

## Phrases, Clauses, and Appositives: Three Ways to Enhance a Sentence

A sentence requires a subject, predicate and a complete thought. Phrases, subordinate clauses, and appositives are missing the complete thought, and sometimes a subject and predicate. Let's take a look at each one.

1. A phrase is a group of words that don't have both a subject and a predicate. Phrases can be a part of speech: noun phrases, adjective phrases, adverb phrases, and verb phrases.

A noun phrase can be the subject or object, and might look like this:  
*Going to grandma's house for Thanksgiving* is a family tradition.  
Mary wants *to get the lead part in the play*.

An adjective phrase modifies nouns and pronouns:  
The puppies *playing in the window* are for sale.  
*After a long transcontinental flight*, he had jet lag.

An adverb phrase modifies verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs:  
He ran *to catch the fly ball*.  
John will meet her *after lunch*.

A verb phrase is a group of words that act as a verb. It has a main verb and either an auxiliary verb or a modifier:  
By the end of the semester, the class projects *will be completed*.  
Good musicians *have rhythm, style, and talent*.

2. Clauses have both a subject and a predicate. They are either a *main clause* (*independent clause*) or a *subordinate clause* (*dependent clause*).

The main clause can stand on its own and make complete sense:  
*John ran to catch the bus* because he was late.

However, a subordinate clause cannot stand alone even though it has a subject and predicate because it doesn't express a complete thought. These types of clauses are dependent on the other words in the sentence:  
*The boys did*

Subordinate clauses need a linking word to attach it to the main clause, such as: *after, although, because, since, than, that, what, when, which, who, whom*:  
The girls painted better *than* the boys did.

They can be an adjective:  
The contract, *which is long*, is signed.

They can be an adverb:

I can get this done *once the supplies arrive*.

They can be a noun:

She wondered *if her idea was sound*.

3. An appositive is a noun that identifies or describes another noun or pronoun. It can be a single noun, noun phrase, or noun clause.  
My cousin's kitten, *Tabby*, is gray.  
My cousin's kitten, *a chubby ball of fur*, played with the yarn.  
My cousin's kitten, *that I am taking care of*, is cute.

Now that you know what *phrases*, *clauses*, and *appositives* are, you need to know that they can be either restrictive or nonrestrictive.

1. Restrictive means they are necessary to the meaning of the sentence and identify a definite person or thing. They do not have commas before and after since they're vital to the sentence.

Here are some examples of restrictive clauses:

The state *that I like best* is Idaho. (Tells us your favorite state)

Our neighbor *Harry* gave us some peaches. (Tells us which neighbor)

2. Nonrestrictive phrases, clauses, and appositives add a description to an already identified person or thing and aren't necessary to the meaning of the sentence. They have commas before and after because they can be omitted from the sentence, and the sentence still has meaning.

Here are some examples of nonrestrictive clauses:

The state, *famous for its potatoes*, has a panhandle. (The state ... has a panhandle)

Our neighbor across the creek, *Harry Jones*, gave us some peaches. (Our neighbor across the creek ... gave us some peaches)

Phrases, subordinate clauses, and appositives cannot stand alone as a sentence. However, they are an important part of sentences because they give further meaning and description to them. Readers like to know what is happening, and these three tools are one way to give them what they want.