



The Writing Center



Harry Potter and the Absolute: More Tips for Style

An absolute is the most sophisticated and least common of the structures that you can add to a basic sentence to add extra information. Generally, an absolute looks almost like a sentence: it begins with a noun, a subject, but it doesn't have a complete verb.

Instead of this—

- Ron strode away. His bright red hair was visible right to the end of the passage.

Try an absolute:

- Ron strode away, his bright red hair visible right to the end of the passage.

Instead of this—

- Snape turned to leave. His black cloak was billowing behind him.

Try an absolute:

- Snape turned to leave, **his black cloak billowing behind him.**

Note how an absolute phrase lets us move from a description of a *whole* person, place, or thing to just one or more parts: from *Snape*, for instance, to *his cloak*.

- The Death Eater's appearance was utterly bizarre, **his tiny baby's head bawling loudly.**
- The bat-winged horses were completely fleshless, **their black coats clinging to their skeletons.**
- There were many cuts on Hagrid's face and hands, **some of them still bleeding.**

Try creating absolutes to combine the ideas in the sentences below.

The students struggled to concentrate on the lesson. Their eyes were drooping as they longed for sleep.

Harry Potter desperately gripped his broom. His knuckles were white

Hermione flung up her arms. Her hands waved in exasperation

The sample sentences on this hand out came from J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Rowling not only tells an entertaining story; she also crafts sentences with style. If you want to develop an ear for varied sentence structures that sound good, check out her Harry Potter books.