



SENTENCE DIAGRAMMING 101

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LESSON #8

Floating Lines and Parenthetical Elements

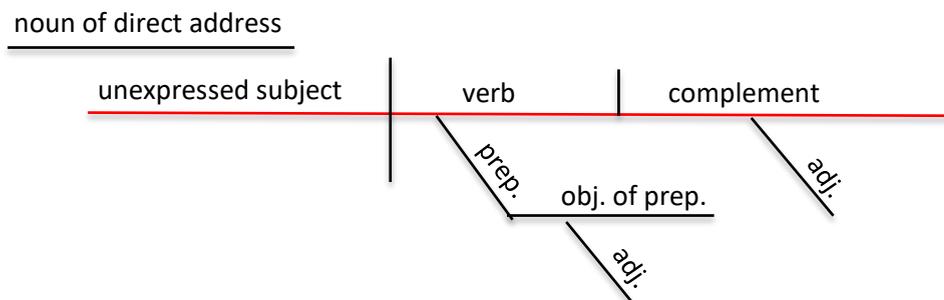
In our final lesson, we'll tie up some loose ends. First, we'll look at words that appear on floating lines; in other words, they're part of the sentence, but they aren't connected to the sentence: nouns of direct address, interjections, and the expletive *there*.

Second, we'll look at appositives and appositive phrases. These nonessential elements of a sentence are placed in parentheses because their connection to the heart of the sentence is tenuous.

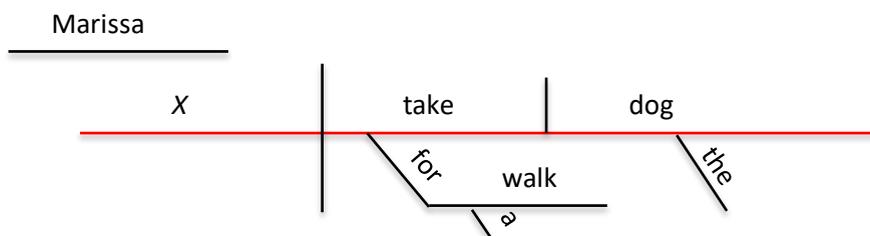
Editors need to identify nonessential sentence elements and assess their importance. As you'll see in this lesson, most of the phrases or words that appear on a floating line and in parentheses can be shortened or eliminated.

Nouns of Direct Address, Interjections, and Expletives

A **noun of direct address** is the name of a person or thing spoken to. These nouns are placed on a floating line above the subject.

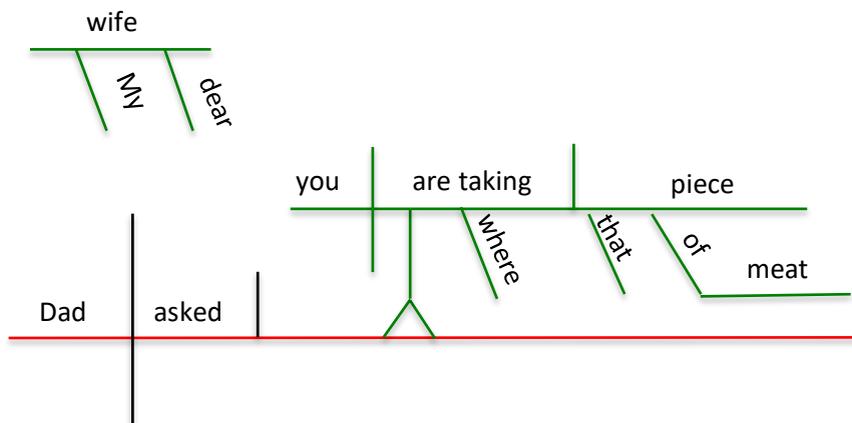


Marissa, take the dog for a walk.



