

Revision Techniques

(the brush strokes)

Revision techniques are grammatical structures that professional writers of all kinds use to make their writing more specific and more beautiful. They're also known as *brush strokes* because they work the same way that an artist uses paint on a canvas. When an artist dips a brush into paint and then applies that paint to a surface, color and texture are left behind. If she leaves enough brush strokes in the right color and shape, she creates a picture that viewers can understand and appreciate. We are going to become artists, too, but we're going to paint with words instead of color.

Revision Technique #1: Begin with a prepositional phrase.

With all revision techniques, we begin with a “core sentence” which is nothing more than a simple sentence. One of the most important rules to remember about adding revision techniques is that *this core sentence will never change when the revision technique is added.* If you've added the techniques correctly, the reader will still be able to find the original core sentence just like it used to be. Let's try using this first technique.

Core sentence: *The woman walked her dog.*

It's a good enough sentence, but, by placing a prepositional phrase at the beginning of the sentence, we add a *brush stroke*, a little color and interest that bring the sentence to life.

Beneath a clear blue sky, the woman walked her dog.

How has the sentence changed since we added the prepositional phrase? Now we have a *setting*. More than that, we have a *feeling*, too. That clear blue sky suggests several things: summer, peacefulness, happiness. It's only one little prepositional phrase, but it's doing a big job. Let's try another one. We'll use the same core sentence, but let's swap that prep phrase with another one:

Under a darkening blanket of clouds, the woman walked her dog.

You might have noticed that I added *two* prep phrases to the beginning of this sentence to be even more descriptive. You can do that, too. How has the sentence changed this time? A storm is coming. There is a feeling that something bad might be on the way. Authors use sentences like these to create a mood for their scenes. Notice also that the core sentence has not changed. We've added something new, but the core is exactly the same as it has been. Let's try another:

With a sad look upon her face, the woman walked her dog.

These two prep phrases give us all new information about the story. Rather than showing us more about the setting, these phrases tell us about our character – a woman who is sad for some reason. Again, and not to harp on it too much, notice that our core sentence is still intact. That will never change!

Rules for creating a “begin with prepositional phrase” revision technique:

1. **The sentence must BEGIN with the prep phrase!** It *has* to. The technique is called “begin with a prepositional phrase”, so that’s a big tipoff! You will find thousands of prepositional phrases in novels, but they are only considered revision techniques when they are found at the beginning of a sentence and are connected to the core sentence with a comma.
2. **The prep phrase HAS to be attached to the core sentence with a comma!** Think of commas like pieces of tape. You will always need a piece of tape to attach a revision technique to a core sentence.

Let’s look at some examples from published authors. Here are a few from the book *Redwall* by Brian Jacques.

- **In a surprisingly short time**, the tunnelers were back.
- **Beneath the Great Hall of Redwall**, candles burned bright in their sconces.
- **Between them**, Matthias and Brother Alf had caught and landed a fully-grown grayling.
- **Through a high slitted window**, Matthias could see the rosy-pink and gold fingers of dawn stealing down into Cavern Hole as the candles began to flicker and smoke into stubs.
- **Without warning**, Cluny charged headlong into the new recruits, lashing out wildly with his scourging tail.

And a few more from Jeanne DuPrau’s *The City of Ember*...

- **For the moment**, Lina felt almost perfectly happy.
- **In Mrs. Polster’s class**, they memorized pages from *The Book of the City of Ember* every week.
- **In just a few hours**, she discovered all kinds of strange and interesting things.
- **At the top of the stairs**, she came to a door marked “Roof,” and she pushed it open.
- **After a few minutes**, Doon left.

And even a few *more* from Suzanne Collins’ book *The Hunger Games*...

- **On the afternoon of my encounter with Peeta Mellark**, the rain was falling in relentless icy sheets.
- **In his arms**, he carried two large loaves of bread that must have fallen into the fire because the crusts were scorched black.
- **For a few minutes**, we say nothing.
- **On the eighth of every month**, I was entitled to do the same.
- **For the opening ceremonies**, you’re supposed to wear something that suggests your district’s principal industry.