

## Figure 12.1    Directions for Writing with Absolute Phrases

How could you use absolute phrases to add description and sentence variation in your narratives? Let's say you are writing about a time you had to overcome a setback in your life. For example, you failed a chemistry test and had to work up the courage to talk to the teacher about a new start.

You might start your first draft this way:

I stood outside my teacher's office. I was waiting nervously. I was holding my failing midterm exam in one hand. I told myself, "You can go in and ask for help. You don't have to fail this course."

My heart was pounding, and I turned the doorknob. I stepped inside and began to explain my problem.

Mr. Davis, my teacher, listened to me. His fingers were tapping a rhythm on his wooden desk. His eyes were fixed on mine.

You may reread your lines and notice the dependence on simple and compound sentences and the overuse of being verbs, *was* and *were*. So you could use your knowledge of sentence variations to make these revisions:

*Standing outside my teacher's office*, I waited nervously, *my failing midterm exam in one hand*. I told myself, "You can go in and ask for help. You don't have to fail this course."

*My heart pounding*, I turned the doorknob, stepped inside, and began to explain my problem.

Mr. Davis, my teacher, listened to me, *his fingers tapping a rhythm on his wooden desk*, *his eyes fixed on mine*.

Good revision! By introducing the three italicized absolute phrases and the one underlined participial phrase, you gave your story an improved rhythm.

Here are a few more examples to help you see sentences improved through use of absolute phrases. After you read them, go back to your descriptive paragraphs, looking for places where you can improve the flow of ideas or add detail with absolute phrases.

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| <i>Without</i> an absolute phrase: | Jim's shoulders were aching from the weight of the heavy bags. He carried the bags up the second flight of stairs. |
| <i>With</i> an absolute phrase:    | <u>His shoulders aching from the weight</u> , Jim carried the heavy bags up the second flight of stairs.           |
| <i>Without</i> an absolute phrase: | He steadied himself against the doorway. His fingers were fumbling in his pocket for a key.                        |
| <i>With</i> an absolute phrase:    | He steadied himself against the doorway, <u>his fingers fumbling in his pocket for a key</u> .                     |