

The Dash

1. When commas are too weak to emphasize, use dashes for additional emphasis.
Linda Simpson -- the President's most trusted economic advisor -- will resign her office during today's news conference.
2. When using dashes instead of commas, you can use a full sentence as a component.
Linda Simpson-- her enemies call her the author of our nation's economic woes-- has resigned from her office.
3. Use a dash at the end of or within your sentence when there is a clear break in the train of thought or a dramatic shift in tone.
The President's economic policies have proven ineffective -- although, it's true that he has lowered inflation.
4. Use a dash to prepare for a list, a restatement, or an amplification.
The ingredients of this fabulously rich dessert are guaranteed to delight your guests -- butter, cream, chocolate, honey, and peanut butter.
5. Use a dash to set off appositives that contain commas. An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that renames a nearby noun. Ordinarily, appositives are set off with commas; but when the appositive contains commas, dashes help eliminate confusion.
In my hometown the basic needs of people -- food, clothing, and shelter -- are less costly than in a big city like Chicago. (A Writer's Reference, sixth edition, pg. 290)

CAUTION: Unless there is a specific reason for using a dash, avoid it. Unnecessary dashes create a choppy effect.