
A Field Guide to Grammar



by Jane Oh

In the late elementary grades, students are learning complex grammar that most adults can't quite keep a handle on. Appositives? Clauses? Huh? But for young writers, knowing the nuts and bolts can be a big step up. Here's a review of some common (and commonly confused) grammar terms, as well as a quick activity to apply them to real life reading and writing.

What You Need:

- kids' magazines
- highlighter
- pen

Review:

A **prepositional phrase**, composed of a preposition (part of speech that shows relationship between a noun or pronoun and another word, such as in, on, by, of, with, to, etc.) and its object, shows relationships involving time, direction, or space. *She left early in order to get to the store.*

An **appositive**, a word or phrase that renames a noun or pronoun, adds information about a noun but in a different way than do adjectives. Appositives are set apart by commas. *Mr. Martinez, our neighbor, is at the door.*

An **independent clause** is also known as a primary, main, and principal clause. An independent clause has a subject and verb, with the ability to stand alone as a sentence. *Charles went to dinner after he changed clothes.*

A **dependent clause**, or subordinate clause, adds information to the sentence by acting as an adjective,

adverb, or noun, and is not able to stand alone as a sentence. *Martha told us that her book is missing.*

Conjunctions link words, phrases, and whole clauses to each other such as, *and, but, if, for, or, so, yet, because, while,* etc.

What You Do:

1. Review the definitions and examples of these terms with your child.
2. Then, focusing on only one term at a time, have your child look through magazines to find examples of sentences demonstrating the term. It's not as easy as it sounds
3. Have your child highlight the word or phrase in the sentence as well as to record the correct term on a separate sheet of paper.
4. When she's finished, have her write a composition using the list of recorded terms as a mad lib! For example, if she found a conjunction, an independent clause, then an appositive, she might write:
While Maria read the book that Sean had given her, Rufus, the family dog, slept soundly on the floor.

By finding and identifying grammar structures, then using them in her own writing, your child will be learning and applying these concepts on her own terms. Who knows, she may even teach you a thing or two!

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