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CHAPTER 3: APPOSITIVES AND APPOSITIVE ADJECTIVES

This chapter deals with two variations on what you learned in chapters 1 and 2 about the structure of phrases and sentences. You learned that a sentence contains slots for a noun phrase functioning as the complete subject and a verb phrase functioning as the complete predicate, and you learned that each phrase contains slots that more or less determine the order of words in it. Appositives and appositive adjectives provide two exceptions to this system of word order. Neither is heard much in speech, but both are encountered frequently in writing.

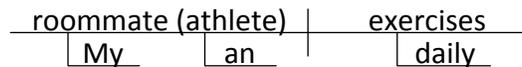
The word “appositive” comes from the Latin for “place near to.” Note that this is looser than “place next to” or “place in its slot.” Appositives and appositive adjectives add information to a sentence from unfixed positions near the words they relate to, and their relation to these words is different from that of the movable adverbials you have studied. They are highly useful rhetorical tools worth understanding well.

Part 1: Appositives

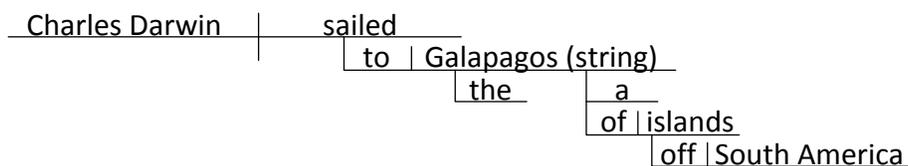
SYNTAX

You have almost certainly used appositives in your writing to define or explain one noun with another noun: *My roommate, an athlete, exercises daily. Charles Darwin sailed to the Galapagos, a string of islands off South America.* An appositive is a noun or noun substitute that renames another noun and fills the same grammatical slot in a sentence as that noun. In our examples, *roommate*, the base noun, is the subject of the sentence and *athlete* shares the same slot; the base noun *Galapagos* is the object of a preposition and *string* shares the same slot. Diagrams make this quite clear:

My roommate, an athlete, exercises daily.

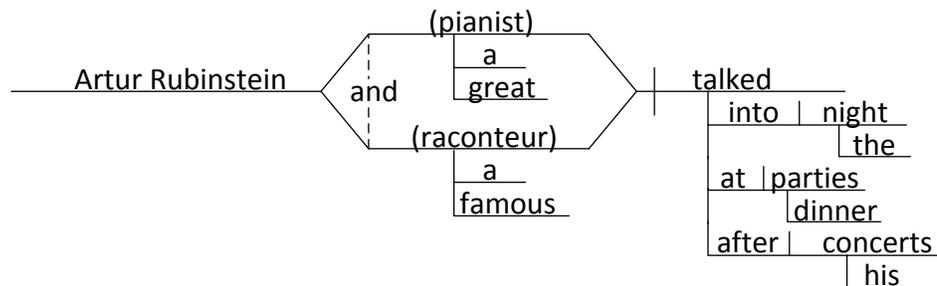


Charles Darwin sailed to the Galapagos, a string of islands off South America.



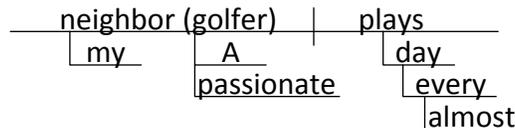
As the diagram shows, appositives are different from the compound elements you learned about in chapter 1, which normally name different things. An appositive and its base noun refer to the same thing: *roommate = athlete*, *Galapagos = string of islands off South America*. The Galapagos example shows that an appositive can have its own modifiers. As you will learn in later chapters, it can even be a noun clause (chapter 13) or a gerund phrase (chapter 14). Appositives can be compounded:

Artur Rubinstein, a great pianist and a famous raconteur, talked into the night at dinner parties after his concerts.



The normal position for appositives is following the base noun, as in the two examples above, but they can come before the base noun. This happens only at the beginning of a sentence. In the following example the appositive comes before the base noun, but note that on the diagram the base noun is shown first:

A passionate golfer, my neighbor plays almost every day.



