

*Sentence Development Tutorial:*

**Tutorial #16:**  
**Noun Phrase Appositives**

**Writing Center**  
**English 800 Center**

**All notes and exercises should be done on separate sheets of paper, which you will bring to your conference with an instructor in the center.**

**As you work through the tutorial, make sure to see an instructional aide at the front desk in the Writing Center or English 800 Center if you have any questions or difficulties.**

## Noun Phrase Appositives

Noun phrase appositives (NPAs) are nouns or noun phrases, which describe other nouns. NPAs are great tools writers use to bring more detail into their sentences. Usually noun phrase appositives begin with *a*, *an*, or *the*. In the examples below, the noun phrase appositive is underlined. You can see that each sentence is complete, *without* the noun phrase appositive. That is, each sentence has a subject and a verb and is a complete idea, and the noun phrase appositive (NPA) simply modifies or provides extra information about another noun.

- subject*                      *NPA*                      *verb*  
• [Allen Ginsberg,] a famous poet, wrote [“Howl,”] a controversial poem.
- subject*                      *NPA*                      *verb*  
• [Allen Ginsberg,] the author of “Howl,” was one of the most controversial poets of the 1960s.

**Principle I.** A noun phrase appositive (NPA) always must contain at least one noun, must be located next to the noun that it modifies, and must be set off by commas.

In the following examples, you can see that each NPA contains a noun, is located *next to* the noun it modifies, and is set off by commas. The noun that the NPA describes or modifies is in brackets, each NPA is underlined, and the noun in each NPA is in boldface.

- noun modified*                      *NPA*                      *noun modified*                      *NPA*  
• [Allen Ginsberg,] a famous **poet**, wrote [“Howl,”] a controversial **poem**.
- noun modified*                      *NPA*  
• [Allen Ginsberg,] the **author** of “Howl,” was one of the most controversial poets of the 1960s.

**Principle II.** A noun phrase appositive (NPA) that consists of a series of noun phrases is usually set off by dashes.

In the following examples, you can see that the NPA consists of a series of noun phrases and is set off by dashes. The noun that the NPA modifies is in brackets, each NPA is underlined, and the noun in each NPA is in boldface.

*noun modified*

*NPA (series of noun phrases)*

- Allen Ginsberg's [friends]—**Jack Kerouac, Richard Brautigan, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Ken Kesey**—also became well-known poets and writers.

*noun modified*

- In the 1960s, Allen Ginsberg wrote several controversial [poems]—**“Howl,”**

*NPA (series of noun phrases)*

**“Walt Whitman in the Supermarket,” “1962,” “Friends and Lovers.”**

**Principle III. As long as it is located next to the noun that it modifies, a noun phrase appositive (NPA) can occur anywhere in a sentence.**

In the following examples, the noun or noun phrase that the NPA modifies is in brackets, each NPA is underlined, and the noun in each NPA is in boldface.

A noun phrase appositive (NPA) can precede the noun that it modifies:

- A controversial **poet** and social **critic**, [Allen Ginsberg] quickly developed a bad reputation.

A noun phrase appositive (NPA) can follow a noun in the middle of a sentence:

- [Allen Ginsberg,] a controversial **poet** and social **critic**, was known worldwide as a radical writer.

A noun phrase appositive (NPA) can follow a noun at the end of a sentence:

- [Allen Ginsberg,] a controversial **poet** and social **critic**, wrote [“Howl,”] a **poem** about self-expression.

## Exercise 1

**Instructions:** Using Principles I, II, and III, underline the noun phrase appositive (NPA) in the following sentences and then place brackets around the noun or noun phrase that the NPA modifies. Remember to punctuate the NPAs correctly. The first sentence has been done for you.

1. According to Betty Edwards in *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, a creative person is *noun modified* *NPA* one who can absorb and process [information]—the ordinary sensory **data** available to all of us.

2. I fell asleep until I reached my destination, the new island. (Jamaica Kincaid, “My Mother”)
3. The rain drove us into the church—our refuge, our strength, our only dry place.  
(Frank McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*)
4. Alcatraz island is now covered with flowers: orange and yellow nasturtiums, geraniums, sweet grass, blue iris, black-eyed Susans. (Joan Didion, “Rock of Ages”)
5. It was an ordinary farm, a calf raising, haymaking farm, and very beautiful.  
(Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*)
6. Within the white working-class community the girl will probably find few resources—teachers, church parishioners, family members—who can tell her of heroes or struggles among people of her background. (James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*)
7. As a child growing up on this plantation, I could not imagine this place, this house, existing without the two of them here. (Ernest J. Gaines, *A Lesson Before Dying*)

**Since noun phrase appositives (NPAs) restate or describe a noun or noun phrase, they can be:**

Quite short

*NPA*

- My cousin, the hostess, is trying too hard.

Or very long

*NPA*

- I met an interesting man, a dentist who works with young children that do not have health insurance.

