

Using Phrases

Once we understand phrases, we can apply that knowledge to punctuation, grammar, and writing style.

Punctuation

Remember that appositive phrases are enclosed on both sides by commas. The meaning of the sentence is at stake.

Wrong: Morrison, the brilliant author won the Nobel Prize.

Right: **Morrison, the brilliant author, won the Nobel Prize.**

Grammar

When a gerund phrase is the subject of the sentence, the verb agrees with the gerund, not with the object of the gerund.

Wrong: Writing the romantic sonnets were challenging.

Right: **Writing** the romantic sonnets **was** challenging.

Introductory participial phrases must modify the grammatical subject, or else there is a misplaced modifier.

Wrong: Covered with slimy scales, I cleaned the fish.

Right: Covered with slimy scales, the fish was hard to clean.

Writing: Be Thoughtful about Phrases

In most cases, it is best to avoid writing anything between the subject and the verb/predicate. The subject and its verb are the beating heart of the sentence, so try to put them adjacent to each other. This means that you should avoid putting a prepositional phrase after the subject if possible. Shrink it to an adjective and move it. The exception is the appositive phrase that defines the subject and is enclosed by commas.