

Revision Technique #2

The Appositive



The second revision technique, or brush stroke, is called an *appositive*. An appositive is a noun that *renames* another noun in a sentence to make it more specific. Why are appositives necessary? They add important detail and clarification that make writing more specific.

As with all revision techniques, we begin with a “core sentence” that is simple and direct.

Core sentence: *The bird sat in the tree.*

It’s a fine sentence; there’s nothing wrong with it. But we can definitely add some color by making it more specific using an appositive.

*The bird, **a cardinal**, sat in the tree.*

The word “cardinal” is our appositive – our noun that renames “bird” to make it more specific. When readers see the word *cardinal*, their minds instantly begin to add visual details that make a cardinal the bird that it is. Most people will picture the bright red feathers. If they know that the males and females are different colors, then the reader may also picture the female cardinal with her green-olive colored plumage. Readers may also picture the black mask that males’ have on their faces. Both the males and females have a “crown” of feathers on their heads that make them look like they have mohawk haircuts!

We can also add detail to that appositive phrase to make it even *more* specific and interesting.

*The bird, **a male cardinal with bright red feathers**, sat in the tree.*

Now the readers know that we’re talking about a male cardinal and what he looks like. Let’s go the other route and make our “bird” a female.

*The bird, **a female with feathers the color of a green olive**, sat in the tree.*

Notice in all three rewritten sentences that the core sentence never changes! We can always find it. It’s really important that the core sentence stays intact.

All revision techniques, the appositive included, need to be attached to the core sentence with a comma. If the revision appears in the middle of the sentence, then the phrase needs a comma at the beginning and at the end of the phrase. When we have commas at the beginning and the end of a phrase, it's called "setting the phrase off" with commas.

When we remove the revision technique from the sentence, we should find the core sentence just how it was before we started revising it.

Core sentence: *The bird sat in the tree.*

Revision: *The bird, **a male cardinal with bright red feathers**, sat in the tree.*

Without the revision: *The bird, ~~a male cardinal with bright red feathers~~, sat in the tree.*

Appositives can rename a noun in the MIDDLE or at the END of a sentence.

*The bird sat in the tree, **a tall oak**.*

*The bird sat in the tree, **a towering forty-foot-tall pine**.*

*The bird sat in the tree, **a white-barked birch**.*

Be careful! Appositives must be close to the nouns they rename or confusion will ensue!

*The bird sat in the tree, **a cardinal**.* (This makes it sound like the tree is a cardinal.)

*The bird sat in the tree, **a jabbering blue jay**.* (This makes it sound like the tree is a blue jay.)

*The bird sat in the tree, **an adorable chickadee**.* (This makes it sound...well, you get the point.)

Rules for creating an appositive revision technique:

1. **Choose a noun to rename.** Choose *another* noun to rename the first one, making it more specific.
2. **The appositive HAS to be attached to the core sentence with a comma!** Think of commas like pieces of tape. You will always need a piece of tape to attach a revision technique to a core sentence.
3. **The appositive must be close to the noun it's renaming.**

Let's look at some examples from published authors. Here are a few from the book *Redwall* by Brian Jacques.

- Now he rode on the back of the hay wagon with his five hundred followers, **a mighty army of rats**: sewer rats, tavern rats, water rats, dockside rats.
- Redtooth, **his second in command**, carried a long pole.
- Tim and Tess, **the twin Churchmouse babes**, felt Matthais's strong arm muscles and giggled aloud in admiration.
- Rufus and George, **both solid-looking, sensible mice**, took their leave with a formal bow to the Abbot.

- A hundred mad ideas pounded through his brain, **each one wilder than the last.**

From Jeanne DuPrau's *The City of Ember*...

- And goodbye to their teacher, **Miss Thorn**, who had finished her Last Day of School speech, wishing them luck in the lives they were about to begin.
- Then Lizzie Bisco, **one of Lina's best friends**, sprang to her feet.
- There were four lamps, **two tall ones that stood on the floor and two short ones that stood on tables.**
- When Lina arrived the next morning, she was greeted by Messenger Captain Allis Fleery, **a bony woman with pale eyes and hair the color of dust.**
- Her next customer turned out to be Mrs. Polster, **the teacher of the fourth-year class.**

From *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins...

- He tells of the history of Panem, **the country that rose up out of the ashes of a place that was once called North America.**
- The result was Panem, **a shining Capitol ringed by thirteen districts**, which brought peace and prosperity to its citizens.
- To make it humiliating as well as torturous, the Capitol requires us to treat the Hunger Games as a festivity, **a sporting event pitting every district against the others.**
- They had lost the ability to enunciate words but could still mimic a range of human vocal sounds, **from a child's high-pitched warble to a man's deep tones.**
- The president, **a small, thin man with paper-white hair**, gives the official welcome from a balcony above us.