

Skill 1

Appositive Phrase

Identifying the Appositive Phrase

Here's a list of sentences, all written by professional writers, but with some parts deleted.

1. It went away slowly.
2. The land that lay stretched out before him became of vast significance.
3. However, I looked with a mixture of admiration and awe at Peter.
4. That night in the south upstairs chamber Emmett lay in a kind of trance.

Now compare those sentences with the originals. Notice that the additions account for the distinctiveness of the original sentences.

- 1a. It went away slowly, **the feeling of disappointment that came sharply after the thrill that made his shoulders ache.**

Ernest Hemingway, "Big Two-Hearted River: Part I"

- 2a. The land that lay stretched out before him became of vast significance, **a place peopled by his fancy with a new race of men sprung from himself.**

Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio

- 3a. However, I looked with a mixture of admiration and awe at Peter, **a boy who could and did imitate a police siren every morning on his way to the showers.**

Robert Russell, To Catch an Angel

- 4a. That night in the south upstairs chamber, **a hot little room where a full-leaved chinaberry tree shut all the air from the single window,** Emmett lay in a kind of trance.

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The **boldface** phrases are appositives, one of the sentence parts that differentiate professional writing from student writing. They're frequently used by professional writers but rarely by students. Appositive phrases are an efficient way to combine related ideas in one sentence.

Characteristics of the Appositive Phrase

Appositives are noun phrases that identify adjacent nouns or pronouns. They can occur as sentence openers, subject-verb splits, or sentence closers. Examples are boldfaced.

Sentence Openers

1. **One of eleven brothers and sisters,** Harriet was a moody, willful child.
Langston Hughes, "Road to Freedom"
2. **A balding, smooth-faced man,** he could have been anywhere between forty and sixty.
Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird
3. **A short, round boy of seven,** he took little interest in troublesome things, preferring to remain on good terms with everyone.

Mildred D. Taylor, Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Subject-Verb Splits

4. Poppa, **a good quiet man,** spent the last hours before our parting moving aimlessly about the yard, keeping to himself and avoiding me.
Gordon Parks, "My Mother's Dream for Me"
5. A man, **a weary old pensioner with a bald dirty head and a stained brown corduroy waistcoat,** appeared at the door of a small gate lodge.

Skill 2

Participial Phrase

Identifying the Participial Phrase

Here's a list of sentences, all written by professional writers, but with some parts deleted.

1. We could see the lake and the mountains across the lake on the French side.
2. Sadao had his reward.
3. The sun rose clear and bright.
4. Spencer took half an hour.

Now compare those sentences with the originals. Notice that the additions account for the distinctiveness of the original sentence.

- 1a. **Sitting up in bed eating breakfast**, we could see the lake and the mountains across the lake on the French side.
Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms
- 2a. Sadao, **searching the spot of black in the twilight sea that night**, had his reward.
Pearl S. Buck, "The Enemy"
- 3a. The sun rose clear and bright, **tinging the foamy crests of the waves with a reddish purple**.
Alexander Dumas, Count of Monte Cristo
- 4a. Spencer took half an hour, **swimming in one of the pools which was filled with the seasonal rain, waiting for the pursuers to catch up to him**.
Ray Bradbury, The Martian Chronicles

student writing. Participial phrases are an efficient way to combine related ideas into one sentence.

Characteristics of the Participial Phrase

Participles describe nouns or pronouns. Present participles always end in *ing*. Past participles usually end in *ed*. In the following example, the nouns or pronouns are underlined, the participles are capitalized, and the rest of the participial phrases are boldfaced.

Present Participles

1. She was quite far from the windows which were to her left, and behind her were a couple of tall bookcases, **CONTAINING all the books of the factory library.**

John Hersey, Hiroshima

2. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, **HANGING in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves.**

Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher"

3. **STANDING there in the middle of the street**, Marty suddenly thought of Halloween, of the winter and snowballs, of the schoolyard.

Murray Heyert, "The New Kid"

4. Professor Kazan, **WEARING a spotlessly white tropical suit and a wide-brimmed hat**, was the first ashore.

Arthur C. Clarke, Dolphin Island

5. He walked to the corner of the lot, then back again, **STUDYING the simple terrain as if deciding how best to effect an entry**, **FROWNING and SCRATCHING his head.**

Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird

Past Participles

6. In six months a dozen small towns had been laid down upon the naked planet, **FILLED with sizzling neon tubes and yellow electric bulbs.**

Ray Bradbury, The Martian Chronicles

Skill 3

Absolute Phrase

Identifying the Absolute Phrase

Here's a list of sentences, all written by professional writers, but with some parts deleted.

1. She returned to her bench.
2. The boy watched.
3. About the bones, ants were ebbing away.
4. Six boys came over the hill half an hour early that afternoon, running hard.

Now compare those sentences with the originals. Notice that the additions account for the distinctiveness of the original sentences.