How do we know which is the base noun and which is the appositive? In speaking, it would be indicated by the rise and fall of the voice; in writing, it is done by punctuation. The next section deals with punctuation of appositives.

Punctuation of Appositives

Appositives are usually set off by commas. Much of the time, you will find them enclosed in a pair of commas—for instance, when they come between a noun and a verb.

Arundhati Roy's first book, *The God of Small Things*, was published in 1997.

Sometimes, for emphasis or clarity, they are set off by dashes. This is often the case when they occur in a series.

Many childhood diseases that used to kill or afflict millions of children--**whooping cough, measles, diphtheria, polio**--can remain a thing of the past if we keep up inoculation programs.

Figure 3.1 Punctuating Appositives

Appositives are usually set off by commas:

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A Guatemalan Indian with little formal education, Rigoberta Menchu wrote a book that brought her to the attention of the world.

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Many childhood diseases that used to kill or afflict millions of children--**whooping cough, measles, diphtheria, polio**--can remain a thing of the past if we keep up inoculation programs.

When an appositive is the final structure in a sentence, it may be set off by a colon.

Sleeping under the Christmas tree was the children's present: **a tiny golden retriever puppy**.

No punctuation is used when an appositive is **restrictive**--that is, when it is necessary to the meaning of its base noun.

The poet **Wallace Stevens** was an executive of the Hartford Insurance Company.

When an appositive comes before its base noun, it is set off by a single comma.

A Guatemalan Indian with little formal education, Rigoberta Menchu wrote a book that brought her to the attention of the world.

When an appositive is the final structure in a sentence, it may be set off by a colon.

Sleeping under the Christmas tree was the children's present: **a tiny golden retriever puppy**.

The U.S. Constitution distributes the power of the federal government among three different branches: **the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judicial branch.**

No punctuation is used when an appositive is **restrictive**--that is, when it is necessary to the meaning of its base noun. (In chapter 12 we deal at length with **restrictive** and **nonrestrictive** elements.) In the following sentence, for example, the appositive *Wallace Stevens* is not set off from the noun "poet" by commas because it is needed to identify which poet the writer is talking about:

The poet **Wallace Stevens** was an executive of the Hartford Insurance Company.

RHETORIC

How to Use Appositives Effectively

1. Maintain Paragraph Flow and Focus

Appositives are particularly useful for adding to a sentence pertinent, helpful, and even necessary information that would interrupt the flow and focus of a paragraph and/or cause unhelpful repetition if it were in a separate sentence. Consider how the second sentence in this short paragraph interrupts both the flow and the focus.

Dr. Richard D. Hansen declares that the ancient Maya may have brought ecological disaster upon themselves by razing forests. **Hansen is a professor of archeology at UCLA.** The Mayans burned forests to melt the lime from which they made stucco for their monuments.

The second sentence gives important information about Hansen's credentials, but it shifts attention away from the subject of the paragraph, the Maya. An appositive permits you to reduce the information to size, so to speak, and also to place it right next to the word to which it relates.

Dr. Richard D. Hansen, **a professor of archeology at UCLA**, declares that the ancient Maya may have brought ecological disaster upon themselves by razing forests. The Mayans burned forests to melt the lime from which they made stucco for their monuments.

2. Increase Economy

First a caution: Economy is not the most important thing in writing. Sometimes the longer way of saying something is clearer or more effective. In general, however, it is good to save words

when you can, and appositives can help you do this. They often seem to function as reduced relative clauses (see chapter 12) from which the *who is* or *which is* has been eliminated.

Original sentence: Linus Pauling, **who was a Nobel Prize-winning scientist**, suggested taking large regular doses of Vitamin C as an antioxidant.

Revision: Linus Pauling, **a Nobel Prize-winning scientist**, suggested taking large regular doses of Vitamin C as an antioxidant.

