

Revision Technique #3

The -ing Participle

The third revision technique is called the “-ing participle”. This might be the easiest revision technique to spot in a novel and to add to your own writing. Simply stated, these are phrases that start with words that end in -ing. The -ing word does not *always* come at the very beginning of the phrase since there may be a word or two modifying the -ing word, but they do *usually* appear at the beginning of the revision technique.

This revision technique is all about adding action to your writing. Words that end in -ing are action words. When added to a core sentence, -ing participles add movement to the scene.

Core sentence: *The kids left school.*

This core sentence communicates effectively, but by adding an -ing participle or phrase, the image sharpens.

The kids left school, screaming as they charged out the doors.

The -ing word chosen has a definite impact on the *feeling* of the sentence. In the example above, it’s really clear that the kids are elated to be leaving school! I was picturing everyone leaving on the last day of school in May. Ah...what a feeling! ;-) Let’s change the -ing word to create a different mood or feeling.

The kids left school, murmuring and shuffling their feet.

The kids are still leaving, but this feels like a Monday afternoon to me because of the words *murmuring* and *shuffling*. There is a quiet tiredness to this scene. Another thing that’s great about the -ing participle is that it can be used *anywhere* in a sentence. Let’s move the phrase that we just added to different locations to see if we like one location better than the others.

Murmuring and shuffling their feet, the kids left school.

The kids, murmuring and shuffling their feet, left school.

All three versions do a nice job of adding some color and detail to the original sentence, so the *best* location is definitely a matter of opinion.

Notice, again, in all three rewritten sentences, **that the core sentence never changes!** We can always find it. It’s really important that the core sentence stays intact.

All revision techniques need to be attached to the core sentence with a comma. If the revision appears in the middle of the sentence, then the phrase needs a comma at the beginning and at the end

of the phrase. When we have commas at the beginning and the end of a phrase, it's called "setting the phrase off" with commas.

When we remove the revision technique from the sentence, we should find the core sentence just how it was before we started revising it.

Core sentence: *The kids left school.*

Revision: *The kids, **murmuring and shuffling their feet**, left school.*

Without the revision: *The kids, ~~murmuring and shuffling their feet~~, left school.*

Placement: In order to prevent confusion, an -ing participial must be placed as close to the noun it modifies as possible, and the noun must be clearly stated.

- *Carrying a heavy pile of books*, his foot caught on a step. *
- *Carrying a heavy pile of books*, he caught his foot on a step.

In the first sentence, there is no clear indication of who or what is performing the action expressed in the participle "carrying." Certainly, a foot is not carrying a heavy pile of books! This situation is an example of a **dangling modifier** error, since the modifier (the -ing participial phrase) is not modifying any specific noun in the sentence and is thus left "dangling." Since a person must be doing the carrying for the sentence to make sense, a noun or pronoun that refers to a person must be in the place immediately after the participial phrase, as in the second sentence.

Punctuation: When a participial phrase begins a sentence, a comma should be placed after the phrase.

- *Arriving at the store*, I found that it was closed.
- *Washing and polishing the car*, Frank developed sore muscles.

If the participle or participial phrase comes in the middle of a sentence, it should be set off with commas **only if the information is not essential (necessary) to the meaning of the sentence.**

- Sid, *watching an old movie*, drifted in and out of sleep.

Note **that if the participial phrase is essential to the meaning of the sentence, no commas should be used:**

- The student **earning the highest grade point average** will receive a special award.
 - The phrase *earning the highest grade point average* is essential (necessary) because it is identifying *which* students will receive a special award...the ones with the highest GPA.
 - The guy **wearing the chicken costume** is my cousin.
 - The phrase *wearing the chicken costume* is essential (necessary) because it is identifying *which* guy is the narrator's cousin...he's the one wearing the chicken costume.
-

If the **-ing participle relates to the last item in the main clause, no comma is required**. In the following sentence, for example, the participle clause applies to "dog".

- He watched the **dog *wagging its tail***.
- The local residents often saw **Ken *wandering through the streets***.
(The phrase modifies *Ken*, not *residents*, so no comma is needed.)

If the **participle clause refers to something earlier in the sentence, a comma is required**. In this sentence, for example, the participle clause relates to "the student".

- **The student** was unable to understand the author's main point, ***finding the whole article virtually unintelligible***.

Much of the section above about [the placement of participles](#) came from Purdue University's Online Writing Lab.

Rules for creating an *ing* participle revision technique:

1. **Choose a sentence to add *action* to.**
2. **The *ing* participle 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.
3. **The participle can appear in the beginning, middle, or end of the sentence.**

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

- ***Exerting the full strength of a female badger***, she lifted the massive Cavern Hole dining table.
- ***Remembering who it was that he had spoken to in this manner***, Redtooth cringed, ***expecting Cluny to deal him a blow for impudence***.
- ***Emerging from the hole***, they carried the hedgehog in the rope sling across their backs, ***refusing any help from the badger or the mouse***.
- ***Looking back down to himself in his baggy green robes and oversized sandals***, Matthias felt hot tears of shame and frustration spilling from his eyes and dripping on his young whiskers.
- ***Strolling through the dappled shade of the orchard***, Matthias sought out old Methuselah. ***Slumping down beneath a damson tree***, the young mouse munched away at his lunch.

From Jeanne DuPrau's *The City of Ember*...

- A few of them approached Sadge, ***speaking in calming voices.***
- Then all at once people started to hurry, ***moving fast toward the safety of home in case it should happen again.***
- Now and then a couple of the children might go there to play, ***scrambling up the sides of the heaps and tumbling down.***
- He'd run across the city with a flaming stick, ***planning to use it to light his journey.***
- ***Moving fast***, Lina threaded her way through them.

From *Catching Fire* by Suzanne Collins...

- He gives his head a disapproving shake, ***causing his orange corkscrew curls to bounce around.***
- And then I am swathed in pajamas and a voluminous robe, ***sitting in my plush apartment, waiting for the others to go to sleep.***
- I walk along the track, ***squinting against the bright sunlight***, already ***regretting my words to Effie.***
- ***Towering at least thirty-five feet in the air and topped with wicked coils of barbed wire***, it makes ours back in District 12 look childish.
- As the train is pulling into the District 11 station, Cinna puts the finishing touches on my outfit, ***switching my orange hairband for one of metallic gold and securing the mockingjay pin I wore in the arena to my dress.***