated (e.g., "a two-thirds majority"). When a number and a unit of measurement combine to form an adjective before a noun, they are hyphenated (e.g., "a five-mile run").

Q: What is the difference between a hyphen, an en dash, and an em dash in Chicago style?

A: A hyphen (-) is used to join words forming compound modifiers or for syllabification. An en dash (–) indicates a range or connection between two things (e.g., page ranges, time ranges). An em dash (—) is used for parenthetical information, breaks in thought, or introductions of summaries, and in Chicago style, it is typically used without spaces.

Q: Should I hyphenate words like "state-of-the-art" when they appear after the noun?

A: No, generally when a compound modifier appears after the noun it modifies, it is not hyphenated. So, "The technology is state of the art" is correct without hyphens. The hyphenation rule primarily applies when the compound modifier comes before the noun.

Q: What is a "suspended hyphen," and when is it used?

A: A suspended hyphen is used when a hyphenated compound adjective is repeated with a shared second element. The hyphen is retained with the first element, followed by a space, and the shared element is placed at the end of the series. For example, "short- and long-term planning" uses suspended hyphens.

Q: How does Chicago style advise on hyphenating adverbs ending in "-ly"?

A: Chicago style generally advises against hyphenating adverbs ending in "-ly" when they modify an adjective or another adverb, even when they precede the word they modify. For example, "a very old book" and "a carefully crafted argument" are correct without hyphens. The adverb clearly modifies the word that follows.

Chicago Manual Of Style Hyphenation Rules

Chicago Manual Of Style Hyphenation Rules

Related Articles

- [chicago manual of style formatting guidelines for academic research and writing](#)
- [chicago manual of style for literary artistry](#)
- [chicago manual of style guide for papers](#)

[Back to Home](#)