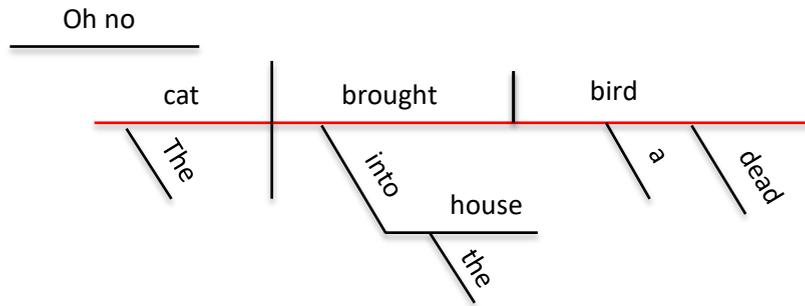
Nouns of direct address are often part of dialogue: “My dear wife, where are you taking that piece of meat?” Dad asked.

In dialogue, the speaker’s words are considered a noun clause functioning as a direct object. Grammatically, the spoken words are answering the question *what* after an action verb.

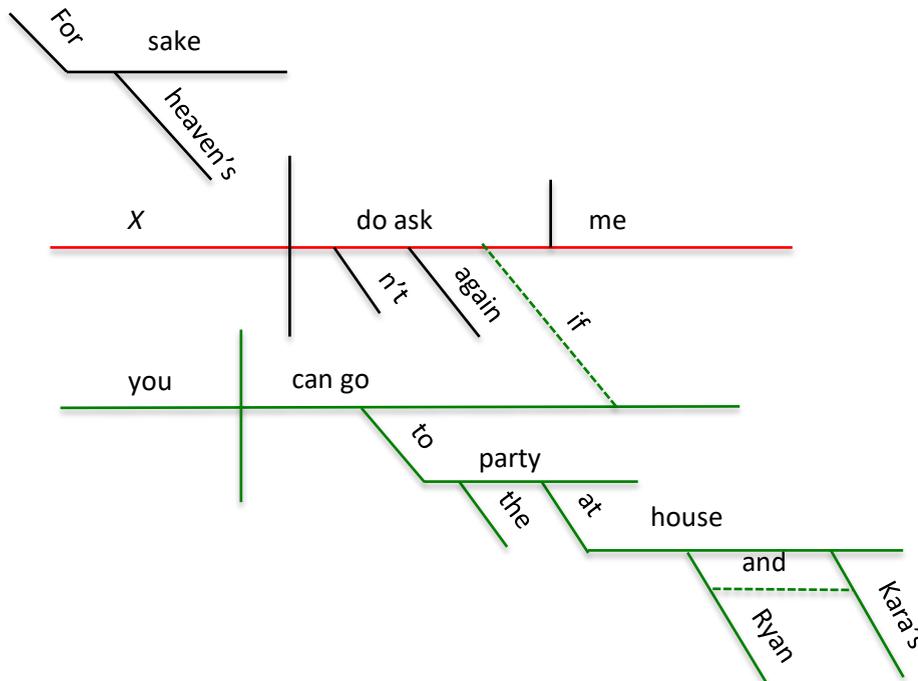


An **interjection** is a word or phrase that expresses emotion. Like the noun of direct address, it appears on a floating line above the subject.

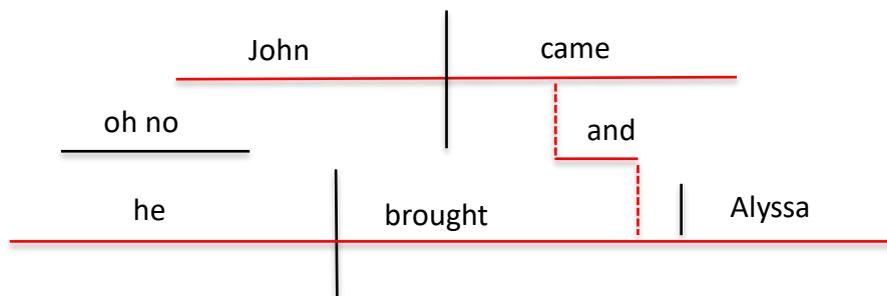
Oh no! The cat brought a dead bird into the house.



