

Revision Technique #5

The Absolute Phrase

Revision technique #5 is called “the absolute phrase.” Another way to think of this phrase is “the blank blanking.” **An absolute is created by pairing a noun with an –ing verb: a “blank blanking.”** Here’s an example of an absolute phrase:

Example: The runner sprinted, ***feet pounding the all-weather track.***

The noun is “feet” and the –ing verb it is paired with is “pounding”. A “blank blanking.” The entire phrase is the revision technique, but it’s the noun and the verb that let us know that we’re dealing with an absolute. Let’s look at another one:

Example: A car sped down the street, ***engine roaring loudly.***

“Engine” is the noun. “Roaring” is the –ing verb. A “blank-blanking.” The noun and verb appear next to one another, which gives the absolute its identifiable blank-blanking form. Absolutes, like AOoO and appositives, usually appear near the nouns that they are modifying or enhancing, but they can also be found further down the sentence:

Example: Children yelled and whooped on the playground, ***voices echoing off the school’s brick walls.***

Below is an example of an absolute that is directly next to the noun its modifying:

Example: The children, ***voices piercing the afternoon air,*** yelled and whooped on the playground.

This revision technique can be hard to find because the key phrase (the noun with the –ing verb) is often buried within the revision phrase. There may be a few words in front of the blank-blanking that make it tricky to spot:

Example: The acrobats performed, ***their many bodies tumbling this way and that.***

Example: Commuters sat in the gridlock, ***the aggravated and irritated drivers mashing on their horns.***

WARNING! You have to be careful when identifying absolute phrases in the books you read and the pieces you write because there are “absolute imposters.” There are phrases that *look* like absolutes but that are not because they don’t fit the **noun + -ing** format. Check these out:

Absolute imposter: David hiked down the mountain, ***carefully picking his way over the jagged rocks.***

THIS IS **NOT** AN ABSOLUTE! “Carefully” is an *adverb* – not a *noun*.

Absolute imposter: Heather loved the movies, ***sometimes watching them by herself.***

THIS IS **NOT** AN ABSOLUTE! “Sometimes” is an *adverb* – not a *noun*.

Absolute imposter: The bird glided effortlessly, ***often catching air currents to stay aloft.***

THIS IS NOT AN ABSOLUTE! “Often” is an *adverb* – not a *noun*.

An important reminder! ***The core sentence never changes!***

Another important reminder! **Always attach an absolute to the core sentence with a comma!**

Rules for creating the absolute phrase revision technique:

1. Choose a noun to modify.
2. Think of a noun that can be doing something (blank-blanking) that will add detail to your sentence. Always attach the revision to the core sentence with a comma.
3. Absolutes can appear anywhere in the sentence, but it must be clear what they are modifying.
4. The blank-blanking does NOT have to be at the front of the phrase.

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

- Matthias gasped with shock as a giant horse galloped past, ***its mane streaming out, eyes rolling in panic.***
- He landed catlike on all fours as the hay cart upended in the roadside ditch, ***its buckled wheels spinning awkwardly.***
- Half senseless, they were hurled towards the doorway, ***with his angry words ringing in their heads.***
- Slowly he made his way upwards, like a long black reptile, ***his claws seeking hidden niches and crevices in the sandstone.***
- Through Cavern Hole he clattered in the darkness, stumbling and tripping over furniture, ***his heart hammering loudly and legs pumping like twin pistons.***

Here’s some from *Star Wars - Heir to the Empire* by Timothy Zahn...

- The vornskr peered out from around the edge of the desk, ***its front paws gripping the carpet,*** its muzzle close to the floor as if on the hunt.
- The city nestled against the southwestern base of Mount Tantiss was larger than it had looked from orbit, ***with many of its squat buildings extending deep under the cover of the surrounding trees.***
- “The Brimms are rather hero-oriented,” Mon Motha said before Leia could answer, ***her eyes searching Han’s face.***
- “Why not?” he demanded, ***stomach tightening.***
- Luke froze, ***his hand still uselessly gripping the doorjamb,*** half a galaxy away from the lightsaber on his belt.

And a few from *The Dragon Reborn* by Robert Jordan...

- Leya nodded and went hurrying away up the slope without another word, holding her bright green skirts up, ***the blue-embroidered red cloak swaying behind her.***
- The trees flailed about, and the leatherleaf suddenly cracked in two, ***the greater part of its trunk crashing down not three paces from Rand.***
- Splashing water echoed, ***the sound seeming to come from everywhere at once.***
- At the last instant the Trolloc spun, ***axe flashing toward Perrin.***
- ***Lip curling back in a snarl,*** he threw himself at the Myrddraal.