Dashes

Although hyphens and dashes look similar, they differ in length and purpose. Hyphens (-) are shorter and are used to show connections between words that are working as a unit, while dashes (—) are longer and are used to add emphasis or indicate an interruption or abrupt change of thought. When typing, do not include spaces before or after dashes.

Using a dash is a writing style choice; in other words, dashes are almost never required by the laws of grammar and punctuation. They are common in informal writing and can almost always be substituted for commas, colons, semicolons, or parentheses depending on the sentence. Avoid using dashes unless you have a specific reason for doing so; unnecessary dashes create a choppy effect.

1. Use a dash to emphasize a word at the start or end of a sentence.

Start	Innovation—that's what we need.
End	The ailing woman longed to revisit the country of her birth—Norway.

2. Use a dash to join independent clauses without a conjunction if you want to emphasize the second clause.

The government's "safe supply" policy horrified the public—it was preposterous.

3. Use a dash to conclude a series before a summarizing clause.

Creative, keen, eloquent, insightful and methodical—the new hire was all of these.
Tablets, smartboards, surround sound—modern-day classrooms look nothing like the schoolhouses of old.

4. Use a dash to introduce an afterthought or something unexpected and surprising.

This semester will be my last—at least I think so.
The boy claimed he was sorry for smashing the window—but continued playing catch close to the house.

5. Use a dash to prepare for a series; a colon could also be used here.

> The bookshelves contained all the classics—Hemingway, Twain, and Steinbeck.

6. Use two dashes to emphasize words in the middle of a sentence. Commas could replace the dashes in the sentences below, but the result would be a weaker tone.

> None of his accomplishments—from starting a charity to building an empire—seemed to fulfill him.

7. Use dashes to set off an interrupting phrase that breaks the syntax of a sentence.

> The committee members who voted for her—the large majority—seem satisfied with her leadership.

8. Use dashes to set off an appositive phrase that already includes commas. An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that renames a nearby noun.

Confusing	The band members, Isaac, Taylor, and Zac, gave a brief interview after the show.
Clear	The band members—Isaac, Taylor, and Zac—gave a brief interview after the show.

References:
https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/semi-colons-colons-and-dashes/
https://www.rd.com/article/hyphen-versus-dash/
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Hacker, D. (2001). *A Canadian writer's reference* (2nd ed). Nelson Thomson Learning.