

**Comma Usage II**

**1. Appositives**

An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that directly follows and renames another noun or noun phrase. Typically, it should be set off from the noun or noun phrase with a comma or commas.

- Dr. York, **my mentor**, proofread my graduation speech. (The appositive “my mentor” renames “Dr. York.”)
- My degree, **a Master’s in English**, will help me throughout life. (The appositive “a master’s in English” renames “my degree.”)
- The Yahoos are creatures featured in Gulliver’s Travels, a book by Jonathan Swift. (The appositive “a book by Jonathan Swift” renames “Gulliver’s Travels.”)

**2. Absolutes**

An absolute is typically a noun and a modifier—usually a participle but not always—and is used to modify or describe nouns or entire sentences. Absolutes work like a camera zooming in and focusing on a specific detail of a noun or pronoun in the independent clause. An absolute is always separated from the independent clause with a comma or commas. The absolutes are in bold below.

- **Her eyes glistening with tears**, the graduate proudly strode to her seat.
- Dr. Keck, **his voice booming over the audience**, spoke passionately.
- George ran into his house, **his boots caked with mud**.

**3. Conjunctive adverbs**

Conjunctive adverbs are transition words such as *however, therefore, then, consequently, nevertheless, moreover, in addition, hence, and thus*. There are three ways to use a conjunctive adverb: 1.) as a conjunction to connect two independent clauses, 2.) at the beginning of an independent clause, and 3.) after the subject of an independent clause. Examples of each are provided below. Notice that if a conjunctive adverb is used between two independent clauses, a semicolon is used before the adverb AND a comma after it.

1.) as a conjunction to connect two independent clauses

- Not preparing yourself for your future can be devastating; **therefore**, you must plan ahead and get educated.
- Graduates do not regret their education; **however**, they do sometimes regret the expense.

2.) at the beginning of an independent clause

- Graduates do not regret their education. **However**, they do sometimes regret the expense.
- She obtained the construction contract. **Thus**, she got promoted.

3.) after the subject of an independent clause (Notice you use commas to separate the adverb from the subject and verb.)

- Jason hates comedies. Janet, **however**, loves them.
- Lily got a \$2,000 raise. She, **therefore**, bought a brand new plasma television.

#### 4. Nonrestrictive relative clauses

A nonrestrictive relative clause is a clause that simply supplies extra information or description to a noun or noun phrase. A nonrestrictive relative clause usually begins with a relative pronoun such as *who*, *which*, and *whom*. Since the information isn't necessary to identify the noun or noun phrase, commas are used to separate the nonrestrictive clause from the rest of the independent clause.

- Cain, **who was banished to the Land of Nod**, murdered his brother, Abel.
- The Empire State Building, **which is 102 stories tall**, is in New York City.
- Stephen King's first novel, **which was bought by Doubleday for \$2,000**, is a classic American horror story.

#### 5. Past participle phrases

These phrases begin with a past participle, a verb ending in *-en* or *-ed*. A past participle, however, may look like a verb, but it functions like an adjective or adverb. A past participle describes what something *is* and is always placed near the noun or noun phrase it describes. Always place a comma after an introductory participle phrase (the first example) or around non-restrictive phrases—phrases that simply provide extra information about a noun or noun phrase.

- **When angered**, the wolverine will slash at unsuspecting humans.
- Jim, **invigorated with new hope**, went in search for a new job.

#### 6. Present participle phrases

Present participle phrases begin with a present participle, a verb ending in *-ing*. Like a past participle, a present participle may look like a verb, but it functions like an adjective or an adverb. A present participle describes what something *does* and is always placed near the noun or noun phrase it describes. Always place a comma after an introductory participle phrase (the first example) or around non-restrictive phrases—phrases that simply provide extra information about a noun or noun phrase.

- **Howling at the moon**, the boy turned into a werewolf.
- Greg, **climbing the ladder of opportunity**, presented his résumé.

### **BEWARE THE DANGLING PARTICIPLE!**

Both past and present participial phrases must be placed as close as possible to the person or thing they describe. If not, the result can say something unintended and sometimes quite foolish.

- Adam blamed the mess on the dog, driving to the kennel. (In this sentence, it sounds like the dog is the one driving, not Adam)

This is easily corrected by simply placing the participle next to Adam:

- Adam, driving to the kennel, blamed the mess on the dog.
- OR**
- Driving to the kennel, Adam blamed the mess on the dog.

In both cases, the participial phrase is set off from the rest of the sentence with a comma or commas.

**Sources:** "Absolute Constructions." Bartleby. 17 Dec 2007

<<http://www.bartleby.com/64/C001/001.html>>.

Killgallon, Don. Sentence Composing for College. Portsmouth, NH: Boyton/Cook Publishers, 1998.

Klammer, Thomas P., Muriel R. Schulz, and Angela Della Volpe. Analyzing English Grammar. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Pearson, 2007.