



# The Writing Center



## Harry Potter and the Participial Phrase: A Lesson in Style

A participial phrase generally begins with an **-ing verb** and adds extra information to a sentence, telling about an action that occurs simultaneously with the main verb.

However, not every -ing verb is a participial phrase; sometimes it is simply the main verb in the sentence. An -ing verb is the main verb when it has a helping verb, like is or was, for example,

- Professor McGonagall **is hurrying** into the dormitory.
- Hermione **was waving** at him from the other side of the room.

**A participial phrase can come at the end of a sentence:**

- The owls descended all over the hall, **bringing letters and packages to their owners.**
- Dumbledore paused, **looking inquiringly at Professor Umbridge.**

**A participial phrase can come at the beginning of a sentence, introducing the action and delaying the subject and verb.**

- **Rising into the air**, he straightened his feather hat and swept away.
- **Pulling out her wand**, she hurried off in the opposite direction.

**A participial phrase can come in the middle of a sentence, often between the subject and verb.**

- Seamus and Dean, **hailing him jovially**, told him they were planning a dusk-till-dawn end-of-exams celebration.
- He hesitated, **listening**, then pulled out his wand again.

**Participial phrases are especially useful for commenting on quotes.**

- **Making her admiration for Michael Gambon clear**, critic Mary Macnamara writes that he has "created a fully believable headmaster who is not just the wisest and most humble of men, but also the kindest."
- Macnamara writes, "Gambon's death scene, Broadbent's combination of hubris and shame, or Rickman's pained fury deserve at least a nomination," **clearly revealing her outrage about the dearth of Oscar nominations for any of the actors in the Harry Potter films.**

Now that you can combine short, choppy sentences by using participial phrases, try it for the following sentences, experimenting with the various options for placement.

A. Sue had been reading Harry Potter for hours. She felt exhausted. She yawned widely.

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B. They opened their books. The students prepared for a lesson on the history of magic.

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C. Uncle Vernon grinned horribly. He was planning another punishment for Harry.

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