

Parenthetical wording

Skillful writers set apart and de-emphasize non-restrictive wording using commas. Parenthetical wording is also set apart by commas, but is not de-emphasized. Instead, the visual separation suggests an aside, explanation, or afterthought. Comma pairs, or commas that sandwich wording, then, can de-emphasize or separate and in some cases even emphasize. Writers must become comfortable with the fluidity of meaning offered by commas used in this way.

Examples of parenthetical wording

1. The biggest problem, he had thought, was going to be getting the piano onto the motorbike.
2. Who would notice, at first glance, that the instrument was even gone?
3. The theft, they supposed, happened during the three-hour lunch break.

Four sample sentences

Explain why you consider the separated wording to be non-restrictive or parenthetical.

4. The gas station attendant, having stepped aside to eat a donut, watched the tire flatten.

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5. The young woman, who had just come from church, stepped out of the car and cursed under her breath.

6. The attendant with the donut, unhappy about the situation, walked back to the pumps.

7. The situation, as it unfolded, made the god-fearing man ever more hungry.
