Dashes

1. Focus

Explain Dashes

Say: Some words or phrases break into or add to the main thought of a sentence. These words are usually set off by commas or parentheses. Some of these words or phrases, however, need stronger emphasis. In these cases, dashes are used.

Model Using Dashes

Display the following text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources and read it aloud to students.

Let’s look for ways to improve the town for everyone—not just a few.

Modeling Text

Say: Dashes are used in this sentence to add a thought to the end of the sentence. The phrase not just a few expands on the main idea of the sentence. In this case, the writer wanted to point out the fact that there is a way to improve the town for everyone, not just for a few residents. The dash adds emphasis to the thought. Writers use dashes in their persuasive writing to call attention to additional information that helps prove their point.

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:
• Determine the purpose of dashes in sentences.
• Identify words that need to be set off with dashes.
• Use dashes in sentences.

Preparation

Materials Needed
• Chart paper and markers
• Dashes (BLM 8)
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text and the practice text (without dashes) onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, write the sentences from “Strategies to Support ELs” onto chart paper to use with ELs.
2. Rehearse

Practice Using Dashes in Text

Display the practice text (without dashes) on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

Ask students to work with a partner to tell where dashes should be included in the sentences. (Students do not need to copy sentences.)

| 1. The mayor announced his support for the sale of Old Oak Park—the oldest park in the city. |
| 2. The mall parking lot would hold up to 300 cars—enough to hold half of the city’s residents. |

Practice Text

If your class includes English language learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Sentences with Dashes

Invite pairs to share their results. Discuss their responses. Ask the following questions:
• Where does the dash go?
• How could you tell?
• How do the words after the dash add to the sentence’s meaning?

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that dashes are used to add extra information that makes the meaning of a sentence clearer. Setting this information off with a dash adds more emphasis than using a comma or parentheses. Use dashes in your persuasive writing when you want readers to pay particular attention to a fact or other piece of information that helps build your argument.

If you would like to give students additional practice using dashes, have them complete BLM 8.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to read aloud their answers to BLM 8. Use students’ answers to provide corrective feedback.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning
Help beginning ELs understand that dashes are used to separate thoughts. Write simple sentences on the interactive whiteboard or chart paper so they can see how the text is separated by dashes to indicate a separate thought. Read each sentence, emphasizing the pause indicated by the dash, and point out the use of the dash.

Sample Sentences
I have a pen—a red pen.
Bill has a book—a big book.

Intermediate and Advanced
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers to revise the practice sentences and to complete the BLM.