

Hyphens and Dashes

Many people do not even know about the 4 lines in scientific/medical/technical writing; or if they do, they never use them correctly!

Know your enemy.

–	Hyphen
—	En dash
—	Em dash
—	Minus

You can clearly see they are 4 different lengths; and 4 different uses.

Hyphen:	This is used to join 2 or more words together
	<i>...non-sulfide-containing copper chelator...</i>
	<i>...ice-cold respiratory medium...</i>
En dash:	This shows a range
	<i>...2–32 mM total sulfur...</i>
	<i>...are often not achieved for 4–6 h.</i>
Em dash:	More than the comma; less than brackets
	<i>...fluorescence detection—excitation and emission at 385 and 515 nm, respectively—with HPLC columns.</i>
	<i>I was a chief scientific adviser — a technocratic expert — in the UK government.</i>
Minus sign:	Negative numbers
	<i>–80°C</i>
	<i>–3</i>

What we should remember:

- The **hyphen** is used by everyone, everywhere;
- The **En dash** is used almost everywhere, you have to look for it;
- The **Em dash** is not very used in scientific/medical/technical writing, but its use is increasing;
- The **minus sign**, difficult to distinguish from the hyphen, so many people just use the **hyphen**.

How do I quickly insert these signs?

All characters have a number; so, to insert that number in your text, just type the number and press Alt + X and the number will change to the character.

Hyphen (Unicode 002D)

En dash (Unicode 2013)

Em dash (Unicode 2014)

Minus (Unicode 2212)

For example:

to insert the **En dash**, you type its code, **2013**, then press the **ALT key** and the **X key** at the same time.

The Number then changes to the character.