

What Kinds of Detail Do Participial, Absolute, and Appositive Phrases Create?

Students often wonder why their writing lacks action, sensory clarity, and vivid detail to help a reader “see.”

Harry Noden in his book *Image Grammar* (1999) explains how using professional mentor sentences as models and practicing particular structures he calls brush strokes achieves success. Noden specifically emphasizes that starting with the mentor sentence model, not the names of the three sentence structures, is most effective with your students.

1. Use participles/ participial phrases at sentence beginnings and endings to
 - evoke action in a piece of writing
 - develop vivid detail and personal feelings

From The Kingdom Keepers by Ridley Pearson

Gripped by a sense of panic, awed by the sight of the Cinderella Castle at night, Finn Whitman briefly recalled that he'd had other, similar dreams recently- (p.1) [two different introductory phrases]

2. Use absolutes and absolute phrases
 - to add action
 - add vivid description

From FLUSH by Carl Hiaasen

*I was actually born in a 1989 Chevrolet Caprice on U.S. Highway One, **my dad racing up the eighteen-mile stretch from Key Largo to the mainland.***
(p.5)

*I locked my bike to a cottonwood tree and walked down to the charter boat, **Abbie trailing behind.** (p. 9)*

3. Use appositives/ appositive phrases to

- add sensory details (for fiction)
- add tone (for fiction or nonfiction)
- add clarity (for nonfiction).

From *Freak the Mighty* by Rodman Philbrick

*That summer, let's see, I'm still living in the basement, **my own private down under,** in the little room Grim built for me. (p. 5)*

*So finally I get bored in the down under and I'm hanging out in the so-called back yard, **your basic chunk of chain-link heaven.** (p. 6)*

*... she has this glow, **a secret spotlight that follows her around and makes her eyes light up.** (p. 7)*