

Brush Strokes Part Two: Painting with Adjectives Shifted Out of Order



Just as a painter combines brush strokes to create an image, the writer combines “brush strokes” to create sentence structures. One basic brush stroke used by writers is adjectives shifted out of order.

Painting with Adjectives Shifted Out of Order

To “paint” with adjectives shifted out of order, simply move adjectives before a noun, placing them after the noun instead. This amplifies the details of an image and helps avoid overloading descriptions with too many adjectives in sentences like: “The large, red-eyed, angry bull moose charged the intruder.” A three-in-a-row string of adjectives is too much. To use three adjectives, leave one in its original place and shift two others after the noun, like this:

The large bull moose, **red-eyed and angry**, charged the intruder.

The effect creates a spotlight and intensifies the image, giving it better rhythm.

The following student examples illustrate use of adjectives out of order:

The woman, **old and wrinkled**, smiled upon her newborn great-grandson with pride.

The boxer, **twisted and tormented**, felt no compassion for his contender.

The cheetah, **tired and hungry**, stared at the gazelle, which would soon become his dinner.

Identifying Adjectives Shifted Out of Order

In the following paragraph, underline four (4) adjectives shifted out of order used to amplify the details of an image.

Trees, old and gnarled, surround the sides of my fort. Forest sounds, soft and soothing, sing me to sleep when I stay the night in my favorite place. Occasionally, when the moon is bright, I hear animals, wild and free, moving in the brush. In a flash I’m awake and sitting up. When the noise ceases, I can sleep again. The only time I can’t go back to sleep is when the coyotes, sly and scrawny, laugh at me from the hills behind our property. Laughing coyotes can make any kid’s mind play tricks.

Sentence Combining with Adjectives Shifted Out of Order

Combine each set of sentences below, creating a new sentence in which you paint with adjectives shifted out of order. Underline the adjectives shifted out of order in each sentence.

Example: (a) She watched the sun sink beyond the fields.
(b) The fields were dark.
(c) The fields were empty.

Sample Combination: Martha watched the sun sink beyond the fields, dark and empty.

1. (a) Martha listened carefully for the sound.
(b) The sound was soft.
(c) The sound was familiar.

2. (a) A spaceship descended suddenly through the warm evening air.
(b) The ship was long.
(c) The ship was silver.

3. (a) The spaceship landed in the empty field.
(b) The spaceship was shiny.
(c) The spaceship was luminescent.

4. (a) Minutes later, the field was silent again.
(b) The field was smelly.
(c) The field was scorched.

Writing with Adjectives Shifted Out of Order

In response to each of the following photographs, write a sentence in which you paint with adjectives shifted out of order. Be sure to use commas before and after the adjectives shifted out of order.



1. _____



2. _____



3. _____



4. _____

Quickwrite: In your Writer’s Notebook or on a sheet of Notebook Paper, choose one of your sentences (above) to fill ½ to 1 page letting your sentence lead your thinking.