An interjection can be a prepositional phrase: For heaven's sake, don't ask me again if you can go to the party at Ryan and Kara's house.

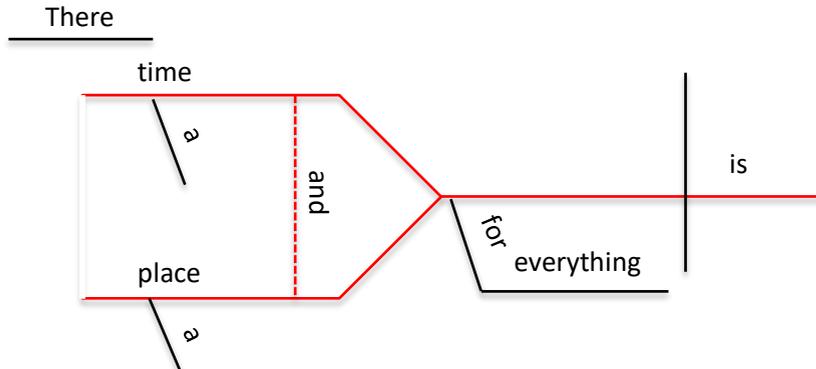


Most interjections are positioned at the beginning of a sentence. If they appear in the middle of a compound sentence, diagram them above the appropriate subject: John came, and, oh no, he brought Alyssa.

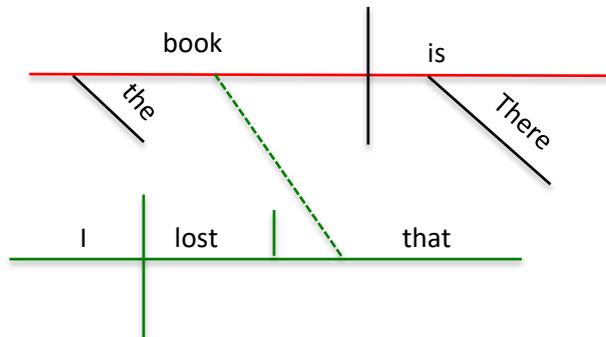


As we learned in Lesson 5, an expletive is a word that has a function in the sentence but adds no meaning to the sentence. Two common expletives used are *there* and *here*. Of course, *there* and *here* can also function as adverbs when they answer the question *where*. Note the difference in the following sentences.

There is a time and place for everything.



There is the book that I lost.

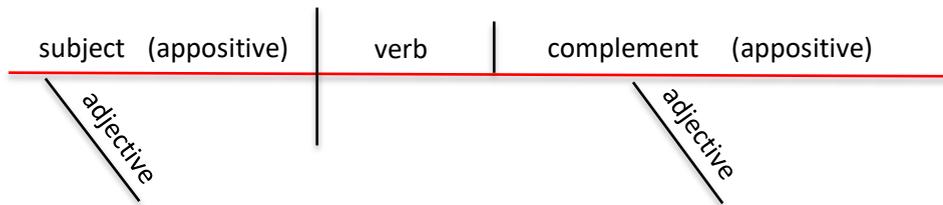


One way to determine whether *there* or *here* is functioning as an expletive is to reverse the order of the sentence. Changing the order of the first sentence doesn't work: A time and a place for everything is *there*. But changing the order of the second sentence confirms that *there* is an adverb: The book that I lost is *there*.

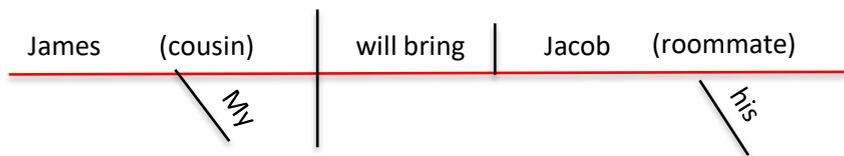
Revising sentences that begin with expletives such as *here* and *there* usually creates stronger sentences. Which of the following sentences do you think is stronger?

- There is always someone at Joe's party who causes trouble.
- Someone at Joe's party always causes trouble.

