Let's look at the following sentences:

I saw a man-eating alligator.

I saw a man eating alligator.

Compound Adjectives
The hyphen makes a big difference

I saw a man-eating alligator.

I saw a man eating alligator.

A **hyphen** can make a difference in meaning.

Compound Adjectives + Periods of Time

- When he have compound adjectives using numbers + a time period, that word referring to a time period is in singular form and is joined to the number with a hyphen.

I work eight hours every day --> I work an eight-hour day

I'm going on vacation for three weeks --> I have a three-week vacation

There was a delay of 5 seconds --> There was a five-second delay

Adverb + Past Participle

However when we have an Adverb + past participle, we put a hyphen between the two words to make it a compound adjective.

This is a brightly-lit room.

She is a well-known actress.

We live in a densely-populated city.

How do we know when to put a hyphen?

If you can use the word "and" between the two adjectives or words, then a hyphen isn't necessary.

She has a big blue book.
(Big and Blue are adjectives)
Can we say: She has a big and blue book. (Yes, it is possible)

He is a world famous singer

Can we say: He is a world and famous singer. No, it doesn't sound correct so we need a hyphen to join the words world and famous.