

Commas III

Restrictive and Non-Restrictive Elements of Commas

Restrictive elements (known also as essential elements) are phrases or clauses that are necessary to make the meaning of the sentence clear. Restrictive elements are not set off by commas. The information within the restrictive elements singles out and identifies the noun (the person, place, or thing) that the restrictive phrase or clause modifies (indicated by double underline).

Example:

The dancer pirouetting center stage moves with grace and beauty.

The restrictive element identifies which one of the dancers moves with grace and beauty.

Each of the following sentences illustrates restrictive elements needed to single out and qualify the nouns modified.

The woman carrying the basket of fruit on her head is Mrs. Balancebeam.

The teller standing at the first window seems to hate her job.

The man selling newspapers in front of Safeway has traveled around the world three times.

Joseph Conrad portrayed his main character as a man seeking power over other men.

People harboring criminals are guilty of breaking the law.

Nonrestrictive elements (known also as nonessential elements) are phrases or clauses that are not necessary to make the meaning of the sentence clear. Nonrestrictive elements are set off by commas. The information within the nonrestrictive elements is additional information not needed to clarify the word modified (indicated by double underline).

Example:

Mr. Carlton, who belongs to the Historical Society, will be the main speaker at our next meeting.

Notice that the nonrestrictive element is set off by a pair of commas. The nonrestrictive clause can be taken out of the sentence, and the meaning of the sentence will be clear: Mr. Carlton will be the main speaker.

Omitted from the following sentences are the restrictive elements shown in the previous examples. Notice the lack of clarity in these versions.

- 1) People are guilty of breaking the law. Are all people guilty of breaking the law?
- 2) The teller seems to hate her job. Which teller?
- 3) The dancer moves with grace and beauty. Which dancer?

Accurate punctuation of restrictive and nonrestrictive adds clarity to written expressions.

___ 4. A. Mr. Carlton, who belongs to the Historical Society, will be the main speaker at our next meeting

___ B. Mr. Carlton who belongs to the Historical Society will be the main speaker at our next meeting.

___ 5. A. The speaker who addressed our class presented biased political views.

___ B. The speaker, who addressed our class, presented biased political views.

Answer Sheet

Answers: Pre-Test

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. A | 6. B |
| 2. B | 7. B |
| 3. B | 8. A |
| 4. A | 9. B |
| 5. A | 10. A |

Answers: Post Test

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. A |
| 2. A | 7. A |
| 3. B | 8. B |
| 4. A | 9. A |
| 5. B | 10. B |