

# Guessing Meaning from Context

Reading Skills

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# Commas with Appositive

An appositive—a word or phrase that further identifies a noun that comes before it—should be set off in commas only if the information it includes is nonessential to the meaning of the sentence.

An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that repeats the meaning of or identifies another noun. Appositives can be used for emphasis or to provide additional information.

An appositive should be a logical equivalent of the noun to which it refers.

Especially in long sentences, be careful not link nouns with appositives that describe completely different types of things.

**Incorrect:** The bus driver pulled into the diner's *parking lot*, the only *restaurant* in the town.

You can correct a faulty appositive by rephrasing the sentence to eliminate it or by changing either the noun or the appositive so that they describe comparable items.

**Correct:** The bus driver pulled into the parking lot of the only restaurant in town.

**Or:** The bus driver pulled into the parking lot of the *diner*, the only *restaurant* in town.

# Example 1

There are two broad classes of electronic games: video games, which are designed for specific video-game systems, handheld devices, and coin-operated arcade consoles; and computer games, which are played on personal computers.

## Example 2

Some video-game systems feature built-in screens, such as Game Boy, a popular handheld system manufactured by Nintendo, and Vectrex, a *tabletop console* made by *General Consumer Electronics* in the *early 1980s*.

## Example 3

Magnavox packaged the invention as Odyssey, the first home video-game console, and released it in 1972.

These machines used mouse controllers, devices that gave players fast and highly precise control.

# The Use of Dash ( – )

This mark usually stresses the materials that follow it. Dashes also emphasize parenthetical thoughts and convey sudden interruptions in thought.

# Example 4

Steven Russell, a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), created the first computer game—Spacewar!—on a Digital Equipment PDP-1 computer in 1962.

With more powerful computer chips allowing for advanced graphics and faster game play—exhibited in games such as Super Mario Bros. and The Legend of Zelda—Nintendo brought new excitement to the market.



# Example 5

Through the 1970s and into the early 1980s these text-based adventure games—another popular game in this mold was called Zork—dominated the field of computer games.

Although some computer-game publishers dropped out of the business, others—such as Broderbund and Sierra On-Line—gained prominence.

# Parentheses

These marks enclose matter of secondary importance.

# Example 6

From their crude origins in the late 1950s and 1960s, electronic games have grown to become a multibillion-dollar industry, one which uses the latest computer technology to produce ever-more realistic game experiences for millions of users (known as gamers).

In 1958 Willy Higginbotham, an engineer at the Brookhaven National Laboratory, used an oscilloscope (an instrument for visually representing electrical current) to build what is considered the first electronic game.

# Example 7

Eventually, he created a version of Spacewar! that used a black-and-white television set and dedicated circuits (electronic hardware created to run a single program).

The game also popularized *online multiplayer gaming* (playing with or against other people through LANs or the Internet).

## Warning!

Some systems even sell additional equipment so online players can speak to each other and verbally help (or taunt) other players during play.

# Conjunction 'or'

Many computer games also allow the use of a joystick or game controller.

# Exemplification

Sometimes examples of the meaning of a new vocabulary item are in another sentence or in another part of the sentence.

The words *for example*, *for instance*, and *such as* are clues to meaning through examples.

## Example 8

People in Los Angeles usually talk about distance in time. They'll say things such as, "The post office is about five minutes from here."

People will tell you directions and distances. In Kansas or Iowa, for instance, the will say, "Go north for two miles. Go east, and then another mile."



# Explanation or Synonym

Sometimes explanation or synonym of a new vocabulary item is in another part of the sentence and is set apart by punctuation.

Besides punctuation, the phrases in other words and that is (abbreviated i.e.) are clues to meaning of words and expressions. The word or is another clue that an explanation or meaning will follow.

# Example 9

Many people live in two-paycheck families; that is, both parents work outside the home.

Many people thought that the American family was falling apart; in other words, they thought it was dying.

Some people live in traditional families, that is, a stay-home mother, a working father, and their own biological children.

# Practice 1

Hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, the Celts, inhabitants of Britain and Ireland, observed a festival on October 31st. Unlike modern-day Halloween, theirs was no children's holiday. The Celts and their priests, the Druids, celebrated Samhain, a festival that marked the eve of the Celtic New Year, which began on November 1. The fall harvest was complete and winter loomed ahead. The Celts believed the power of the sun was fading. For the next several months, darkness would prevail.

# Practice 2

Historically, the practice of Halloween can be traced back several 100 years before the birth of Christ. The Celts were a pre-Christian culture that was served by priests and druids. We learn about them through the Greek writers and the Roman Caesars. Early record of them has also been found in Ireland. In 47 BC the Romans defeated the Celts and outlawed their human sacrifice.

# Practice 3

The first computers were people! That is, electronic computers (and the earlier mechanical computers) were given this name because they performed the work that had previously been assigned to people. "Computer" was originally a job title: it was used to describe those human beings (predominantly women) whose job was to perform the repetitive calculations required to compute such things as navigational tables, tide charts, and planetary positions for astronomical almanacs.

# Practice 4

Just a few years after Pascal, the German Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (co-inventor with Newton of calculus) managed to build a four-function (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) calculator that he called the **stepped reckoner** because, instead of gears, it employed fluted drums having ten flutes arranged around their circumference in a stair-step fashion. Although the stepped reckoner employed the decimal number system (each drum had 10 flutes), Leibniz was the first to advocate use of the binary number system which is fundamental to the operation of modern computers. Leibniz is considered one of the greatest of the philosophers but he died poor and alone.

# Practice 5

In 1953 Grace Hopper invented the first high-level language, "Flow-matic". This language eventually became COBOL which was the language most affected by the infamous Y2K problem. A high-level language is designed to be more understandable by humans than is the binary language understood by the computing machinery. A high-level language is worthless without a program -- known as a **compiler** -- to translate it into the binary language of the computer and hence Grace Hopper also constructed the world's first compiler.

# Practice 6

One of the earliest attempts to build an all-electronic (that is, no gears, cams, belts, shafts, etc.) digital computer occurred in 1937 by **J. V. Atanasoff**, a professor of physics and mathematics at Iowa State University. By 1941 he and his graduate student, Clifford Berry, had succeeded in building a machine that could solve 29 simultaneous equations with 29 unknowns. This machine was the first to store data as a charge on a capacitor, which is how today's computers store information in their main memory (**DRAM** or **dynamic RAM**).



As far as its inventors were aware, it was also the first to employ binary arithmetic. However, the machine was not programmable, it lacked a conditional branch, its design was appropriate for only one type of mathematical problem, and it was not further pursued after World War II. It's inventors didn't even bother to preserve the machine and it was dismantled by those who moved into the room where it lay abandoned.