**Make sure NPAs modify the correct noun.**

Notice what happens when the following sentences are combined with a misplaced NPA:

The patient suffered when the dentist extracted a wisdom tooth.  
She was a slender, fourteen year-old.

(To combine the sentences, simply change the second sentence into the following NPA: “a slender, fourteen year-old” and insert it into the first sentence.)

Incorrect: The patient suffered when the dentist, a slender, fourteen-year-old girl, extracted a wisdom tooth.

(If we insert it here, we have a slender, fourteen year old dentist.)

Incorrect: The patient suffered when the dentist extracted a wisdom tooth, a slender, fourteen-year-old girl.

(If we insert it here, we have a slender, fourteen year old tooth!)

Correct: The patient, a slender, fourteen-year-old girl, suffered when the dentist extracted a wisdom tooth.

(*The patient* is the correct noun being modified; the NPA gives us further information about her.)

## Exercise 2

**Instructions:** Using Principles I, II, and III, combine each group of sentences into a noun phrase appositive. Underline the NPA, and then place brackets around the noun or noun phrase that the NPA modifies. Make sure that the NPA is located *next to* the noun or noun phrase that it refers to, and remember to punctuate the NPAs correctly.

Examples:

At the church social we gobbled strawberry shortcake.  
It is my favorite dessert.

*NPA*

At the church social we gobbled strawberry [shortcake,]my favorite dessert.

San Francisco has excellent dining options.  
It is one of the major cities in California.

*NPA*

[San Francisco,] one of the major cities in California, has excellent dining options.

1. Constanza has a vibrant personality and a dry, sharp sense of humor.  
She is the Language Arts secretary.
2. My grandfather is overly concerned about his four teenaged grandchildren.  
He is an interfering worrywart.
3. My biggest fear overwhelms me as I proceed on to the suspension bridge.  
It is a form of claustrophobia.  
It is a crippling emotion.
4. I saw the pink Cadillac race down Highway 280.  
It was a giant, finned model with black trim.
5. Jaime keeps my spare key in his study, handy for the times when I lock myself out.  
He is a generous, understanding neighbor.
6. My classmates in English class are helpful when it comes to revising my essays.  
They are the partners with whom I relish sharing my writing.

7. Magic Johnson revealed the results of his HIV test.  
He is a role model for millions of young people all over the United States.  
He is a brilliant athlete.
  8. Freewriting gives me the ability to explore my thoughts.  
It is an icebreaker.  
It is an invention of Peter Elbow.
- 9-13. Write five appositive sentences of your own.

### Exercise 3

**Instructions:** Using Principles I, II, and III, combine each group of sentences into an appositive phrase. Underline the NPA, and make sure that it is located *next to* the noun or noun phrase that it refers to. Remember to punctuate the NPAs correctly.

1. Fred was worried about his son.  
Fred was a concerned parent.
2. Timmy had been hanging around Sloppy Joe's with the Notorious Nerdz.  
Timmy was Fred's son.  
Sloppy Joe's was the neighborhood dive.  
The Notorious Nerdz was the creepiest gang in town.
3. The leader of the Notorious Nerdz was the saddest slob in all of Seattle.  
The leader of the Notorious Nerdz was Bill Gatesmith.
4. Bill was well known for his sloppy and sleazy ways.  
His sloppy and sleazy ways were his wrinkled shirts.  
His sloppy and sleazy ways were his smelly suits.  
His sloppy and sleazy ways were his odorous armpits.
5. Timmy seemed to be picking up some of Bill's worst traits.  
Timmy was a nice enough boy until recently.  
Bill's worst traits included his sad habit of hitting on pretty women.  
Bill's worst traits included his irritating tendency to slurp his soda in public.  
Bills worst traits included his way of bragging about all the great robberies he had pulled off.
6. One night Bill and his new buddy Timmy were finally arrested.  
Bill and his new buddy Timmy were the dimwitted duo.

7. Fred was particularly ashamed that his son had been arrested holding up a donut shop with Bill.  
Fred was the laughing stock of Seattle.  
The donut shop was one of local cops' favorite hangouts.  
Bill was an embarrassment to nerds everywhere.
  
8. Write three sentences, which contain a series of noun phrase appositives. Remember to punctuate the NPAs correctly.

## **Exercise 4**

### **Instructions:**

1. Review a classroom essay that you are working on and try to incorporate noun phrase appositives into your own writing.
2. Look back at the principles and exercises in this tutorial and make notes on a separate sheet of paper. You will bring these notes and the essay to your conference.
3. Make an appointment for a conference with an instructor in the Writing Center (18-104) or English 800 Center (18-102). To make this appointment, stop by the Centers or call (650) 574-6436. During this appointment, the professor will make sure you understand the concepts covered in this tutorial, answer any questions that you might have, review your answers to these exercises, and check to see if you can incorporate the skill into your writing.

### **Reminder:**

For this appointment, bring

- any notes about the tutorial that you have taken
- your completed tutorial exercises
- and the essay