

Appositive

Definition of Appositive

When a noun or word is followed by another noun or phrase that renames or identifies it, this is called appositive. This is a literary device that appears before or after a noun or noun phrase. It is always used with a comma. Simply, we can define it as a noun phrase or a noun that defines or explains another noun, which it follows.

In this grammatical structure, writers place elements like noun phrases side-by-side, where one element serves to define the other, and one is in apposition to the other. For instance:

“We were waiting outside the condemned cells, *a row of sheds* fronted with double bars, like small animal cages.” (*A Hanging*, by George Orwell)

In this line, “the condemned cells” is a noun phrase, while “*a row of sheds*” is an appositive that explains this noun phrase.

Types of Appositive

Restrictive Appositive

Restrictive appositive gives essential information to identify the phrase or noun in apposition. It clarifies the meaning of a phrase but, if the appositive is removed, the meaning of the entire sentence changes. Commas are not necessarily used in this type of appositive, such as in, “John’s friend, Michael, likes chocolates.” Here, John has others friends, but the statement is restricted to only Michael.

Non-Restrictive Appositive

Non-restrictive appositive gives non-essential or extra information, which is not important to identify the phrase or noun in apposition. This type of appositive is often used with commas, for example, “John, my friend, likes to eat chocolates.” Here, my friend is a non-restrictive appositive, because it is not necessary for identifying John.

Examples of Appositive in Literature

Example #1: *A Christmas Memory* (By Truman Capote)

“Christmas Eve afternoon we scrape together a nickel and go to the butcher’s to buy Queenie’s traditional gift, *a good gnawable beef bone.*”

In the above excerpt, a restrictive appositive is clarifying and describing a noun “traditional gift.” Here, this literary device has appeared after the noun, specifying the type of gift.

Example #2: *Bronx Primitive* (By Kate Simon)

“Though her cheeks were high-colored and her teeth strong and yellow, she looked like a mechanical woman, *a machine with flashing, glassy circles for eyes.*”

In this example, the noun “mechanical woman” is defined and identified by a long noun phrase, a restrictive appositive, “flashing, glassy circles for eyes,” which serves as a useful device in this excerpt, and brings variety to the sentence, enhancing its meaning.

Example #3: *The Pride of the Yankees* (By Gary Cooper as Lou Gehrig)

“I have had the great honor to have played with these great veteran ballplayers on my left – *Murderers Row, our*

living with and playing with these men on my right — *the Bronx Bombers, the Yankees of today.*

Gehrig identifies a noun, “ballplayers,” by using the restrictive appositive “murderers row,” and he adds a noun “championship team.” These two appositives are used with commas and add meaning and significance to the sentence.

Example #4: *Inside Cape Town* (By Joshua Hammer)

“The Koeberg Nuclear Power Station, *Africa’s only nuclear power plant*, was inaugurated in 1984 by the apartheid regime and is the major source of electricity for the Western Cape’s 4.5 million population.”

In the above extract, Hammer has used an appositive immediately after the noun phrase “Nuclear power station,” which adds information to the sentence. This presents an example of non-restrictive appositive which, if removed, does not change the meaning of the sentence.

Example #5: *Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self* (By Alice Walker)

“My father, *a fat, funny man with beautiful eyes and a subversive wit*, is trying to decide which of his eight children he will take with him to the county fair.”

This is another good example of non-restrictive appositive, in which the noun “father” does not need extra information, but the author has used a long noun phrase, “a fat, funny man ... and a subversive wit,” to describe it.

Function of Appositive

The function of appositive in literary works is to provide information, which is either essential or additional. It also gives meanings to different sentences in literary texts, and helps in identifying other nouns. An appositive noun also defines, explains, and clarifies the meaning of a

short sentences. In addition, an appositive phrase gives variety to a literary work by using sentences of varied lengths, allowing the writers to use interesting details with smooth flow of the reading experience.