

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone Excerpt

Uncle Vernon entered the kitchen as Harry was turning over the bacon.

"Comb your hair!" he barked, by way of a morning greeting.

About once a week, Uncle Vernon looked over the top of his newspaper and shouted that Harry needed a haircut. Harry must have had more haircuts than the rest of the boys in his class put together, but it made no difference, his hair simply grew that way - all over the place.

Harry was frying eggs by the time Dudley arrived in the kitchen with his mother. Dudley looked a lot like Uncle Vernon. He had a large pink face, not much neck, small, watery blue eyes, and thick blond hair that lay smoothly on his thick, fat head. Aunt Petunia often said that Dudley looked like a baby angel - Harry often said that Dudley looked like a pig in a wig.

Harry put the plates of egg and bacon on the table, which was difficult as there wasn't much room. Dudley, meanwhile, was counting his presents. His face fell.

"Thirty-six," he said, looking up at his mother and father. "That's two less than last year."

"Darling, you haven't counted Auntie Marge's present, see, it's here under this big one from Mommy and Daddy."

"All right, thirty-seven then," said Dudley, going red in the face. Harry, who could see a huge Dudley tantrum coming on, began wolfing down his bacon as fast as possible in case Dudley turned the table over.

Aunt Petunia obviously scented danger, too, because she said quickly, "And we'll buy you another two presents while we're out today. How's that, popkin? Two more presents. Is that all right?"

Dudley thought for a moment. It looked like hard work. Finally he said slowly, "So I'll have thirty . . . thirty . . ."

"Thirty-nine, sweetums," said Aunt Petunia.

"Oh." Dudley sat down heavily and grabbed the nearest parcel. "All right then."

Uncle Vernon chuckled.

"Little tyke wants his money's worth, just like his father. 'Atta boy, Dudley!" He ruffled Dudley's hair.

At that moment the telephone rang and Aunt Petunia went to answer it while Harry and Uncle Vernon watched Dudley unwrap the racing bike, a video camera, a remote control airplane, sixteen new computer games, and a VCR. He was ripping the paper off a gold wristwatch when Aunt Petunia came back from the telephone looking both angry and worried.

"Bad news, Vernon," she said. "Mrs. Figg's broken her leg. She can't take him." She jerked her head in Harry's direction.

Dudley's mouth fell open in horror, but Harry's heart gave a leap. Every year on Dudley's birthday, his

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parents took him and a friend out for the day, to adventure parks, hamburger restaurants, or the movies. Every year, Harry was left behind with Mrs. Figg, a mad old lady who lived two streets away. Harry hated it there. The whole house smelled of cabbage and Mrs. Figg made him look at photographs of all the cats she'd ever owned.

commentary

"Now what?" said Aunt Petunia, looking furiously at Harry as though he'd planned this. Harry knew he ought to feel sorry that Mrs. Figg had broken her leg, but it wasn't easy when he reminded himself it would be a whole year before he had to look at Tibbles, Snowy, Mr. Paws, and Tufty again.

commentary

"We could phone Marge," Uncle Vernon suggested.

"Don't be silly, Vernon, she hates the boy."

The Dursleys often spoke about Harry like this, as though he wasn't there - or rather, as though he was something very nasty that couldn't understand them, like a slug.

commentary

"What about what's-her-name, your friend - Yvonne?"

"On vacation in Majorca," snapped Aunt Petunia.

"You could just leave me here," Harry put in hopefully (he'd be able to watch what he wanted on television for a change and maybe even have a go on Dudley's computer).

Aunt Petunia looked as though she'd just swallowed a lemon.

Sentences: variety of lengths.

JK Rowling Style

Dialogue Tags: "Said" wins hands down. The tag usually precedes the name of the character speaking ("said Ron"), but follows if she wants to include an adverb ("Hermione said brightly" or "he said feebly").

Dashes: A few times a chapter on average. Which is quite a few. Not everyone will use them either.

Description: Straight forward with little to no commentary. Cinematic almost. What you might expect the camera to pick up.

Sentence Length: Varied. The longest: 52 words. The shortest, not including dialogue, 3 words .

Verb Choices: Simple. I'm not fond of language that draws attention to itself. Strong verbs are great, but they can wear you out after a while. Here's a sampling of the verbs Rowling uses in my sample (dialogue not included): "sat," "unwrapped," "was," "got up," "hugged," "tried," "bought," "contained," "linger," "came," "took."

Participial Phrases: Rowling's addiction to present participial phrases (or clauses) to describe a concurrent (look it up) action. For instance:

- Colin ignored him, his face shining with excitement.

This combines two sentences: "Colin ignored him. His face was shining (or shone) with excitement."

Another example:

- Wood shot towards the ground, landing rather harder than he meant to in his anger, staggering slightly as he dismounted.

(Wood shot towards the ground. Wood landed rather harder than he meant to in his anger. Wood staggered slightly as he dismounted.)

Sometimes the clause comes before the sentence:

- Stiff-legged and still yawning, his team followed.

Rowling particularly loves to use them with reported speech. For example:

- 'Aren't you Lucius Malfoy's son?' said Fred, looking at Malfoy with dislike.
- 'Better out than in,' he said cheerfully, plonking a large copper basin in front of him.

The sentences below exemplify both her heavy use of participles and another feature of her writing: her **Heavy use of Adverbs** (bolded in red). Whether this amounts to 'overuse' depends on your point of view, but it's safe to say that graduates of creative writing workshops are likely to find it excessive.

- Ron's wand was still malfunctioning, surpassing itself on Friday morning by shooting out of Ron's hand in Charms and hitting tiny old Professor Flitwick **squarely** between the eyes, creating a large, throbbing green boil where it had struck.
- Yawning and shivering **slightly**, Harry climbed out of bed and tried to find his Quidditch robes.
- Colin Creevey came dashing down the spiral staircase, his camera swinging **madly** around his neck
- Lockhart gave up and slumped, panting, against the white edge of the picture.
- He mounted his broomstick and kicked at the ground, soaring up into the air.
- The cool morning air whipped his face, waking him far more **effectively** than Wood's long talk.