An appositive at the beginning of a sentence can economically suggest a relation between one fact and another. Here an appositive replaces an adverb clause (see chapter 8).

Original sentence: **Because he is an amateur chef**, Pat built a genuine wood-fired pizza oven in his back yard.

Revision: **An amateur chef**, Pat built a genuine wood-fired pizza oven in his back yard.

An appositive can also replace an independent clause in a compound sentence (see chapter 5).

Original sentence: Higher education was once a privilege of the well-to-do in this country, but it is now available to many, though still not to all, Americans.

Revision: **Once a privilege of the well-to-do in this country**, higher education is now available to many, though still not to all, Americans.

Finally, a special kind of appositive can be placed at the end of a sentence to comment on the sentence itself rather than to rename a noun within it:

Minutes before his flight was to take off, the respected international financier was arrested and led off the plane in handcuffs – **a shock to the whole world**.

This last appositive may be seen to replace a whole sentence – *This was a shocking event to the whole world* – or a kind of dependent clause you will be learning about in Chapter 12 – *which was a shocking event to the whole world*. Here the appositive after the dash saves words and adds drama!

3. Set off an Appositive With a Colon for Clarity and Emphasis

An appositive at the end of a sentence may be set off with a colon. This is a good way to detach information for clarity and emphasis:

Most liberal arts degrees in the U.S. require study in three areas: **the humanities, the social sciences, and science and mathematics**.

Do note that a complete sentence precedes the colon in these cases. The following is not recommended:

∅ Most liberal arts degrees in the U.S. require study in: the humanities, the social sciences, and science and mathematics.

The above sentence does not contain an appositive; the colon is followed by objects of the preposition *in*, and objects of the preposition, not a colon, should follow a preposition.

4. Extend the Meaning of a Word in Context

In one of its most interesting uses, an appositive can go well beyond merely renaming a noun. You can use it to extend the meaning of a word, stating what you intend the word to mean in a particular context.

They had a beautiful marriage, **a union of romantic passion and intellectual compatibility.**

Valerie is that rarity, **a great talent with a small ego.**

5. Create Coordination and Parallelism

Appositives fit easily into series and into coordinate and parallel constructions.

Many factors--**global warming, El Niño, explosions in distant galaxies, even secret military experiments**--have been named as possible causes of recent weather patterns.

Both a superb chef and a shrewd businessman, the owner of Labujnik Restaurant enjoyed financial success as well as critical acclaim for many years.

Now they all lie equal in their graves--**masters and slaves, kings and commoners, the conquerors and the conquered.**

Exercises on appositives are at the end of this chapter.

Part 2: Appositive Adjectives

SYNTAX

Appositive adjectives, sometimes called movable adjectives, are adjectives that are placed and punctuated so that they receive a different focus in a noun phrase from that of regular adjectives. In the normal order of a noun phrase, adjectives come before the noun. If the noun has a determiner like *the*, it comes before the adjectives: ***The sturdy old cabin*** withstood the

hurricane.

Appositive adjectives, on the other hand, most frequently come after the noun or before the determiner, and they are always set off by commas:

Appositive adjectives following the noun:

The cabin, **old but sturdy**, survived the hurricane.

Appositive adjectives before the determiner:

Old but sturdy, the cabin survived the hurricane.

Note that the information conveyed by *the cabin, old but sturdy* is not different from that conveyed by *the sturdy old cabin*. But the placement and punctuation of *old but sturdy* cause both adjectives to receive a kind of stress and focus they do not receive in normal order. The *but* helps, too, of course. *The sturdy old cabin* describes a cabin; *the cabin, old but sturdy* tells a little story.

Appositive adjectives commonly occur in pairs or a series. When they appear singly, they are often modified by a prepositional phrase:

Angry over the dirty dishes in the sink, Janet told her roommate she was leaving.

They do not follow personal pronouns, but they may precede them:

ØShe, **witty and effervescent**, was the life of the party.

Witty and effervescent, she was the life of the party.

