Use of the Dash

A dash is a mark of separation stronger than a comma, less formal than a colon, and more relaxed than parentheses.

In normal circumstances, other punctuation marks (commas, colons, or parentheses) should be used. However, when you want a phrase or another part of the sentence to have extra emphasis, a dash may be used.

Em-Dash

Typing two hyphens, with neither a space between them nor a space on either side of them, forms a dash. The dash (or em-dash) should be used for a specific reason and not be overused in academic writing.

Examples:

1. *The only thing Tony could do—if he could do anything at all—was to sit and wait for the test results to come in the mail.*

In this sentence, dashes are used because it seems informal and the clause inside the dashes needs some emphasis. The emphasis is added in order to show that Tony could do nothing in this situation. The writer could have used parentheses, but parentheses may have been too formal for this situation.

2. *The professor was unwilling to change the due date—even for a candy bar!*

Use a dash to indicate an abrupt break in thought.

3. *The professor was unwilling—even for a candy bar! —to change the due date.*

If the sentence resumes after the break, use a second dash.

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En-Dash

The en dash is used between equal weighted words in a compound adjective. It is made by typing the first adjective, followed be a space, a hyphen, another space, and the second adjective.

Examples:

1. the Tiger Cat - Argo rivalry - the New York - London flight.

2. the Israeli – Palestinian Peace Conference.

It can also stand for the words and, to, or versus between two words of equal weight.

Sources:

"Using Dashes in Writing." (2002). Retrieved from

> http://www.myenglishteacher.net/dashes.html

"Using Dashes." (n.d.) Retrieved from

> http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ssw/write/handouts/dash.html