- 1a. She returned to her bench, **her face showing all the unhappiness that had suddenly overtaken her.**
Theodore Dreiser, An American Tragedy
- 2a. The boy watched, **his eyes bulging in the dark.**
Edmund Ware, "An Underground Episode"
- 3a. About the bones, ants were ebbing away, **their pincers full of meat.**
Doris Lessing, African Stories
- 4a. Six boys came over the hill half an hour early that afternoon, running hard, **their heads down, their forearms working, their breath whistling.** (three absolutes)
John Steinbeck, The Red Pony

The **boldface** phrases are absolute phrases, one of the sentence parts that differentiates professional writing from student writing. They're frequently used by professional writers but rarely by

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students. Absolute phrases are an efficient way to combine related ideas in one sentence.

Characteristics of the Absolute Phrase

Absolutes are sentence parts that describe the rest of the sentence in which they appear. Absolutes are *almost* complete sentences. As a test, you can make *any absolute* a sentence by adding *was* or *were*. Here are the four absolutes from the previous examples, changed into sentences:

- 1a. Her face **was** showing all the unhappiness that had suddenly overtaken her.
- 2a. His eyes **were** bulging in the dark.
- 3a. Their pincers **were** full of meat.
- 4a. Their heads **were** down. Their forearms **were** working. Their breath **was** whistling.

Another way to identify an absolute is that many absolutes begin with the words *my, his, her, its, our, their* (possessive pronouns). Absolutes can occur as sentence openers, subject-verb splits, or sentence closers. Examples are boldfaced.

Sentence Openers

1. **His hands raw**, he reached a flat place at the top.
Richard Connell, "The Most Dangerous Game"
2. **Each child carrying his little bag of crackling**, we trod the long road home in the cold winter afternoon.
Peter Abrahams, Tell Freedom
3. Outside, **his carpetbag in his hand**, he stood for a time in the barnyard.
Jessamyn West, "A Time of Learning"

Subject-Verb Splits

4. Miss Hearne, **her face burning**, hardly listened to these words.
Brian Moore, The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne

Skill 4

Prepositional Phrase

Identifying the Prepositional Phrase

Here's a list of sentences, all written by professional writers, but with some parts deleted.

1. All children grow up.
2. Lincoln International Airport was functioning.
3. They have no memory.
4. He groped out and began to sob.

Now compare those sentences with the originals. Notice that the additions account for the distinctiveness of the original sentences.

- 1a. All children, **except one**, grow up.
J. M. Barrie, Peter Pan
- 2a. **At half-past six on a Friday evening in January**, Lincoln International Airport was functioning, **with difficulty**.
Arthur Hailey, Airport
- 3a. They have no memory, **of tears or laughter, of sorrow or loving kindness**.
Lloyd Alexander, The Book of Three
- 4a. He groped out **for me with both of his own arms, like a drowning man**, and began to sob **against my stomach**.
Stephen King, "The Mouse on the Mile"

The boldface parts are prepositional phrases, another of the sentence parts that differentiate professional writing from student writing. Professional writers sometimes open their sentences with one or more prepositional phrases, use prepositional

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phrases in a series, and use them in ways most students don't, as you'll see in the practices that follow.

Characteristics of the Prepositional Phrase

Prepositional phrases are sentence parts that describe people, things, or actions. Most begin with one of these prepositions: *in the beginning, before the fall, after the creation, at the game, down the aisle, across the street, inside the stadium, outside the store, between the posts, within the den, behind the scenes, on the bridge, by the sea, under the boardwalk, around the park, down the road, into the woods, against the grain, near the field, through the woods, to Grandmother's house, like a bird, except the sophomores, over the rainbow, up the creek, without a paddle, with malice, toward none, of the people, by the people, for the people*. Most prepositions are easy to identify because they are difficult to define. (Try defining *of, in, off, by, through, between*, and so on.) Sentences can contain single or consecutive prepositional phrases anywhere in the sentence.

Single Prepositional Phrases

1. **In that place**, the wind prevailed.
Glendon Swarthout, Bless the Beasts and Children
2. **At the bottom**, he looked glumly **down the tunnel**.
Stephen King, "Night Journey"
3. **With a quick, guilty hand**, she covered the tear, her shoulders bunching to hide her face.
Zenna Henderson, The Believing Child

Consecutive Prepositional Phrases

4. **In a hole in the ground**, there lived a hobbit.
J. R. R. Tolkien, The Hobbit
5. **Across the street from their house, in an empty lot between two houses**, stood the rock pile.

Skill 5

Adjective Clause

Identifying the Adjective Clause

Here's a list of sentences, all written by professional writers, but with some parts deleted.

1. I used to have a cat, an old fighting tom.
2. She lived in a small frame house with her invalid mother and a thin, sallow, unflagging aunt.
3. That spirit of discord was gone.
4. Louise tried to make talk, but the country boy was embarrassed and would say nothing.