Punctuating Appositive Adjectives

As demonstrated in the previous section, punctuation is part of what makes adjectives appositive. They are set off by commas, both when they are placed before a determiner and when they follow the noun they modify.

Light and **newsy**, Brian's letters brightened Adam's days in the war zone.

Brian's letters, **light** and **newsy**, brightened Adam's days in the war zone.

Appositive adjectives may also be set off by dashes, usually when the appositive follows the noun:

Yehuda Amichai's Hebrew poems – **precise, personal, passionate** – have appeared in thirty-seven languages.

Figure 3.2 Punctuating Appositive Adjectives

Appositive adjectives set off by commas, both when they are placed before a determiner and when they follow the noun they modify.

Bright and **newsy**, the letters brightened Adam's days in the war zone.
The letters, **bright** and **newsy**, brightened Adam's days in the war zone.

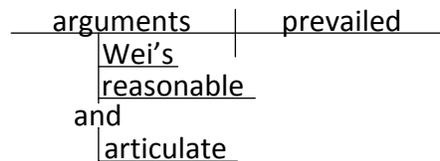
Appositive adjectives may also be set off by dashes, usually when the appositive follows the noun:

Yehuda Amichai's Hebrew poems – **precise, personal, passionate** – have appeared in thirty-seven languages.

Diagramming Appositive Adjectives

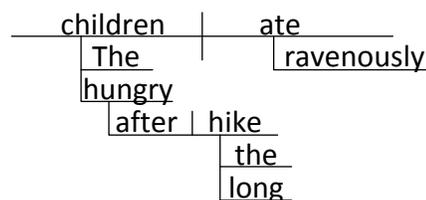
Appositive adjectives are diagrammed just like regular adjectives. When they are joined by a conjunction, the conjunction is also shown:

Wei's arguments, reasonable and articulate, prevailed.



When an appositive adjective is modified by a prepositional phrase, the phrase is attached to it in the diagram:

The children, hungry after the long hike, ate ravenously.



RHETORIC

How to Use Appositive Adjectives Effectively

1. Control Focus

By being out of normal English word order, appositive adjectives almost automatically receive special focus. This permits you to shine a spotlight on information you want to stress.

Intelligent, decisive, and fair, Peggy should make an excellent team leader.
The ocean water, **cool and clear**, was irresistible on a hot day.

2. Relate Ideas or Information Economically within a Sentence

Appositive adjectives typically suggest a relation between information found in a sentence and information carried by the adjectives themselves. They are especially efficient for suggesting cause and effect. In the revision shown here, they replace the original adverb clause in boldface.

Original sentence:

Jim's dog is unsafe around little children **because she is overprotective and unpredictable**.

Revision:

Jim's dog, **overprotective and unpredictable**, is unsafe around children.

3. Break up Long Strings of Modifiers

Sometimes two or three modifiers are needed to identify a noun. Adding even more modifiers for description can result in a long string of modifiers. Putting some of them in the appositive position not only breaks up the string but effectively separates modifiers that describe from those that merely identify. In the original sentence of the following example, an italicized string of five modifiers precedes the noun *counselor*. In the revision, the adjectives describing attributes that help explain the counselor's popularity have been separated as appositives from modifiers that merely identify the counselor.

Original sentence:

The *energetic, upbeat, new assistant camp* counselor was popular with the children.

Revision:

Energetic and upbeat, the new assistant camp counselor was popular with the children.

4. Achieve Variety in Sentence Rhythm and Structure

Certain kinds of writing seem to call for many adjectives; when these are in a series of sentences with similar structure, the result can be monotonous. Appositive adjectives can break up the structure and rhythm. Compare the paragraphs below discussing James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son."

Original:

Baldwin's long, passionate essay is an extraordinary piece of writing. His intricate, sometimes tortured sentences seem to capture raw feelings in conflict with each other. His clear-eyed but compassionate analysis of his father will ring true to many readers whose fathers have been both monstrous and pitiful. His profound, still urgent insights into hatred, which "never failed to destroy the man who hated," should be posted in classrooms around the world.