An **appositive** is a noun or pronoun (and its modifiers) that explains or identifies another noun or pronoun right next to it. In a diagram, it's placed in parentheses next to the word it modifies.



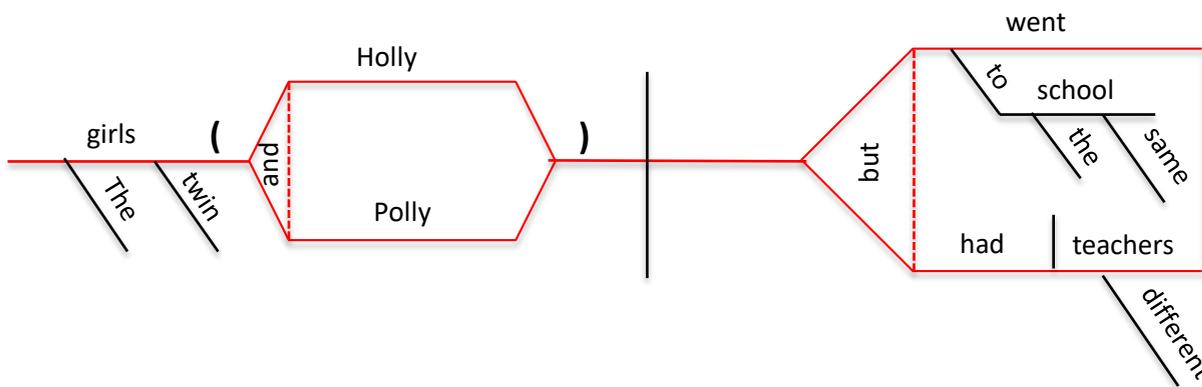
My cousin James will bring Jacob, his roommate.



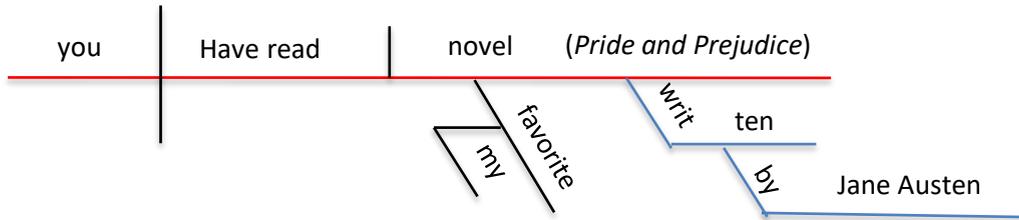
An appositive can be positioned before or after the word it explains or identifies. Often, an appositive is set off by commas. However, in the above sentence, no comma is placed after *cousin*. Why not? The absence of a comma indicates that the speaker has more than one cousin. If James were the speaker's only cousin, then commas would be placed on either side of James: My cousin, James, will bring Jacob, his roommate. What if the speaker had more than one roommate? If he did, the sentence would be written like this: My cousin James will bring his roommate Jacob.

What if the sentence contains a compound appositive?

The twin girls, Holly and Polly, went to the same school but had different teachers.



