

# *What, Why, and How?*

**14**

## **GRAMMAR**

**Appositives**

# Appositives

## What are they?

In your essays, you often want to use long, complex sentences to draw your reader in, to avoid the choppiness that comes from a series of short sentences, and to provide clear and vivid detail. While adjectives can modify nouns (the *blue* car), sometimes nouns themselves—appositives—also modify nouns for the purpose of offering details or being specific. Sometimes these appositives will be called noun phrase appositives (or NPAs).

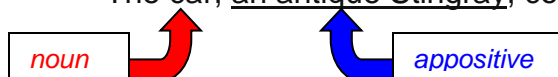
**Connections**  
For more help combining sentences, see “Adjectives and Adverbs.”

## What does an appositive look like?

- It will begin with a noun or an article (a, an, the).
- As a phrase, it will not have its own subject *and* verb.
- It will be usually set off with a comma, but occasionally is separated with a colon (: ) or dash (—).

## Examples:

- The car, an antique Stingray, cost ten thousand dollars.



- Martha, Beth's older sister, came to the open-mic night with her guitar.
- To the baseball game Roger brought all his goodies: balls, a glove, a hat and a sign.
- She took her medication—pain killers and cold medicine—and hid them in her suitcase.

## Create Your Own Appositives

Because you may be writing a whole new sentence to give just a little piece of information to your reader, try to make your writing less choppy and repetitive by using an appositive to combine the ideas.

You might have:

- I wanted to give Droopy to the SPCA before she attacked.
- Droopy is my sister's ferocious pit bull.

These sentences could easily be combined:

- I wanted to give Droopy, my sister's ferocious pit bull, to the SPCA before she attacked.

What happened to create the appositive? The writer noticed that the second sentence, “Droopy is my sister's ferocious pit bull” only gave more information about Droopy, who had already been introduced in the previous sentence. That additional information is dropped into the first sentence after the noun it modifies. Remember to use commas to set off the NPA.

## **A Note on Colons and Dashes**

You may be wondering when a colon or dash is appropriate to set off an NPA. Most of the time a comma will do just fine. Sometimes, though, you will wish to call more attention to the information in apposition—draw the reader’s eyes to it—and in those instances, a dash (which is made with *two* hyphens “—”) may do the trick. A colon is usually used when the NPA is a series or list of items (“I brought her favorite fruit: apples, oranges and peaches.”)

# **PRACTICE**

## **Exercise 1 – Noun Phrase Appositives – Sentence Combining**

Combine the following sentences using NPAs.

Example: I want to take the painting to the museum for donation. The painting is a Van Gogh.

CORRECT: I want to take the painting, a Van Gogh, to the museum for donation.

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1. The lunch was cheap, served cold, and brought an hour late. The lunch was a bowl of soup.
  2. Maxwell’s car topped fifty miles per hour—but barely. His car was a sleek Corvair.
  3. The student body voted “no” on the resolution even though it would have benefited them explicitly. The student body is a confused group of adults whose only interest in common was the college’s location.
  4. The pilot was stranded for twelve hours inside of his jet. The pilot was a former Air Force mechanic. His jet was a Cessna Skylane.
  5. I want to speak on the important subjects. The important subjects are philosophy, linguistics and chemistry.
  6. After six long years Alec finally achieved his lifelong goal. The goal was a scholarship to a good college.
  7. Even though you’re willing to forfeit the prize, I think you should wait a week or two—until you know you won’t need the money. The prize would be my salary for a whole year.
  8. The bear came to our tent, peeked in, and went on his merry way. The bear was a sleepy grizzly.
  9. Camped around the fire, each of us stared at the night sky. The fire was a glowing source of warmth. The night sky was a bowl full of sparkling stars.
  10. Mrs. Peterson warned us that we would have only one more day to hand in the assignment. Mrs. Peterson is my least favorite teacher.

## **Exercise 2 – NPAs – Sentence Combining**

For each of the following sentences, add one or more NPA to give the reader additional information. Make up whatever you like! (Hint: find the noun(s) in the sentence to look to see what can take an NPA.)

Example:

- The textbook fell from my desk.

CORRECT: *The textbook, a giant collection of poetry, fell from my desk.*

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1. My best friend lost the race.
2. Bill Clinton took first prize for his book.
3. Joanne told Larry to go for a ride on his boat.
4. Napoleon discovered the “trapple.”
5. My binder contains one hundred papers and two pamphlets.
6. The dog bit Bill in the leg before he could run into a house.
7. Her shirt nearly blinded me.
8. Abe Lincoln probably didn’t use Log Cabin syrup.
9. I like the school’s newest building.
10. Cindy took the money to the bank.

# ANSWERS

## Appositives Answer Key

### Exercise 1 – Noun Phrase Appositives – Sentence Combining

Combine the following sentences using NPAs.

1. The lunch was cheap, served cold, and brought an hour late. The lunch was a bowl of soup.  
*The lunch, a bowl of soup, was cheap, served cold, and brought an hour late.*
2. Maxwell's car topped fifty miles per hour—but barely. His car was a sleek Corvair.  
*Maxwell's car, a sleek Corvair, topped fifty miles per hour—but barely.*
1. The student body voted “no” on the resolution even though it would have benefited them explicitly. The student body is a confused group of adults whose only interest in common was the college's location.  
*The student body, a confused group of adults whose only interest in common was the college's location, voted “no” on the resolution even though it would have benefited them explicitly.*
2. The pilot was stranded for twelve hours inside of his jet. The pilot was a former Air Force mechanic. His jet was a Cessna Skylane.  
*The pilot, a former Air Force mechanic, was stranded for twelve hours inside of his jet, a Cessna Skylane.*
3. I want to speak on the important subjects. The important subjects are philosophy, linguistics and chemistry.  
*I want to speak on the important subjects: philosophy, linguistics and chemistry.*
4. After six long years Alec finally achieved his lifelong goal. The goal was a scholarship to a good college.  
*After six long years Alec finally achieved his lifelong goal: a scholarship to a good college.*
5. Even though you're willing to forfeit the prize, I think you should wait a week or two—until you know you won't need the money. The prize would be my salary for a whole year.  
*Even though you're willing to forfeit the prize—my salary for a whole year—I think you should wait a week or two—until you know you won't need the money.*

6. The bear came to our tent, peeked in, and went on his merry way. The bear was a sleepy grizzly.

*The bear, a sleepy grizzly, came to our tent, peeked in, and went on his merry way.*

7. Camped around the fire, each of us stared at the night sky. The fire was a glowing source of warmth. The night sky was a bowl full of sparkling stars.

*Camped around the fire, a glowing source of warmth, each of us stared at the night sky, a bowl full of sparkling stars.*

8. Mrs. Peterson warned us that we would have only one more day to hand in the assignment. Mrs. Peterson is my least favorite teacher.

*Mrs. Peterson, my least favorite teacher, warned us that we would have only one more day to hand in the assignment.*

## **Exercise 2 – NPAs – Sentence Combining**

For each of the following sentences, add one or more NPAs to give the reader additional information. Make up whatever you like! (Hint: find the noun(s) in the sentence to see what can take an NPA.)

**NOTE: Answers will vary but one of the underlined nouns must be modified in each sentence.**

1. My best friend lost the race.
2. Bill Clinton took first prize for his book.
3. Joanne told Larry to go for a ride on his boat.
4. Napoleon discovered the “trapple.”
5. My binder contains one hundred papers and two pamphlets.
6. The dog bit Bill in the leg before he could run into a house.
7. Her shirt nearly blinded me.
8. Abe Lincoln probably didn't use Log Cabin syrup.
9. I like the school's newest building.
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