Now compare those sentences with the originals. Notice that the additions account for the distinctiveness of the original sentences.

- 1a. I used to have a cat, an old fighting tom, **who would jump through the open window by my bed in the middle of the night and land on my chest.**

Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek

- 2a. She lived in a small frame house with her invalid mother and a thin, sallow, unflagging aunt, **where each morning between ten and eleven she would appear on the porch in a lace-trimmed boudoir cap to sit swinging in the porch swing until noon.**

William Faulkner, "Dry September"

- 3a. That spirit of discord, **which had jumbled my thoughts like powerful fingers sifting through sand or grains of rice,** was gone.

Stephen King, "Night Journey"

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1. I used to have a cat, an old fighting tom.
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William Faulkner, "Dry September"
- 3a. That spirit of discord, **which had jumbled my thoughts like powerful fingers sifting through sand or grains**

- 4a. Louise, **whose mind was filled with thoughts of him,** tried to make talk, but the country boy was embarrassed and would say nothing.

Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio

The boldface parts are adjective clauses, another of the sentence parts that differentiate professional writing from student writing. They're frequently used by professional writers but rarely by students. Adjective clauses are an efficient way to combine related ideas in one sentence.

Characteristics of the Adjective Clause

Adjective clauses are sentence parts that describe whatever is mentioned to the left of them in the same sentence. Most begin with the words: *who*, *which*, *whose*, or *where*. They can occur as subject-verb splits, or sentence closers. Examples are boldfaced.

Subject-Verb Splits

1. Keeton, **who overtopped Norris by five inches and outweighed him by a hundred pounds,** gave the deputy a harsh little shake and then did let go.
Stephen King, Needful Things
2. Even his eyes, **which had been young,** looked old.
John Steinbeck, The Red Pony
3. His face, **whose shades we had often labeled,** now achieved a new one.
John Knowles, A Separate Peace

Sentence Closers

4. They dropped his belongings at the freshman dorm, **where the only sign of his roommate was a khaki duffel bag and a canvas butterfly chair printed to resemble a gigantic hand.**
Anne Tyler, Saint Maybe

5. I loved school with a desperate passion. **which became**

Skill 6

Adverb Clause

Identifying the Adverb Clause

Here's a list of sentences, all written by professional writers, but with some parts deleted.

1. He ate.
2. I was just fourteen years of age.
3. The number thirteen proved unlucky for Harry Cone and his crew of twelve aboard the big PBM.
4. Shrinking is always more painful than growing, but the pain was over quickly enough.

Now compare those sentences with the originals. Notice that the additions account for the distinctiveness of the original sentences.

- 1a. He ate **while his blanket, still damp, steamed in front of the fire.**
Hal Borland, When the Legends Die
- 2a. I was just fourteen years of age **when a coward going by the name of Tom Chaney shot my father down in Fort Smith, Arkansas, and robbed him of his life and his horse and \$150 in cash money plus two California gold pieces that he carried in his trouser band.**
Charles Portis, True Grit
- 3a. The number thirteen proved unlucky for Harry Cone and his crew of twelve aboard the big PBM, **for the giant plane was never heard from again.**
Richard Winer, The Devil's Triangle
- 4a. Shrinking is always more painful than growing, **since for a moment all your bones jam together like a crowd**

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1. He ate.
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4. Shrinking is always more painful than growing, but the pain was over quickly enough.

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Charles Portis, True Grit
- 3a. The number thirteen proved unlucky for Harry Cone and his crew of twelve aboard the big PBM, **for the giant plane was never heard from again.**
Richard Winer, The Devil's Triangle

on market day, but the pain was over quickly enough as I became the size of a cat.

Laurence Yep, Dragonwings

The boldface parts are adverb clauses, another of the sentence parts that differentiate professional writing from student writing.

Characteristics of the Adverb Clause

Adverb clauses are sentence parts that tell more about the rest of the sentence in which they appear. They usually tell *why, how, when, or under what condition* something was done. Most begin with the words *after, if, because, although, when, as, before, until, for, or since* (subordinators). They can occur as sentence openers, subject-verb splits, or sentence closers. Examples here are boldfaced, with the subordinator also in italics.

Sentence Openers

1. ***After he got himself under control***, he apologized. (Tells when he apologized.)
Stephen King, "The Mouse on the Mile"
2. ***If you know whence you came***, there is really no limit to where you can go. (Tells the condition for not having limits.)
James Baldwin, "Letter to My Nephew"
3. ***Because its primary reason for existence was government***, Maycomb was spared the grubbiness that distinguished most Alabama towns its size. (Tells why Maycomb wasn't grubby.)
Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird
4. ***Although they lived in style***, they felt always an anxiety in the house. (Tells an ironic condition.)
D. H. Lawrence, "The Rocking-Horse Winner"

Subject-Verb Splits

5. The truck drivers, ***when they heard that Maxie Hammerman had been released***, were furious. (Tells