

## Introduction to Harry Noden's "Brush Strokes"

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### Introduction

Harry Noden teaches us that there are five basic 'brush strokes' that guide young writers through the essentials of writing. He uses the metaphor of 'painting' to teach kids grammatical elements. As a group today, we are going to experiment and learn these 'strokes' as we paint a picture with our words, under the guidance of Noden's 'grammar' lessons.

This is what Noden has to say about grammar and his ideas

Traditionally, the study of grammar has dealt only with words, phrases, and clauses. However, when I began to see grammar as a process of creating art, it seemed unnatural – even impossible – not to view grammar as a continuous spectrum in a whole work. As I explored this view with my students, the connection seemed to bring grammar into a meaningful relationship with stories, novels, screenplays, poems, reports, and songs – the ultimate products of the writer's art. (ix)

So, for Noden, writing is like art. Grammar is the craft that gets the artist from rough sketch to professional painting.

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### Participials

**Definition:** A participial is an "ing" word or phrase tagged on the beginning or the end of a sentence (also "ed" words) "ing" = present participle; "ed" = past participle

What they can do: Add description to an otherwise bland sentence or string of sentences. Specifically, they give motion to a sentence

#### Examples:

<b>1<sup>st</sup></b> The soccer player kicked the ball.  The fish was caught on the line.	<b>Alternate</b> <u>Grunting and screaming</u> with agony, the soccer player kicked the ball, <u>swerving</u> into the back of the net.  <u>Rising from the water</u> , the fish, <u>caught on the line</u> , thrashed violently.
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### Absolutes

**Definition:** An absolute adds description to a noun, a subject, or a phrase acting as a noun (these are also called "free modifiers" or nominative absolutes) by adding a two-word phrase that creates more vivid description. (Simply, it is a noun, with a "ing" participial)

#### Examples

<b>1<sup>st</sup></b> The crowd urged an encore from the exhausted band.  The mountain climber edged along the cliff.	<b>Revised</b> <u>Voices screeching, lighters clicking and flickering</u> , the crowd urged an encore from the exhausted band.  The mountain climber edged along the cliff, <u>hands shaking, feet trembling</u> .
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**Appositives:**

**Definition:** A noun or nominative phrase that adds a second description, image, or idea to a previous noun. Simply, it means that you ‘re-name’ a noun.

**Examples**

1 <sup>st</sup>	Revised
The boat bobbed lifelessly in the Lake Michigan swells.	The boat, <u>a small weathered trawler trawler with a faded inscription -- “Lucky Lady” --on the stern,</u> bobbed lifelessly in the Lake Michigan swells.
The meal was sparse, yet filling.	The meal, <u>a coarse mixture of gruel and warm grog,</u> was sparse yet filling.

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**Adjectives shifted out of order**

**Definition:** Very simple. Instead of writing a ‘safe’ and simple sentence in the ‘right’ order – “The angry one-armed man broke into the house and shattered the vase” – reverse the order “The man, one-armed and angry, broke into the house.”

**Examples**

1 <sup>st</sup>	Revised
Sad eyed goofy Jim couldn’t get a date to the prom.	Jim, <u>sad eyed and goofy,</u> couldn’t get a date to the prom.
The young, nimble, and well-trained gymnast clearly outclassed her amateurish opponents.	The gymnast, <u>young, nimble, and well-trained,</u> clearly outclassed her amateurish opponents.

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**Painting with Action Verbs**

**Definition:** The key here is to look at ways to avoid “passive” voice. (hint: these are most easily recognized by the use of “be” verbs). Instead, use verbs that connote actions instead of states of being.

**Examples**

1 <sup>st</sup>	Revised
The snake was under the porch.	The snake, <u>rattle shaking and tongue flicking,</u> <u>waited</u> under the porch.
We were on the edge of cliff, waiting desperately for the overdue rescue team.	We <u>clung</u> desperately to edge of the cliff, waiting for the overdue rescue team.