

Ms. Foster's ninth graders, inspired by the participial phrases in Debbie Allen's picture book *Dancing in the Wings*, wrote these stories. With a friend, discuss the participial phrases you find in these writers' sentences. Talk about how the participial phrases affect the sentence fluency in the writing.



The Swimmer

by Mara, 9th grade writer

Trying to steady my breathing, I sat down. The off-white chair engraved its plastic striped pattern onto my exposed legs. Goosebumps, overpowering my chilled skin, covered my body in seconds. My arm hairs stood on end as I tried to relax. The continuous gun shot made me jump each time it went off. Sitting alone, I searched for fellow competitors. Not one walked by looking friendly. I hid myself under my damp towel, allowing the infinite splashes of water to engulf my ears. Imagining my starting position, someone poked me on the shoulder with a sharp finger. My water-dried face felt as if it was about to crack and fall off. But lotion was the last of my worries. Wishing I was home, the finger poked again, this time impatiently. Revealing myself from the towel like a bear from hibernation, I hesitantly gazed up. The woman was my coach.

"You ready?" Her soft voice calmed my nervous stomach.

I nodded, trying to look excited instead of wanting to vomit. She signaled me to follow her. Not knowing what else to do, I obeyed. My bathing suit began to bunch up in the back. Embarrassed, I wrapped my towel around my waist. It was difficult to keep up with her fast pace, but my legs were warming up from the walk. The gun shot went off again, but it was muffled. My coach stopped. Wondering if my wedgie was still in tact, I sneakily fixed anything that might've been seen earlier. Turning around, she handed me a small slip of paper. I studied it, remembering each word vividly. She directed me to a long line of girls. I walked to the end, looking down at my paper.

Shivering from my towel's wetness, I let it drop from my waist. Curious, I looked up: five girls between me and the water's edge. I slid my paper under my towel and set them both on a chair. I was ready. Four girls left. The gun shot went off. For the first time, I didn't jump. Three girls. Becoming more nervous, I took a deep breath of the crisp winded air. A hand rested on my shoulder. She whispered to have fun and do my best. Two girls left. I intended to follow through with her advice. One girl left. Forgetting about the cold air and the annoying gun, I briefly closed my eyes. It was my turn. The tight strap of my goggles were secured onto my eyes.

Angling my legs like the others, I bent down. Staring straight into the icy water, I focused. The turquoise blue color was relaxing in such a hand-shaking instance. The gun shot was louder than ever and my legs kicked into full gear. The chilled water felt like the ocean: monstrous, mysterious, mine. I kicked and pushed with all my strength. Nearing the wall, the audience's encouraging yelps were coming closer. I flipped into an underwater somersault and used the wall for my next forward momentum. Forgetting to breathe, I tilted my head to the side and gulped in air for the last time. My hand crashed into the wall and I knew it was over. My pruned feet found the rough floor and I emerged from the water. A tall man with white hair held a first place ribbon over my lane. My adrenaline swallowed my happiness back down. Climbing out of the pool, I was met with a large, warm towel. Yelling and smiling, my coach's arms surrounded me.

"I am so proud of you," she exclaimed with a teary smile.

I was dry from water but still drenched with joy. Snapping off my tight goggles, I looked up to see my mom and dad staring at me with pride all over their faces.



Allegro, Con Amour by Alex, 9th grade writer?

I've never been one to brag; it's not really in my nature. But I will admit this: I am, without a doubt, the most envied violinist in my entire school.

Why, you might ask me? It isn't because of material possessions or because of money. In all actuality, it's because of my "little sister," Violette Dvorak.

Now, Violette and I never got on well at first, most likely because of my disdain for her skill. Violette and I aren't actually related, after all; she attended school with me, and after a while I took her on as my "apprentice." For that reason, there wasn't any of that sisterly love thing going on. I wasn't required to love her, at all; ergo, she wasn't required to love me.

There was something of a contrast between me (the ebony-haired veteran) and her (the ivory-haired new girl). I was deep, thoughtful, and sorrowful in my sadly overplayed music. Violette, on the other hand, was fun, carefree, and jubilant, using her newfound rhythms and notes. We were as different as the keys on a piano; I was the sharps and flats, and Violette was the *naturals*, which disheartened me.

Needless to admit once again, I hated her. I hated to walk outside and hear practiced songs coming up from beneath the staircase as once again Violette practiced a piece, be it Humoresque or a Minuet. To make up for my obvious insecurities, I practiced harder, playing like a madwoman to keep up with Violette's intensified pace.

And then...One day, it was like magic, actually...One day, Violette passed me in the hall. I ignored her in my silent and insolent way, but she, smiling at me like an old friend, said, "Hi."

Stupefied beyond belief, I replied with a crisp "Hello." There. Short, sweet, and to the point. *How do you like me now, Violette?* I thought, with an inner wicked grin.

"You did a nice job on the Moonlight Sonata for Violin today," she said with a quiet nod. Taken aback, I tried to come up with something to say in return, something hurtful, something *wounding*, and failing miserably.

"Thanks. You did a nice job on your Concerto," I replied, then, offering my kind advice, added, "Your shift up to that G-sharp was a little rough. Let the music come to you instead of you going to it."

"Thanks for the advice. And if you don't mind my saying, your return to the C-natural was a little messy as well. You have to let it go sooner and it will sound better."

"Thanks," I said, the devil on my shoulder screaming "WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" as my angel screamed "ARE YOU INSANE?"

Thanks for the support, guys, I thought, irritated at their refusal to comply. "If you ever want to get together, then we could work on those shifts."

"Sure!" Violette replied, being naturally enthusiastic.

And so we started meeting. It was gradual, at first...once a week on Tuesdays in the library. And then it expanded, to meeting three times a week Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, then to meeting every day.

It was rarely about strings, too. It was more to talk about "How was your day?" and "Oh my god, isn't Jason hot?" (Jason is actually a trumpeter.)

And with friendship, our musical capabilities expanded, becoming more than I thought was possible. I helped Violette to qualify for the Gold Scholarship, a virtually free ride to Julliard. We worked for hours every night, trying to get better by the fifth of March. It was tough; there were days when we both broke down and cried with frustration.

Finally, the big day came. Violette went in and played her solo, a song I don't even know the name of. It was so hard, and I listened, waiting for her to return.

Violette finally came out and motioned me in. "It's your turn," she said, but I shook my head.

"Violette, I don't have anything prepared. We took up too much time on your piece," I admitted quietly. She looked at me, her eyes filled with hurt. "But it was all worth it!" I added, trying to play the redresser. She finally smiled.

A few days later, the letter came. Violette, my sister, stared at me, blushing with pride, and we finally screamed.

It's been a few months now, since then...Violette still writes me, begging me to tell her what's going on at school (Jason and I have been dating since she left). I'll ask her how Julliard is (she's got her own man, a bassist!), and we'll call each other every so often, just to hear the sound of the other's voice...Just like music.