

Appositives: Are You Positive?

Learning how writing works, being able to identify parts of a sentence and knowing how to effectively use these parts will help you greatly improve your writing skills. One powerful way to instantly improve your writing, and make it more vivid and illustrative, is to use **modifiers**.

A **modifier** is a part of a sentence that provides more details or explanation. The word *modify* means *to change*. By adding modifiers, we are changing a basic sentence to a more detailed sentence. Adding modifiers can help make sentences more interesting and clear.

For this exercise, we will be working with a type of modifier called an **appositive**. An appositive is a word or group of words that *renames* or gives more *specific* details about a **noun** (a person, place, thing, or idea) or **pronoun** (a word that takes the place of a noun).

Here is a hint to remember this: When you look at the word **appositive**, do you see the word “positive” inside it? The word “positive” means “absolutely sure” or “certain.” So, by adding an appositive, think of it as making “sure” the reader knows exactly who or what your sentence is referring to. For example:

Fred went to the store.

This is a clear enough sentence as it is, but if we simply add an appositive, we can clarify or add detail to make sure the reader is *positive* about which Fred we mean. Look at the sentence below.

*Fred, **the tall boy with the red hair**, went to the store.*

By adding the **appositive**, we have made absolutely **positive** that the reader knows we are talking about Fred with the red hair, and not Fred with the brown hair. Get it?

Here are a few more examples (appositives are in **bold**):

- *The dragon, **a fire-breathing beast**, shot flames from its nostrils.*
- *The captain ordered the ship, **the huge, white vessel**, to dock. (Notice that the appositive is not referring to the captain, but is referring to the ship in this case.)*

- **A wonderful cook**, my husband likes to make fancy dinners.
- Livia is very close to her sister, **Maggie**.

Be careful! The appositive should *rename* the noun or pronoun. Some examples:

*The dragon, **huge, green, and scary**, shot flames from its nostrils.*

Notice that the words “huge, green, and scary” do not **rename** the noun *dragon*, but instead, just describe what the dragon looks like.

*Fred, **running as fast as he could**, went for the doctor.*

Again, notice, that the words “running as fast as he could” merely describe **how** Fred ran for the doctor.

To test whether a word or phrase is an appositive, you should be able to remove the noun or pronoun and the sentence should still make sense.

☐ *The dragon **huge, green, and scary** shot flames from its nostrils.* (This doesn’t make sense as a complete sentence)

☐ *The dragon **a fire-breathing beast** shot flames from its nostrils.* (This sentence—with a few edits—makes sense as a complete sentence)

Additionally, appositives can be indicated by parentheses or with dashes:

Jennifer (my cousin) moved to North Dakota.

Mount Rushmore—the mountain sculpture of presidents—is located in South Dakota.

My little sister likes to pretend she’s Wonder Woman—a DC Comics superhero.

Name _____

Directions: Read the sentences below, then underline the appositive. If there is no appositive, leave the sentence alone and write "none." Two examples have been done for you.

Ex. 1: Upset by her students, the teacher assigned extra homework. **(none)**

Ex. 2: My new puppy, a cute, floppy-eared Beagle, likes to lick my face.

1. My best friend Joe has a new PlayStation.
2. Isabelle, the cute girl in my English class, asked to sit with me at lunch.
3. During math, my favorite class, Jaime passed me a note.
4. The book that we read in class was *Of Mice and Men*.
5. Joe, an avid fan of sports, had season tickets for two different sports teams.
6. My mom (a concert pianist) bought herself a new baby grand piano.
7. A great dane, his dog is almost as big as the couch.
8. My teacher, Mrs. Martinez, also coaches the cheer team.
9. Monica, eager to start the school year, purchased new school supplies.
10. The protesters demanded one thing: answers.
11. My wish that we don't have a test today is probably not going to happen.
12. My aunt, a vegetarian, loves to make spinach lasagna.
13. Sarah, my six-year-old sister, is afraid of the dark.
14. We read a book about Martin Luther King, Jr., a hero of the Civil Rights movement.