THE APPOSITIVE

Recognize an appositive when you find one.

An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that renames another noun right beside it. The appositive can be a short or long combination of words.

Read these appositive examples, all of which rename intruder:

The intruder, a cockroach, is crawling across the kitchen table.

The intruder, a large, inquisitive cockroach, is crawling across the kitchen table.

The intruder, a large, inquisitive cockroach with hairy legs, is crawling across the kitchen table.

The intruder, a large, inquisitive, hairy-legged cockroach that has spied my bowl of oatmeal, is crawling across the kitchen table.

Here are other examples:

During the dinner conversation, Clifford, the messiest eater at the table, spewed mashed potatoes like an erupting volcano.

My 486 computer, a modern-day dinosaur, chews floppy disks as noisily as my brother does peanut brittle.

Genette's bedroom desk, the biggest disaster area in the house, is a collection of overdue library books, dirty plates, computer components, old mail, cat hair, and empty potato chip bags.

Reliable, Diane's eleven-year-old beagle, chews holes in the living room carpeting as if he were still a puppy.
Punctuate the appositive correctly.

**Nonessential Appositive**

A *nonessential* appositive is always separated from the rest of the sentence with comma(s).

When the appositive *begins* the sentence, use a comma:

A *hot-tempered tennis player*, Robbie charged the umpire and tried to crack the poor man's skull with a racket.

When the appositive *interrupts* the sentence, use one comma in front and another comma after:

Robbie, a *hot-tempered tennis player*, charged the umpire and tried to crack the poor man's skull with a racket.

And when the appositive *ends* the sentence, use a comma:

Upset by the bad call, the crowd cheered Robbie, a *hot-tempered tennis player who charged the umpire and tried to crack the poor man's skull with a racket*.

**Essential Appositive**

If, however, the appositive is *essential* (readers need the information to distinguish *which one of many* the writer means), no punctuation is needed.

Although my sister *Loretta* disapproves of the on-court temper tantrums, she still thinks Robbie is cute.

*Sister*, a noun that can refer to many, many females, requires the clarification that the appositive *Loretta* provides. If we flip the order of the words, commas *are* necessary:

Although Loretta, *my sister*, disapproves of the on-court temper tantrums, she still thinks Robbie is cute.