Revision:

Baldwin's long, passionate essay is an extraordinary piece of writing. His sentences, **intricate and sometimes tortured**, seem to capture raw feelings in conflict with each other. His clear-eyed but compassionate analysis of his father will ring true to many readers whose fathers have been both monstrous and pitiful. **Profound and still urgent**, his insights into hatred, which "never failed to destroy the man who hated," should be posted in classrooms around the world.

5. Create Coordination and Parallelism

Because they so often come in pairs or in threes, appositive adjectives lend themselves to coordination and parallelism. They can be effectively balanced with correlative coordinate conjunctions such as *neither . . . nor*. With a conjunction such as **but**, and with their own modifiers, they can help compress a complete story into a sentence.

Neither too **formal** nor too **casual**, Selina made a strong impression in her interview. The minister, **passionate** in the pulpit but **icy** in person, led a lonely existence. **Friendly** but **firm**, **relaxed** but **demanding**, Roy gets a lot of work out of people while keeping morale high.

EXERCISES

Part 1: Appositives

A. Sentences to Diagram

1. Challah, a braided loaf of white egg bread, is traditionally eaten on Jewish ceremonial occasions.

2. A highly successful poet, Terry Sheets has also dabbled in fiction.
3. Across the front page was a shocking one-word headline: WAR!
4. Her voice soared into the hearts of the audience, a gift from the gods.
5. Our friendship, my most precious possession, began in a rivalry.
6. The Beatles' first album, *Please Please Me*, appeared in England in 1963.
7. According to the magazine *Rolling Stone*, two songs on the album, "I Saw Her Standing There" and "Please Please Me," stand among the 500 greatest songs of all time.
8. In the raucous "Twist and Shout," another famous song on the album, John Lennon audibly struggles with a sore throat.
9. The photograph on the original album cover is by the legendary theater photographer Angus McBean.
10. *Please Please Me* was released in LP format, predecessor of the CD and ancestor of MP3.

B. Sentence Combining

Combine each group of sentences into one sentence that uses at least one appositive. The starred sentence should remain the base sentence. In most cases, the appositive will rename a subject near the beginning of the sentence. Appositives may be compounded or in a series. Some may be placed either before or after the subject; try them both ways.

Example

- * Marcel gets many dinner invitations.
- Marcel is a witty storyteller

Marcel, a witty storyteller, gets many dinner invitations.

1. *Art Tatum was completely blind.
Art Tatum was one of the greatest jazz pianists of the century.
2. *In 1996, Gary Kasparov accepted the challenge of playing against IBM's Deep Blue.
Gary Kasparov was world chess champion.
Deep Blue is a powerful chess-playing computer program.
3. *Arthur wanted a house with a cool, dry cellar.
Arthur was a collector of rare wine.
4. *Michael Jordan was a master of every kind of shot.
They included three-pointers, slam-dunks, free throws.
5. *A walk around the block with little Chloe is a joy.
The joy is a voyage of discovery led by a tireless explorer.
6. *The Maya left pyramids and monuments that are among the wonders of the world.

The Maya were an Amerindian people who flourished between 300 and 800 C.E.

7. *The major sites are in northern Guatemala and southern Mexico.
The major sites are Uxmal, Uxactum, Copán, Piedras, and Tixal.
8. *One archaeologist believes the Maya may have brought ecological disaster upon themselves.
The archeologist is Dr. Richard D. Hansen.
Dr. Richard D. Hansen is a professor at UCLA.
9. *Lime stucco is made by melting limestone.
Lime stucco is the material used in much Maya architecture.
10. *The melting of limestone led to the leveling of forests for firewood.
The melting of limestone is a process that requires intense heat.