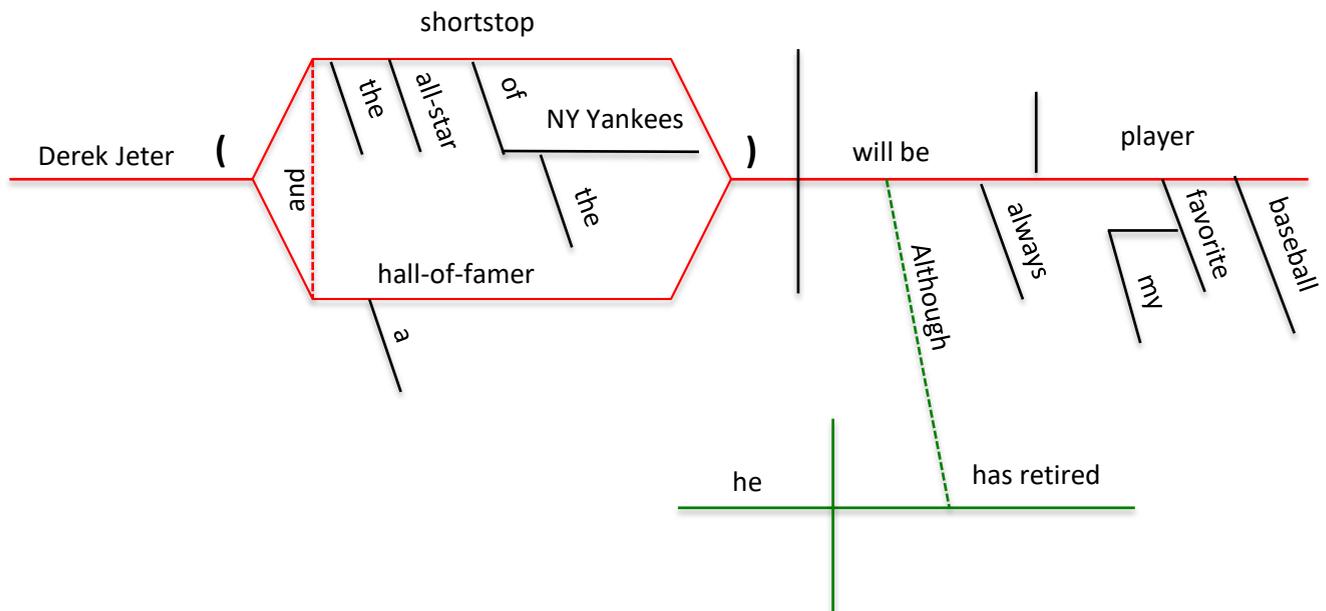
Here's an example of a multiple-word appositive: Have you read my favorite novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, written by Jane Austen?



Remember from Lesson 1 that proper nouns are treated as one word in a diagram, no matter how long the name may be. Do you remember why *my* is placed under *favorite* and not *novel*? Also note that an appositive's modifiers go beneath it, e.g. the participial phrase *written by Jane Austen* is placed beneath *Pride and Prejudice*.

