

Hyphens and Dashes: Which Do You Use and When?
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Remember the good old days of typewriters? If you wanted to hyphenate a long word at the end of a line of text, you'd just use a dash. If you wanted to type hyphenated word strings, like mother-in-law, you'd use dashes between the words. If you wanted to separate a pair of numbers with a dash, like 75-80 percent, you'd do the same thing – type a dash. If you wanted to type a double dash to set off a phrase, like – well, you know, like this – you'd just type two dashes on each side of the phrase. Regardless of what you wanted, you'd use the same dash. Life was simple.

But then computers, word processors, desktop publishing and electronic hyphenation dictionaries came along. The one-key-fits-all approach wouldn't do any more. Life got more complicated.

Now that you have more than one choice, it's time to understand the difference between hyphens and dashes in WordPerfect.

Kinds of Hyphens

WordPerfect supports three kinds of hyphens: the hyphen character, the hard hyphen and the soft hyphen.

The hyphen character is the hyphen you get when you type a dash (-). The hyphen character always appears on the screen. You'd use this type of hyphen for such words as co-worker, start-up, cross-reference and star-spangled. If a word like star-spangled occurs at the end of the line and spans the Hyphenation Zone – whether Hyphenation is on or off – WordPerfect keeps star- at the end of one line and wraps spangled to the beginning of the next line. In Reveal Codes (Alt-F3), the hyphen character will appear as a bolded dash in square brackets [-].

The hard hyphen is the hyphen you get when you press (Home) and then dash (-). It looks just like the hyphen character, but WordPerfect will treat words with this hyphen as one word, keeping the words together on the same line. (If Hyphenation is on, however, WordPerfect will follow the normal rules of hyphenation and may try to divide the hyphenated word.) For example, if you want to make sure the "1-2-3" in "Lotus 1-2-3" stays on the same line, you'd use a hard hyphen instead of a normal hyphen to separate the numbers.

Another use of a hard hyphen is in typing a double-dash to interrupt a sentence for insertion of a side thought or to emphasize explanatory information.

If you use a double dash to set off a phrase, you should type a hard hyphen followed by a hyphen character to create a double dash: that is, press (Home), dash (-) and dash (-). This ensures that the two dashes always stay together on the same line, yet allows WordPerfect to wrap the word after the double dash to the next line. In Reveal Codes, a hard hyphen appears as a normal dash (-), without brackets.

The soft hyphen is the hyphen you get when you press (Ctrl) and then a dash (-). It is a soft character because it doesn't appear on the screen unless the word is hyphenated at the end of the line.

When WordPerfect determines that the word could be hyphenated, then the hyphen appears on the screen, and the syllables after the hyphen wrap to the next line. The soft hyphen is a way of telling WordPerfect where to hyphenate a word, even when Hyphenation is turned off.

In Reveal Codes, a soft hyphen appears as a bolded dash (-), without brackets. If Hyphenation is turned on, WordPerfect will insert its own soft hyphens into a word. If your word gets bumped so that it's no longer divided, the hyphen will disappear on screen but will still be present in Reveal Codes.

Em and En Dashes

Using the above three types of hyphens is fine for normal documents, but for desktop-published documents, you'll need two other types of dashes: em dashes and en dashes.

An em dash is a long dash (—), having the width of the letter M. You should use an em dash instead of double dashes to set off a phrase of emphasis or explanation — like the em dash in this sentence. To create an em dash, invoke WordPerfect's Compose command by pressing (Ctrl-V). Then type 4,34 and press (Enter). On the screen, the em dash appears as a hyphen character, but when you use the cursor to highlight the em dash character in Reveal Codes (Alt-F3), the code [-:4,34] appears.

WordPerfect reads two words separated by an em dash as a single word, and therefore will keep the words together, even if they should be hyphenated after the em-dash. To solve the problem, insert an invisible soft return just after the em dash. To do this, press (Home), then (Enter). In Reveal Codes, the invisible soft return appears as the code [ISRt].

The included ALTM.WPM macro makes the process easy. Just press (Alt-M) to create the em dash!

The en dash (–), which is about the width of the letter N, is wider than a hyphen character but narrower than the em dash. You should use the en dash to type a negative sign, such as –15F°, or to indicate "to" or "through" in a range of numbers, such as 8:00–9:30 a.m. or \$15–25 thousand.

To create an en dash, press (Ctrl-V), type 4,33 (including the comma) and press (Enter). On the screen, this appears as a hyphen character; when it's highlighted in Reveal Codes, it appears as [-:4,33]. Usually, you don't want an invisible soft return after an en dash.

The included ALTN.WPM macro makes the process easy. Just press (Alt-N) to create the en dash!