C. On Your Own

1. Write five sentences that use appositives in their normal position following their base noun.
(*Dave Oglethorpe, a professional hockey player, has scars all over his face.*)
2. Write five sentences that use appositives at the beginning of a sentence before their base noun. (*A specialist in computer security, Phyllis is in great demand these days.*)

Part 2: Appositive Adjectives

A. Sentences to Diagram

1. The lion, regal and powerful, stood against the sky.
2. Fragrant beyond belief, the white roses hung over the fence.
3. Grimy and exhausted, the rescue workers staggered into camp.
4. Baldwin's essays – passionate, powerful, sometimes perplexing – stand out from his other works.
5. The two leaders, outwardly respectful of each other but inwardly contemptuous, negotiated at length.

The next five sentences are about William Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale.

6. Brooding and mistrustful, King Leontes erupts in jealous rage at his wife and his best friend.
7. Queen Hermione, pregnant with the King's child and secure in her innocence, does not cower before the King's irrational charges.
8. Her fearless gentlewoman, Paulina, full of moral force and dignity, argues in Hermione's defense.

9. Leontes will end up in broken regret, alone, humble, incurably sad.
10. By play's end, new life – fresh and beautiful and real -- will have sprung up like the flowers at the sheep-shearing festival.

B. Sentence Combining

Combine each group of sentences into one sentence containing appositive adjectives. In each case, the first sentence should remain your base sentence. In some cases you will have to supply coordinating conjunctions (*and, but, or, nor, for, so, and yet; either . . . or, neither . . . nor, and not [only] . . . but [also]*). In choosing them, think about the meaning of the combined sentence. Experiment with placing the appositive adjectives before and after their nouns. In some cases, you may want to have both appositive and regular adjectives in the same sentence.

Examples

Griselda won the hearts of all who knew her.
 Griselda was patient.
 Griselda was kind.
Patient and kind, Griselda won the hearts of all who knew her.
 or
Griselda, patient and kind, won the hearts of all who knew her.

The retriever won first prize at the dog show.
 The retriever was a Labrador.
 The retriever was young.
 The retriever was beautifully groomed.
 The retriever was perfectly obedient.
 The retriever was from Racine.
Beautifully groomed and perfectly obedient, the young Labrador retriever from Racine won first prize at the Milwaukee Dog Show.
 or
The young Labrador retriever from Racine, beautifully groomed and perfectly obedient, won first prize at the Milwaukee Dog Show.

1. Cliff's brownies were the first item to sell out at the bake sale.
 They were dark.
 They were moist.
2. The student instantly became unpopular with almost everybody in the class.
 The student was new.
 The student was a music student.
 The student was from Los Angeles.
 The student was loud.
 The student was relentlessly competitive.

3. The Secretary of State attracted attention whenever she entered a room.
She was short.
She was imposing.
4. The water was a rich reward for the long hike.
The water was ocean water.
The water was green.
The water was clean.
The water was inviting.
5. The drama teacher eventually won the devotion of all her students.
She was strict.
She was demanding.
She was kind.
6. As Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde* opens, Tristan is bringing Isolde from Ireland to be the bride of King Marke of Cornwall.
Tristan is profoundly loyal.
Tristan is dutiful.
7. Isolde prepares a poison mixture with which to kill both Tristan and herself.
Isolde is furious at Tristan for having captured her for King Marke.
Isolde is half in love with Tristan from an earlier encounter.
8. Her servant substitutes a love potion for the poison mixture, and Tristan and Isolde drink it.
Her servant is well-meaning.
Her servant is short-sighted.
9. The music of their long love scene rises by slow chromatic steps to an excruciatingly delayed climax.
The music is almost embarrassing in its sensuality.
10. The love-scene music returns at the end in the famous Liebestod ("love-death"), which Isolde sings over Tristan's body before she falls upon him.
Isolde is dead of a broken heart.

C. On Your Own

1. Write five sentences that use appositive adjectives following the noun they modify. (*The children, happy but hungry after the long hike, ate ravenously.*)
2. Write five sentences that use appositive adjectives before the noun they modify. (Example: *Polite but distant, Gerhard made it clear that he still bore a grudge.*)