

Question: Where did David A. Raskin's essay "Unsung Heroes (Underrated Basketball Players)" appear? (on page 35 of volume 81 of *Sport* magazine)

Write a formal letter to Ms. Huff answering her questions. Follow proper business letter form as described on pages 848-849. In your answers, use colons correctly to write out the citations.

THE DASH

Dashes are used to indicate an abrupt change of thought or a pause in a sentence. Dashes show a looser connection to the main idea than commas do. The words, clauses, or phrases set off by dashes merely add extra information to an already complete thought.

Use a dash to show an abrupt break in thought.

The winner of today's baseball game—assuming we aren't rained out—will play in the regional semifinals. The appetizers—supposedly the restaurant's specialty—left us disappointed.

Use a dash to set off a long explanatory statement that interrupts the main thought of the sentence.

They frantically searched everywhere—under the seats, in the aisle, in the lobby—before Dan finally found the car keys in the meeting between the two men—they had clashed over the years—was unexpectedly calm and friendly.

Note that in the first example, punctuation occurs within the interrupting statement. Here the dash serves as a guide to the reader, signaling the addition of extra, nonessential information.

of the sentence.

Insufficient heating, leaky roofs, cluttered stairways, and unsanitary corridors—for all these violations of the housing code, the landlord was brought into court. Photographs of rock-and-roll stars, concert posters, souvenir T-shirts—these covered the walls of her room.

Be careful not to overuse dashes. When used correctly, dashes can add variety and emphasis to your writing. However, too many dashes may make your writing seem choppy and less precise.

When writing dialogue, use a dash to show an abrupt break in thought.

In dialogue, the break in thought is often caused by uncertainty or hesitancy, as in the first example below. Note in the second example how the dash adds a casual, conversational tone to dialogue. People often change their thoughts in midsentence while speaking. "Photosynthesis is an action—I mean, it's what happens—well, it's sunlight doing something to chlorophyll." "The movie opens with a spectacular shot of the desert—oh, you've already seen it."

Practice Your Skills

CONCEPT CHECK

Dashes Study the passages from literature given below. Dashes have been omitted from these passages. Rewrite the passages, inserting dashes where they originally occurred.

1. Impy left by the back way. Before the scrape of her hard, bare feet had died away on the back porch, a wild shriek I was sure it was hers filled the hollow house.
O. Henry

2. A man with murder in his heart will murder, or be murdered it comes to the same thing and so I knew I had to leave.
James Baldwin

3. The third day it was Wednesday of the first week Charles bounced a see-saw onto the head of a little girl and made her bleed, and the teacher made him stay inside all during recess.
Shirley Jackson

4. The following spring the heavier of the two almost half the tree broke off in a spring gale.
Richard Mabey

5. I would sit down to this breakfast at a round table in the dining room with my young parents or my beloved Miss Rachel. My father called Tata, the Polish for papa was my most favorite person in the world.
Esther Hautzig

6. The deep rumble of the produce wagons, coming to the big London markets from the farms generally about three a.m., held no disturbing quality.
Algernon Blackwood

7. My knowledge made me happy it was like fire in my heart.
Stephen Vincent Benét

8. I remember I *think* I remember, for I could not have been more than five one frigid day Pa huddled on a stool before the coal stove, took me on his knee, and studied me gravely.
Eugenia Collier

Writing Theme
The Art and Craft
of Storytelling

Writing TIP

Writers often use dashes to provide explanation to their readers. The explanatory material added with dashes clarifies the statements being made and keeps the reader from becoming confused.