

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.