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Copy editing service for natural health professionals

Working as a proof reader/editor and writer for almost two decades now, I tend to see confusion in the same areas of grammar, spelling and English language usage over and over.

One of these areas is understanding the *different meanings and uses* of en dashes (-) vs em dashes (—).

And hey, no judgement from me—most of us native English speakers aren't taught grammar formally in schools anymore!

Here is a guide to help you.

Meet the En dash (named so because it is the same width as an n): –

(aka, a hyphen)

- 1) Used to show a number range.**
- 2) Used to join two (or more) concepts/words/ideas together to make one concept and /or create an adjective (describing word).**

It takes 2-4 working days for delivery of test results.

This client is always 5-10 mins late, but he is compliant and so committed.

My PA discovered this morning that some of the dispensary herbs are 6-12 months past their use-by dates.

It was a jaw-dropping view of the 12 Apostles.

These are my staying-in-to-snuggle-self-care jammies and slippers. (Hyphens make this sentence a lot easier to read and understand on first go!)

Milk thistle is my favourite liver-loving herb.

Note that there are no spaces either side of an en dash/hyphen.

Meet the Em dash (named so because it is the same width as an m): —

1) Used to show a pause or break in the flow of text or dialogue.

“Of course we can see you for an appointment—would Thursday at 1pm suit?”

The suicide statistics in NZ—and globally—are tragic.

I’m sure you’ll agree, these recipes are simple to prepare and delicious—and they’re all gluten free, too!

“New practitioners often struggle with this—a lack of confidence around marketing—but this simply highlights the need for ongoing mentoring of recent grads.”

Note that there are no spaces either side of an em dash.

To insert an Em dash in Word, go to Insert >> Symbol >> More symbols >> Special characters >> Em dash.

I hope this has helped you learn about the different meanings and uses of the hyphen/en dash (-) and the em dash (—) in the English language, and their unique roles in the flow and clarity of written communication 😊

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Smiles and grammar geekiness,

Francesca Eldridge

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