LEFF

Hyphens

Rule: Two (or more) separate words whose meaning together alters a following word can be hyphenated to clarify their relationship. Hyphens are also used to form number series, including telephone numbers (867-5309) and social security numbers (XXX-XX-XXXX).

In July of 2015, my husband and I rescued a well-behaved, sweet-as-can-be Chihuahua from Felines & Canines, a shelter in Edgewater.

We named him Todd because he was a foxy-looking pup, which reminded us of the Disney classic *The Fox and the Hound* in which the fox is named Todd.

Exceptions: Do not hyphenate any word that ends in "-ly" nor words combined with "very."

Upon first meeting Todd, then named Clay, he ran back and forth between us excitedly licking our faces for a very long time. It was a highly effective maneuver in getting us to fall in love with him.

Keystroke: Hyphens are formed with the standard "-" key between "0" and "=."

Em dashes

Rule: The em dash can fill in for parentheses, colons, and commas that are not part of a series.

Parentheses: If you had asked me if I wanted a Chihuahua—in the years preceding meeting Todd—I would have told you "no, thank you."

Comma: But this dog has totally changed me—and he's made me realize that I likely harbor all sorts of unfair assumptions.

Colon: I just love everything about the little fluffball—his pale eyelashes, the way he sprints around the house after a bath, and how he believes a little girl's pink bed (featuring mosquito net) is his.

Keystroke: Hold down ALT and type 0151 using the right-hand number pad on a full-size computer keyboard.

En dashes

Rule: Use an en dash to express number ranges, generally to mean "through" and "to," and to connect compound adjectival phrases.

When we adopted Todd, we were told he was 1.5–2 years old.

The pre–Todd Mullowney years notably lacked walks through the neighborhood, excessive baby talk, and uninterrupted yoga sessions. ("Todd Mullowney" is being used as an adjectival phrase. This example would call for a hyphen if it was merely "The pre-Todd years. . .".)

Keystroke: Hold down ALT and type 0150 using the right-hand number pad on a full-size computer keyboard.

For more exceptions and uses of these punctuation marks, Tweet us @Leffcomm or send us an email (info@leffcommunications.com). For more complete usage rules, you can also see the Chicago Manual of Style, a.k.a the Leff Communications bible.