

Appositives

What is an appositive?

An **appositive** is a **noun**¹ that immediately follows and renames another noun in order to clarify or classify it.

Why are appositives used?

Appositives are used to reduce wordiness, add detail, and add **syntactic**² variety to a sentence.

- My teacher is a tough grader.
- Mrs. Green is a tough grader.
- My teacher *Mrs. Green* is a tough grader.

How can I identify an appositive?

Appositives immediately follow a noun; an appositive will always help to identify the noun.

- One or two words, often including a name: Ms. Wood, *Sally's teacher*, assigned a research project.
- Three or four words, often including some detail: Ms. Wood, *Sally's fifth grade teacher*, assigned a research project.
- Four or more words, often including extensive detail: Ms. Wood, *Sally's favorite teacher in the school*, assigned a research project.

The previous examples show how an appositive can come after a noun it renames. However, appositives can also stand as the **introductory** phrase of a sentence before the noun it renames to add sentence variety.

- After a noun: Ms. Wood, *Sally's favorite teacher in high school*, is friendly and approachable.
- Before a noun: *Sally's favorite teacher in high school*, Ms. Wood is friendly and approachable.

Similarly, an appositive can be found as a phrase at the end of a sentence.

- Martha ate lunch at Chili's, *her favorite restaurant on the weekends*.
- My uncle was staying at the Holiday Inn, *the most affordable hotel in the neighborhood*.

How do I test for an appositive?

To test to see if an appositive is needed, replace the appositive with the noun being modified. The sentence should make sense if you substitute the appositive for the noun or noun phrase.

- Without substitution: Ms. Wood, *Sally's favorite teacher in the school*, is friendly and approachable.
- With substitution: *Sally's favorite teacher in the school* is friendly and approachable.

¹ A **noun** can name both concrete objects, such as a person, place, or thing, or abstract ideas, such as a feeling.

² **Syntax** is the sequence in which words are put together to form sentences.

How do I punctuate appositives?

Appositives may or may not be crucial to identify the noun or noun phrase.

If an appositive is necessary to understand the identity of the noun or noun phrase that is being modified, the appositive is **restrictive**. Restrictive appositives are not set off with commas.

Mark's teacher *John Smith* served in the army.

If we removed the appositive, we would understand that Mark's teacher served in the army, but the sentence loses clarity. Without the appositive, we are unsure which of Mark's teachers is being referred to. Therefore, this appositive is **restrictive** and has no commas.

If an appositive is unnecessary to understand the identity of the noun or noun phrase it is identifying, it is **nonrestrictive**. Nonrestrictive appositives are set off with commas.

Fred's biology teacher, *Ted Jones*, served in the navy.

If we removed the appositive, we would still understand that Fred's biology teacher served in the navy. Although the appositive adds detail to the sentence, the audience already understands which specific teacher is being referred to; including the name is unnecessary. Therefore, this appositive is **nonrestrictive**.

Exercise:

- Underline the appositive.
 - Identify the appositive as **restrictive** (no commas) or **nonrestrictive** (commas).
 - Punctuate the appositive appropriately.
1. One of their favorite baseball players Barry Bonds played for the San Francisco Giants.
 2. My third grade teacher Mrs. Brown is now retired.
 3. President Obama the popular US president usually presents eloquent speeches.
 4. The Lincoln Memorial a beautiful structure is located near the Washington Monument.
 5. Sally Bill's younger sister is afraid of heights.
 6. Your cousin Danielle has beautiful hair.
 7. Elvis Presley my favorite musician will be legendary for decades to come.
 8. A credible author Stephen King has written many horror novels.
 9. My neighbor Ann an elderly woman loves to plant her own vegetables.
 10. The famous musician Stevie Wonder is completely blind.

Exercise Answer Key:

1. **Restrictive** - One of his favorite baseball players Barry Bonds played for the San Francisco Giants.
2. **Nonrestrictive** - My third grade teacher, Mrs. Brown, is now retired.
3. **Nonrestrictive** - President Obama, the popular US president, usually presents eloquent speeches.
4. **Nonrestrictive** – The Lincoln Memorial, a beautiful structure, is located near the Washington Monument.
5. **Nonrestrictive** – Sally, Bill's younger sister, is afraid of heights.
6. **Restrictive** - Your cousin Danielle has beautiful hair.
7. **Nonrestrictive** - Elvis Presley, my favorite musician, will be legendary for decades to come.
8. **Nonrestrictive** - A credible author, Stephen King has written many horror novels.
9. **Nonrestrictive** - My neighbor Ann, an elderly woman, loves to plant her own vegetables.
10. **Restrictive** - The famous musician Stevie Wonder is completely blind.