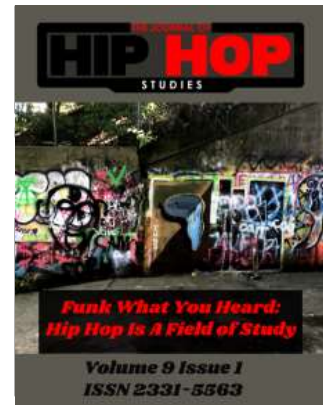


## It's "Hip Hop," Not "hip-hop"

Tasha Iglesias and Travis Harris

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## It's "Hip Hop," Not "hip-hop"

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Tasha Iglesias and Travis Harris

"It's 'Hip Hop,' Not 'hip-hop'" explains how two Hip Hop scholars, Tasha Iglesias and Travis Harris, collaborated to get the official academic spelling of Hip Hop changed from "hip-hop" to "Hip Hop." While they were graduate students, they grew frustrated with reading numerous academic texts that did not represent Hip Hop in the same way the culture did outside of academia. Iglesias and Harris are Hip Hop and involved with the culture outside of the classroom. The clash between these two worlds led them to petition the American Psychological Association and eventually speak with Merriam Webster dictionary to change the spelling. In September 2019, APA put out a statement regarding hyphens and proper nouns thereby allowing "hip-hop" to be spelled "Hip Hop." This article includes two primary sources, the official statement Harris and Iglesias co-authored and the email exchanges with APA and Merriam Webster.

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Hip Hop is an African diasporic phenomenon not bound by space and time and is made up of a collective consciousness from global cultures. Hip Hop is a culture. I (Iglesias) grew up in Hip Hop; I was also a Hip Hop promoter in the early 2000s. In *those days* we promoted events or shows by handing out flyers, or by sending a text or email. I was constantly handing out flyers that had *Hip Hop* written on them or was writing *Hip Hop* in an email or text. In all these instances, as well as within the culture, Hip Hop was spelled as two words and was capitalized without a hyphen. I will note, however, that some flyers from the past did not capitalize Hip Hop; I would be dishonest if I did not address this. But one could only imagine the shock I had when trying to write Hip Hop using Microsoft Word and finding out that the way I spelled my culture was incorrect according to various organizations. These organizations included the American Psychological Association (APA) and Merriam Webster Dictionary, organizations that mandated how I write Hip Hop in academic text.

Prior to writing my dissertation in 2019, I (Iglesias) did not know that how I spelled Hip Hop was incorrect according to these governing bodies. I became increasingly aware however as I received feedback and inquired about the blue squiggly lines underneath the words "Hip Hop." At the time, I voiced my frustrations to my friend and colleague, Harris. We were both graduate students completing our dissertations and experiencing the same issue. I (Harris) was also frustrated with the way it was being spelled. I grew tired of reading "hip-hop" in academic text after academic text. What frustrated me the most was that those outside of Hip Hop determined how to spell Hip Hop. We did not want to assimilate and adhere to these requirements. We decided to directly argue for the ability to write and spell our culture in an authentic manner.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tasha Iglesias, "It's 'Hip Hop' not 'Hip-Hop,'" August 6, 2020, (Social Media Post), *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/drtashaiglesias/posts/pfbid02CGuhzChUtyKANmhjpAMnemDUTj7VEEHWgDkXHrKQ8sJKirm2DZ4j2bqVHFHwQV5HI>

We challenged the APA and Merriam Webster Dictionary in 2019 and asked that Hip Hop be capitalized and that the hyphen requirement be dropped.<sup>2</sup> First we coauthored an official statement (see below) and shared this statement with academics and those in the culture. With our official statement and Hip Hop behind us, we successfully petitioned and had the guidelines changed. We argued that Hip Hop is a culture by definition and as a result is considered a proper noun and must be capitalized. We challenged the use of a hyphen because members of Hip Hop often write “Hip Hop” without a hyphen. In September 2019, APA published a new style guide, “Hyphenation Principles.”<sup>3</sup> This style allows for compound words to be written as two separate words without the hyphen.

In the grand scheme of the many issues confronting us, this was a relatively small victory, but our fight was purely Hip Hop. We challenged institutions that sought to censor and oppress how we express ourselves in the culture. Every time Hip Hop is properly spelled, every time Hip Hop is published in any academic texts, every time a student or professor acknowledges the spelling “Hip Hop” and not “hip-hop,” these instances continually point to our ability to come together, make changes and define who we are as Hip Hop. We are Hip Hop and can now officially spell it that way.

