

Participles

WHAT IS A PARTICIPLE?

A participle is a verbal that is used as an adjective. A verbal is a word that is based on a verb but does not act as a verb. A participle is used to modify either a noun or a pronoun. For example:

The **barking** dog wanted to come inside. ← Here the participle *barking* modifies the dog.

WHAT IS A PARTICIPIAL PHRASE?

A participial phrase is a phrase that begins with a participle and includes objects or other modifiers. It also acts as an adjective. For example:

Barking loudly, the dog wanted to come inside. ← Here the participial phrase *barking loudly* modifies the dog.

Present and Past Participles

There are two types of participles: present participles and past participles. Present participles end in *-ing*, while past participles end in *-ed*, *-en*, *-d*, *-t*, or *-n*.

Present

A **present participle** is the *-ing* form of a verb when it is used as an adjective. Note: a *present participle* is different from a *gerund*, which is the *-ing* form of a verb when it is used as a noun.

The **approaching** deadline hung over the heads of all the people in the office.

Here, *approaching* is an adjective that is used to describe the deadline.

The **leaping** flames from the **burning** building presented the firefighters with the responsibility of protecting other nearby buildings from the **growing** fire.

Here, *leaping*, *burning*, and *growing* are verbals used as adjectives to describe a noun (flames, building, and fire respectively) in the sentence, thereby qualifying them as present participles. Although it ends in *-ing*, *protecting* is not a participle because it is acting as a noun in the sentence (object of the preposition), thereby qualifying it as a gerund.

Past

A **past participle** is the form of a verb ending in *-ed*, *-en*, *-d*, *-t*, or *-n* when used as an adjective. Some examples of these types of verbs are: *opened*, *beaten*, *baked*, *burnt*, and *chosen*.

She crawled out the opened window to escape the fire.
Here, *opened* is used as an adjective to describe *window*.

The recipe calls for three beaten eggs.
Here, *beaten* is used as an adjective to describe *eggs*.

One of my favorite foods is baked lasagna.
Here, *baked* is used as an adjective to describe the *lasagna*.

The smell of the burnt toast filled the room.
Here, *burnt* is used as an adjective to describe *toast*.

Margaret loved her chosen career as a kindergarten teacher.
Here, *chosen* is used as an adjective to describe *career*.

Participial Phrases

A **participial phrase** is a group of words that begins with a participle and includes objects or modifiers. Participial phrases are **dependent clauses** and are used as adjectives to describe nouns or pronouns.

Having been an athlete, Jenny knew that training took a lot of determination.
Here, *having been an athlete* is a participial phrase that describes Jenny.

He noticed the girls running to the car to avoid the rain.
Here, *running to the car* is a participial phrase that describes the girls.

Placement

A **participial phrase** must be placed as close to the noun it modifies as possible in order to avoid possible confusion.

Leaping through the woods, his foot landed in a huge puddle of mud.
Leaping through the woods, Josh landed his foot in a huge puddle of mud.

In the first sentence, the subject is not clear because it does not clearly state who is performing the action expressed in the participle *leaping*. This is called a **misplaced modifier**. The word *foot* cannot be the subject because it cannot leap. The second sentence is clearer because a person must be doing the leaping and this sentence names the person as Josh.

Note: For information on how to punctuate participial phrases, refer to the skills pages on Commas (Non-essential and Essential Clauses) and Dependent Clauses.