What is a hyphen?
A hyphen is a mechanical tool used to divide and connect separate elements of individual words. Though it looks quite similar to a dash, the hyphen is used to clarify meaning in particular words rather than sentences.

A hyphen is used...

In some compound words
A compound word is created when two words are combined to make a new word with a new meaning. Incorrect hyphenation can change the meaning of the word(s). Hyphenated compound words are usually used to describe nouns.

• Look! There’s a man eating shark!
• Look! There’s a man-eating shark!

In fractions
In order to designate fractions in writing, we use hyphens.

• We must add two thirds to get the correct answer.
• We must add two-thirds to get the correct answer.

In numbers twenty-one through ninety-nine
In English, these numbers require hyphens in writing.

• I gave the waitress twenty-five dollars and she never gave me change!
• I gave the waitress twenty-five dollars and she never gave me change!

To connect prefixes to nouns and adjectives
A prefix is placed at the beginning of a word to modify or change its meaning. Usually, hyphenated prefixes are used to separate two consecutive vowels to avoid confusion.

• I need to deice my car.
• I need to de-ice my car.

To connect a single letter to a word
This rule is usually used to designate an action.

• We went a caroling on Christmas Eve.
• We went a-caroling on Christmas Eve.