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<sup>2</sup> See the emails below following the official statement.

<sup>3</sup> American Psychological Association, “Hyphenation Principles,” September 2019, <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/spelling-hyphenation/hyphenation>

## Hip Hop Spelling Official Statement

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Hip Hop is Hip Hop. This phenomenon can only be described by looking within itself. Hip Hop is multi-dimensional, multi-faceted, fresh, dynamic, life giving, inspiring, revolutionary, complex, and creative. A holistic depiction of all that Hip Hop is necessitates that Hip Hop is properly identified. While what scholars and those in the culture mean by "Hip Hop" is constantly in contention with what everyone agrees on is its complexity. As such, imperative to presenting this complex nature of Hip Hop is its spelling. Lawrence "KRS One" Parker has proposed spelling Hip Hop in three different ways, in order to account for the various notions of Hip Hop: Hiphop, Hip Hop and hip-hop (40 years of Hip Hop by KRS-One – Full Movie).<sup>4</sup> KRS One contends that "hip-hop" is only the products of the culture "Hip Hop." "Hiphop" gets at the true essence of what Hiphop truly is, which KRS One identifies as collective consciousness. KRS One's spellings of Hip Hop do not have to serve as the final word on how we define Hip Hop but it is beneficial in thinking about the various complexities of what we mean by "Hip Hop."

Currently, the *Journal of Hip Hop Studies (JHHS)* uses the spelling "Hip Hop." The American Psychological Association (APA) citation and format style enforces the spelling "hip-hop." *JHHS*, Hip Hop Studies Association (HHSA) and the undersigned contend for the spelling "Hip Hop" to be the standard academic spelling of Hip Hop. We posit that this is the standard for two reasons: "hip-hop" does not adequately address the conceptions of Hip Hop and Hip Hop must define for itself how it should be spelled. Going along with KRS One's breakdown of Hip Hop, "hip-hop" only accounts for the products of the Hip Hop culture. In fact, that has been a problem with some Hip Hop scholarship; it has focused too much on the products, especially rap music, and not the culture. Therefore, in order to move beyond this myopic perspective of Hip Hop, the spelling needs to change from hip-hop to Hip Hop. Secondly, the fabric and foundation of Hip Hop's identity was and still is self-expression in the midst of chaos. African diasporic youth in South Bronx, New York developed an identity and culture amid literal burning buildings. When the world told them they were nobodies, they banded together and a revolutionary life force flowed, swelled up, and burst, or rather boomed through Hip Hop. Hip Hop scholars call upon the APA and any other academic organization to allow Hip Hop to identify itself. Hip Hop is not just the product and is more than a culture. Hip Hop is Hip Hop.

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<sup>4</sup> KRS One "40 Years of Hip Hop by KRS-One-Full Movie," *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBGjPebfq74>

## Email Exchange between Tasha Iglesias and American Psychological Association and Merriam-Webster

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**From:** Tasha Iglesias

**Sent:** Wednesday, July 3, 2019 12:00 PM

**To:** StyleExpert@apa.org <StyleExpert@apa.org>

**Subject:** RE: Request Change by APA

Dear Whomever it May Concern,

I hope this email finds you well. I am writing to request the procedure for requesting a change by APA on the correct format of the word Hip Hop. Per APA, Hip Hop should be written as Hip-Hop. We would like to submit a request with signatures from those who created the Hip Hop culture to write the culture's name without a hyphen in academic papers. Please let me know what is needed in order to formally present this request to APA.

Sincerely,

Tasha Iglesias

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**From:** <@m-w.com>

**Sent:** Thursday, July 11, 2019 8:36 AM

**To:** tasha.iglesias

**Subject:** RE: Question/Comment About a Definition

Dear Tasha,

Thank you for your comments about the spelling of the word "hip-hop." Our job as definers is to provide an accurate reflection of the English language as it is popularly used. This means that any changes or additions to our content are founded in careful research demonstrating that a word has been widely used over a long period of time. Since there is overwhelming evidence for the popular use of the spelling "hip-hop," we are bound to report it as a valid spelling. We do not alter our content based on petitions or anything besides the usage evidence available to us. We also have no association with the American Psychological Association and are unable to directly communicate changes to them or request alterations to their style guide, so I'm afraid we're unable to accommodate your second request.

That said, I can see from a brief Internet search that the term is at least sometimes spelled "hip hop." I will recommend to our editors that the spelling of this word be

further researched and, if supported by the evidence, that the non-hyphenated spelling be added to the entry.

We hope this information is helpful. Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,

Merriam-Webster, Inc.