Language – parenthesis

Reading/discussion

Parenthesis can mean a word, phrase or sentence which is inserted into a sentence as a comment or to give additional information. Parenthesis can mean the bracket which is used to enclose the parenthesis too! We can also use commas or dashes to separate the parenthesis from the rest of the sentence, but in this lesson we will just use brackets, which look like this: ( ). If you use parenthesis within another parenthesis you can use square brackets, like this: [ ].

In this case the words enclosed in square brackets (which are a comment on the parenthesis [and should not be used often]) give additional but unessential information about the initial parenthesis. If parentheses are used correctly they can be removed from the sentence without changing the grammar or the meaning. Here are some examples:

A small bird (perhaps a mountain blue-bird) flew out of the tree in front of me.
My father gave me my pocket money ($20) to take to the movies with me.

In both of these examples the information in brackets might be interesting but it isn’t essential to the meaning of the sentence:

A small bird flew out of the tree in front of me.
My father gave me my pocket money to take to themovies with me.

One important rule to remember is that, unless the parenthesis is a full sentence, the punctuation remains outside of the brackets:

Using a blue crayon (one of the few unbroken ones left), she colored in the sky. OR
She used a blue crayon (The crayon box had only one unbroken blue crayon left!) to color in the sky.
Activities:

A. Find the parentheses

Each of these sentences contains a word or phrase which provides additional but unessential information. See if you can identify these phrases and put them into brackets.

1. The retriever a large friendly dog licked my hand and won my heart.
2. Mary Martin who went to school with me got married on Saturday.
3. Dave’s best friend James Leigh went with him on the fishing trip.
4. I left early about 6.30pm to get to the theatre in time.
5. He is crying because his favourite toy a wind up car is broken.
6. The new puppy chewed my shoes again and is now in disgrace.
7. I lent my adventure book which I read three times to Terry.
8. The weather was miserable wet and windy so we decided not to go to the beach.
9. Jane wore her new dress the pink spotted one to the show.
10. John and Paula’s new baby their third is a beautiful little boy.

B. Try it yourself.
Now try writing 5 sentences of your own, using parentheses to give additional but unessential information.
Activity A

1. The retriever (a large friendly dog) licked my hand and won my heart.  
2. Mary Martin (who went to school with me) got married on Saturday.  
3. Dave’s best friend (James Leigh) went with him on the fishing trip.  
4. I left early (about 6.30pm) to get to the theatre in time.  
5. He is crying because his favourite toy (a wind up car) is broken.  
6. The new puppy chewed my shoes (again) and is now in disgrace.  
7. I lent my adventure book (which I read three times) to Terry.  
8. The weather was miserable (wet and windy) so we decided not to go to the beach.  
9. Jane wore her new dress (the pink spotted one) to the show.  
10. John and Paula’s new baby (their third) is a beautiful little boy.

Activity B.

The parentheses in the children’s sentences should not affect the meaning and grammatical style of the rest of their sentences and should only contain punctuation if they are in the form of full sentences.