

Revision Technique #4

Adjectives Out of Order

Revision technique #4 is called “adjectives out of order”. This technique can be really hard to find in novels and it can be tricky for writers to create on their own. The issue? This revision looks a lot like the appositive. It appears after a noun in a sentence, the same exact place where you see appositives. What is the difference between AOoO and an appositive?

- Adjectives out of order **DESCRIBE** a noun in a sentence using **ADJECTIVES**.
- Appositives **RENAME** a noun in a sentence using **ANOTHER, MORE DESCRIPTIVE NOUN**.

If you can keep that idea in your head when identifying and creating adjectives out of order, then you’ll be all set. 😊

To begin with, we need to know what adjectives IN order look like before we can see the value of shifting them out of order. Normally, adjectives come before the noun they describe:

Adjectives IN order: *The **rusty red** truck sat in the yard.*

This revision pulls the adjectives out of order and places them *behind* the noun they describe. Just like an appositive, an AOoO phrase is “set off with commas”. Those commas identify the revision technique, set it off from the core sentence, and give the sentence a wonderful rhythm because they inject small pauses that give the passage a musical quality.

Adjectives shifted OUT of order: *The truck, **rusty and red**, sat in the yard.*

Let’s look at an appositive next to an AOoO to see the difference:

Appositive: The truck, *a **rusty red Ford F-150***, sat in the yard. (the **NOUN Ford F-150** **RENAMES** the truck)

AOoO: *The truck, **rusty and red**, sat in the yard.* (the **ADJECTIVES (rusty, red)** **DESCRIBE** the truck)

AWESOME TIP! There is a great trick you can use to see if you’re dealing with an AOoO or an appositive. Since appositives use nouns to rename another noun in the sentence, you can substitute the revision to see if the sentence still makes sense. Check it out:

The dog, *a **fluffy white shih tzu***, wagged its tail.

Now, substitute **shih tzu** with the noun it’s either describing or renaming...

The ***fluffy white shih tzu*** wagged its tail.

The sentence makes sense, *so this is an appositive*. It’s a noun **renaming** another noun.

Let's look at another one:

The dog, ***fluffy and white***, wagged its tail.

Again, substitute the revision for the noun. If it makes sense, it's an appositive.

The ***fluffy and white*** wagged its tail.

This does *NOT* make sense since *there is no noun renaming the dog*. There are only adjectives ***describing*** it. This is an adjectives out of order instead of an appositive.

Let's create a few of these. The easiest, most common form of the AOoO is when there are two adjectives connected with the conjunction "and" describing a noun.

The birds, ***black and frantic***, fluttered through the tree branches.

A jet, ***sleek and white***, darted overhead.

Camels, ***tall and brown***, stood by the tent.

His hoodie, ***tattered and filthy***, hung in his locker.

You don't *have* to use this form, though. Longer, more beautiful AOoOs are out there! You may choose only one adjective to describe the noun, and then you can add other words around that adjective to paint a specific picture:

Maisy, ***exhausted from a long night of studying***, fought to stay awake during first period.

A racehorse, ***shiny beneath the spotlights***, trotted past us.

The exercise bike, ***dusty from years of neglect and disuse***, sat in the corner.

You can also combine *both* approaches to make some *really* superb sentences!

The Browns, ***embarrassed by another loss and frustrated by their play***, left the field.

Green peppers, ***emerald in color and plump with freshness***, sat in the bins.

The spaceship *Endeavor*, ***nearly a mile long and as white as new-fallen snow***, drifted past.

An important reminder! ***The core sentence never changes!***

Another important reminder! **Always attach an AOoO to the core sentence with a comma!**

Rules for creating an adjectives out of order revision technique:

1. Choose a noun to describe.
2. The AOoO HAS to be attached to the core sentence with a comma!
3. The AOoO has to be near the noun it is modifying (or describing).

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

- He gazed longingly up at Martin the Warrior, ***so proud, so brave.***
- Matthias, ***with his eyes dry and his head held high,*** stood up; he felt himself stand taller than he ever had.
- His eyes were strangely slanted, ***black without any brightness in them.***
- He was dragged forward, ***face to face with his master.***
- In the ditch a frog opened its eyes, ***disturbed by some slight noise from the hedgerow.***

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

- Mrs. Sample, the mender, had to sleep on the couch because her entire bedroom, ***almost up to the ceiling,*** was crammed with clothes to be mended.
- He was a big man, ***with wide shoulders, brawny arms, and a thick neck.***
- Beyond Harken Square, the lighted windows of the buildings made checkered lines, ***yellow and black, row after row.***
- Doon watched from the doorway, ***eager to join in but not sure what to do.***
- ***Wide as the widest street in Ember,*** churning and dipping and swirling, the river roared past, its turbulent surface like black, liquid glass scattered with flecks of light.

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

- In sleep, my mother looks younger, ***still worn but not so beaten-down.***
- Our part of District 12, ***nicknamed the Seam,*** is usually crawling with coal miners heading out to the morning shift at this hour.
- ***Concealed by a clump of bushes,*** I flatten out on my belly and slide under a two-foot stretch that's been loose for years.
- My bow is a rarity, ***crafted by my father with a few others that I keep well-hidden in the woods, carefully wrapped in waterproof covers.***
- The space gets tighter, ***more claustrophobic as people arrive.***