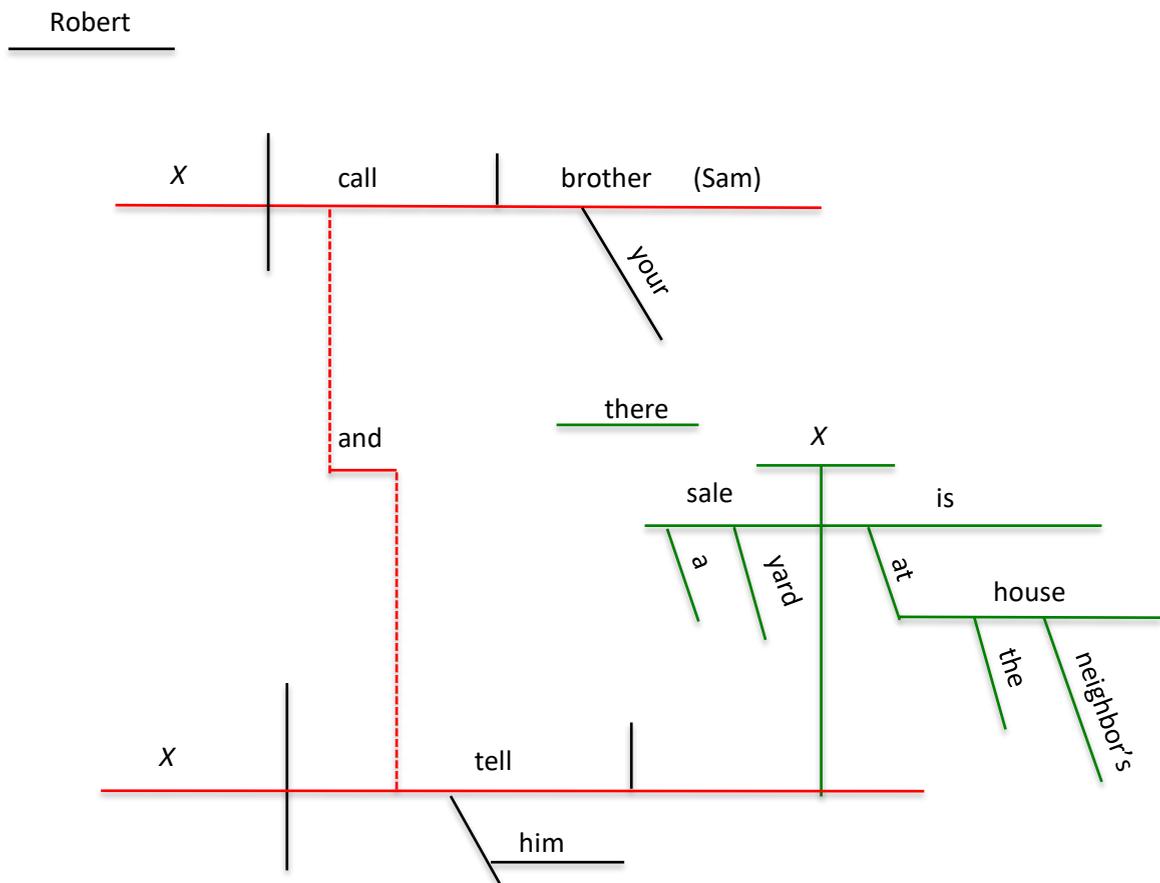
Some appositive phrases can be lengthy. As an editor, you'll probably want to change the structure of a sentence to avoid a long appositive phrase like this one: Although he has retired, Derek Jeter, the all-star shortstop of the New York Yankees and a hall-of-famer, will always be my favorite baseball player.

What revision would you suggest to a client to create a more readable sentence?



For our final diagram of the course, let's incorporate several diagramming elements covered in this lesson: Robert, call your brother Sam, and tell him there is a yard sale at the neighbor's house.

Can you identify what the *X*'s represent in the diagram?



Lesson Review

- A noun of direct address and its modifiers are placed on a floating line above the subject of the sentence.
- An interjection and its modifiers are also placed on a floating line above the subject of the sentence.
- Expletives, such as *here* and *there*, which contribute no meaning to a sentence, are placed on floating lines above the subject of the sentence.
- Appositives and their modifiers, which explain or identify a noun or pronoun, are placed in parentheses right beside the word they modify.

Lesson #8 Assignments

To receive a *Certificate of Completion* you must successfully complete all assignments.

Assignment #1

Diagram these sentences.

- A. Melissa, go to the kitchen and get the salad I left on the counter.
- B. Mary, have you seen the most recent movie in the Jurassic Park series, *Jurassic World*?
- C. “For heaven’s sake,” yelled Dad, “who left the dog outside in the rain again?”
- D. My best friend, Patricia, whom I have known since I was in kindergarten, is coming for a visit.
- E. “There is a problem with your credit card,” said Mr. Simms, the branch manager of the bank.

Assignment #2

If you want more sentences to diagram, try some of these. They may be a little more challenging.

- A. Will my sister Joanie and my cousin Arlene come there to meet us?
- B. I didn’t want to attend the conference alone, so I called my fellow writers, Anita and Julie, and I invited them to come with me.
- C. Sue, will you handle the reservations for the awards dinner, or will Bill Watkins, English department head and conference committee chairman, do that?
- D. The Smith’s five children—Bart, Betty, Bill, Barbara, and Bret—will be home for Christmas.
- E. There is no reason for you to get angry about the broken refrigerator, for there was nothing you could have done about it.

Assignment #3

Look through a few pages of a manuscript you’re editing.

- A. Are there appositive phrases that create long or awkward sentences? How can you improve the structure of those sentences?
- B. Do any sentences begin with *there* or *here*? Can you improve the structure of those sentences by eliminating the expletives?