Text Hyphenation

Hyphenation is a process of dividing the words at the end of the line of the text. It is symbolized by hyphen mark which is dividing the words by syllables. It is often adjusted together with justification settings and good setup of both settings should result in good flow and easily readable body text.

This post will focus on hyphenation of body copy but we will discuss other uses of hyphenation and we will also tell you when not to use hyphenation.

Hyphenation can be adjusted in two ways. Manually and automatically. As with all text adjustments that are done for the whole magazine I suggest to adjust the hyphenation settings in the paragraph style palette. Of course to achieve the best results you should select the appropriate dictionary from the language list in Advanced Character Formats in Paragraph Style options.

First let’s go through the automatic hyphenation settings.

![Hyphenation Settings](image)
Automatic text hyphenation

InDesign hyphenate option has several options:

- **Words With At Least X Letters** Specifies the minimum number of characters for hyphenated words. The minimum should be 5, meaning the words with less than 5 characters won’t be hyphenated.

- **After First X Letters / Before Last X Letters** This option specifies the minimum number of characters at the beginning or end of a word that can be broken by a hyphen. For the first letters, value should be 2 and for the last letters, value should be 2. With this setting, the word will be hyphenated only after first 2 letters and before last 2 letters.

- **Hyphen Limit X Hyphens** Specify the maximum number of hyphens that can appear on consecutive lines. Zero means unlimited hyphens. Here the value should be 3. This means that the maximum of three consecutive lines of text will be hyphenated. More would be a big mistake resulting in much harder text readability and this is bad typesetting.

- **Hyphenation Zone** Specify the amount of white space allowed at the end of a line of unjustified text before hyphenation begins. This option applies only when you’re using the Single-line Composer with non-justified text.

- **Better Spacing / Fewer Hyphens** To alter the balance between these settings, adjust the slider at the bottom of the dialog box. Here you can move the slider to the second tick on the right for fewer hyphens. Don’t worry about bad spacing since you will adjust the spacing in the justification settings. In this way you get the best of both options. Properly justified text with few hyphens.

- **Hyphenate Capitalized Words** To prevent capitalized words from being hyphenated, deselect this option. Try to avoid this. Capitalized words that are hyphenated don’t look nice.

- **Hyphenate Last Word** To prevent last words in paragraphs from being hyphenated, deselect this option. This option should be avoided also since it will result in orphaned text which you will have to adjust manually.

- **Hyphenate Across Column** To prevent words from being hyphenated across a column, frame, or page, deselect this option. Another option that should be avoided. Imagine that you hyphenate the word that is crossing from one
column to another and those columns are crossing pages also. Not good, right! This is bad type setting and should be avoided.

Manual text hyphenation

From time to time you will have to manually hyphenate the text. You can do this in two ways. First, using the Type tool, click where you want to insert the hyphen.

Then do one of the following:
Choose Type > Insert Special Character > Hyphens And Dashes > Discretionary Hyphen. Press Ctrl+Shift+- (Windows) or Command+Shift+- (Mac OS) to insert a discretionary hyphen.

It must be noted that by entering a discretionary hyphen in a word does not guarantee that the word will be hyphenated. Whether or not the word breaks depends on other hyphenation and composition settings. However, entering a discretionary hyphen in a word does guarantee that the word can be broken only where the discretionary hyphen appears.

When not to hyphen?

Sometimes there are text elements that you do not want to hyphen. Elements like headlines, subheads, pull quotes and intro/kickers should not be hyphenated. These are basically short text elements and there is not advantage in hyphenating them. Besides it would not look nice if you hyphenate the subheads. Or even worse, headlines.
For other elements like picture captions hyphenations should be turned off also. Only if there is one word that is too long for the desired space width you can hyphenate only that picture caption.
When not to hyphenate? Bottom examples look and read better than the top ones.

Text that is justified in center should not be hyphenated, unless it is really necessary. Centered text should be used for short blocks of text and it does not have to be hyphenated. Instead it should be divided in lines by sense with soft returns. Text that is aligned right also does not look nice when hyphenated.
It was a December of 1963 and Esquire’s metamorphosis was complete. This was the first month and the first issue to carry Hayes’s new title, editor, although he has run the magazine since mid-1961 under the title of managing editor. But what is more important it was the first issue to display the full range of literary and visual firepower that would make Esquire the great American magazine of the 1960s, if not the greatest American magazine of the 20th century.

There is one option that I have seen in many tutorials online where authors advise you to use it. This option is Story (Type > Story). I advise you not to use it. What it does is it aligns the letters and moves hyphen dashes out to the right of the imaginary vertical column line. I think it is unnecessary to use it.

Hyphenation is the option which will make your text more readable and if adjusted right in conjunction with the justification setting your text will look tidier without those ugly white spaces between the words.