1. Use a dash to introduce a word, phrase, or clause that summarizes or restates what comes just before:

   Terns, geese, and warblers—all migratory birds—fly hundreds of miles each year.

   But ideas—that is, opinions backed with genuine reasoning—are extremely difficult to develop.

   —Wayne Booth

2. Use a dash to set off an interruption that is important to the meaning of the sentence but not grammatically part of it:

   It matters not where or how far you travel—the farther commonly the worse—but how much alive you are.

   —Henry David Thoreau

   Less important interruptions may be set off by parentheses (as explained in 33.3).

3. Use dashes to set off a series of specific items:

   The wings of the natural extant flying vertebrates—the birds and the bats—are direct modifications of the preexisting front limbs.

   —Michael J. Katz

4. Use a dash in dialogue to indicate an unfinished remark:

   “You wouldn’t dare to—” Mabel gasped in disbelief.
The Dash, Parentheses, the Slash

“But I would,” he said. “In fact, I—”

“No!” she screamed.

When the dash is used to indicate an unfinished remark, it should be followed only by quotation marks, not by a comma or period.

5. If dashes set off a parenthetical remark that asks a question or makes an exclamation, put the question mark or the exclamation point before the second dash:

   During the American bicentennial of 1976, Canada’s gift to the United States was a book of superb photographs of—what else?—scenery.
   —June Callwood

6. In typing, make a dash with two hyphens (--) and leave no space on either side.

33.2 MISUSING THE DASH

The main misuse is overuse. Too many dashes can make your writing seem breathless or fragmented:

   The new baseball stadium—with its luxury boxes, shopping malls, and restaurants—went seriously over budget—straining the local economy and threatening to alienate the city’s residents. The mayor—criticized in the local media—tried to convince her constituents that the stadium would stimulate the economy—bringing in tourists from a three-state region. But local citizens—disappointed in the cost overruns and the tax breaks given to the team’s owners—remained skeptical about—even resentful of—the stadium, the mayor, and their hometown team.

33.3 USING PARENTHESES

1. Use parentheses to enclose words, phrases, or complete sentences that offer a side comment or help to clarify a point:

   All this does not mean, what I should be the last man in the world to mean, that revolutionists should be ashamed of being revolutionists or (still more disgusting thought) that artists should be content with being artists.
   —G. K. Chesterton
Why would parents want to go to such expense (treatment with biosynthetic hGH costs roughly $10,000 a year), cause their children pain (the shots hurt a bit), and risk unknown long-term side effects?

—Thomas Murray

Parentheses placed within a sentence do not change any other punctuation, and a parenthesized sentence within a sentence (such as the shots hurt a bit) does not need a capital or a period. But a freestanding parenthetical sentence needs both:

No Allied leader would have flinched at assassinating Hitler, had that been possible. (The Allies did assassinate Heydrich.)

—Michael Levin

2. Use parentheses to enclose numerals or letters introducing the items of a list:

Motherhood is in trouble, and it ought to be. A rude question is long overdue: Who needs it? The answer used to be (1) society and (2) women.

—Betty Rollin

3. Use parentheses to enclose numerals clarifying or confirming a spelled-out number:

The law permits individuals to give no more than one thousand dollars ($1,000) to any one candidate in a campaign.

Like material put between dashes, a parenthetical insertion interrupts the flow of a sentence. Parentheses make the interruption less emphatic than dashes do, but since they do in fact break up the sentence, you should use them sparingly.

33.4 USING THE SLASH

1. Use a slash, or virgule, to indicate alternative items:

Every writer needs to know at least something about his/her audience.

Leave no space before or after a slash used in this way.

2. Use a slash to mark off lines of poetry when you run them on as if they were prose:
Coleridge introduces the mariner in the very first stanza: “It is an ancient Mariner, / And he stoppeth one of three.”

Leave one space before and after a slash used in this way.

3. Use a slash in typing a fraction that is not on the keyboard of your typewriter or computer:

\[ 2 \frac{1}{2} \quad 5 \frac{7}{8} \quad 15/16 \]