

The Participle Phrase

Recognize a *participle phrase* when you see one.

A participle phrase will begin with a present or past participle. If the participle is present, it will dependably end in *ing*. Likewise, a regular past participle will end in a consistent *ed*. Irregular past participles, unfortunately, conclude in all kinds of ways [Check a dictionary for help].

Since all phrases require two or more words, a participle phrase will often include objects and/or modifiers that complete the thought. Here are some examples:

Crunching caramel corn for the entire movie

Washed with soap and water

Stuck in the back of the closet behind the obsolete computer

Participle phrases always function as adjectives, adding description to the sentence. Read these examples:

The horse *trotting up to the fence* hopes that you have an apple or carrot.

Trotting up to the fence modifies the noun *horse*.

The water drained slowly in the pipe *clogged with dog hair*.

Clogged with dog hair modifies the noun *pipe*.

Eaten by mosquitoes, we wished that we had made hotel, not campsite, reservations.

Eaten by mosquitoes modifies the pronoun *we*.

Be careful not to mistake a present participle phrase for a gerund phrase.

Gerund and present participle phrases are easy to confuse because they both begin with an *ing* word. The difference is the function that they provide in the sentence. A gerund phrase will always behave as a noun while a present participle phrase will act as an adjective. Check out these examples:

Walking on the beach, Delores dodged jellyfish that had washed ashore.

Walking on the beach = present participle phrase describing the noun *Delores*.

Walking on the beach is painful if jellyfish have washed ashore.

Walking on the beach = gerund phrase, the subject of the verb *is*.

Waking to the buzz of the alarm clock, Freddie cursed the arrival of another Monday.

Waking to the buzz of the alarm clock = present participle phrase describing the noun *Freddie*.

Freddie hates *waking to the buzz of the alarm clock*.

Waking to the buzz of the alarm clock = gerund phrase, the direct object of the verb *hates*.

After a long day at school and work, LaShae found her roommate Ben *eating the last of the leftover pizza*.

Eating the last of the leftover pizza = present participle phrase describing the noun *Ben*.

Ben's rudest habit is *eating the last of the leftover pizza*.

Eating the last of the leftover pizza = gerund phrase, the subject complement of the linking verb *is*.

Punctuate a participle phrase correctly.

When a participle phrase introduces a main clause, separate the two sentence components with a comma. The pattern looks like this:

PARTICIPLE PHRASE + , + **MAIN CLAUSE** .

Read this example:

Glazed with barbecue sauce, the rack of ribs lay nestled next to a pile of sweet coleslaw.

When a participle phrase concludes a main clause and is describing the word right in front of it, you need no punctuation to connect the two sentence parts. The pattern looks like this:

MAIN CLAUSE + Ø + **PARTICIPLE PHRASE** .

Check out this example:

Mariah risked petting the pit bull *wagging its stub tail*.

But when a participle phrase concludes a main clause and modifies a word farther up in the sentence, you will need a comma. The pattern looks like this:

MAIN CLAUSE + , + **PARTICIPLE PHRASE** .

Check out this example:

Cooper enjoyed dinner at Audrey's house, *agreeing to a large slice of cherry pie even though he was full to the point of bursting*.

Don't misplace or dangle your participle phrases.

Participle phrases are the most common modifier to misplace or dangle. In clear, logical sentences, you will find modifiers right next to the words they describe.

Shouting with happiness, William celebrated his chance to interview at SunTrust.

Notice that the participle phrase sits right in front of William, the one doing the shouting.

If too much distance separates a modifier and its target, the modifier is misplaced.

Draped neatly on a hanger, William borrowed Grandpa's old *suit* to wear to the interview.

The suit, not William, is on the hanger! The modifier must come closer to the word it is meant to describe:

For the interview, William borrowed Grandpa's old *suit*, *which was draped neatly on a hanger*.

If the sentence fails to include a target, the modifier is dangling.

Straightening his tie and smoothing his hair, the appointment time for the interview had finally arrived.

We assume William is about to interview, but where is he in the sentence? We need a target for the participle phrase *straightening his tie and smoothing his hair*.

Straightening his tie and smoothing his hair, *William* was relieved that the appointment time for the interview had finally arrived.



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Grammar Worksheets: Misplaced and Dangling Participles

<http://www.grammar-worksheets.com>

Many students do not understand the difference between a participle and a gerund. Here is the answer:

Gerund: A verb form used as a noun. It ends in ing – always.
Participle: A verb form used as an adjective. It usually ends in ing, en, or ed.

However, a gerund and a participle may look exactly the same, like so:

Gerund: Laughing makes me cry sometimes.
Participle: Laughing, Julio stumbled out of the bar.

Gerunds take care of themselves. Rarely do students write confusing sentences using gerunds. Participles, however, can “dangle” or be misplaced.

Dangling Participle: Slipping on the wet sidewalk, the keys fell from Amaury’s pocket.

This sentence reads as if the keys slipped on the wet sidewalk. Dangling and misplaced participles often give rise to absurdly humorous scenarios. A “dangling participle” has no noun in the sentence to which the participle would logically attach. A “misplaced participle” does have a noun, but that noun does not come directly after the participle, thus creating a confusing sentence. For our purposes, “dangling” and “misplaced” are equivalent.

How Do We Correct a Misplaced or Dangling Participle?

Given the infinite combinations and permutations available in the English language, we have several ways of correcting a misplaced or dangling participle. We will illustrate, however, only three.

1. Turn the Misplaced or Dangling Participle Into a Dependent Clause.

This means that you take the ing word (the participle), give it a subject, turn it into a verb, and attach it to the main clause. Let’s take the example above, with Amaury’s unfortunate slip on the wet sidewalk.

Correct: When Amaury slipped on the wet sidewalk, the keys fell from his pocket.

Here we have taken the original participial phrase (Slipping on the wet sidewalk), and we have turned it into a dependent clause. We understand that “Amaury slipped,” not the keys.

2. Make the Thing Being Modified by the Participle, the Subject of the Main Clause.

This means we take what is being modified by the ing phrase and place it first in the sentence, right after the comma. Again, let’s use the example of Amaury’s unfortunate slip.

Correct: Slipping on the wet sidewalk, Amaury lost his keys when they fell from his pocket.

Note that “Amaury,” the person, NOT “Amaury’s keys” is placed after the comma. You may be tempted to write “Amaury’s keys,” but then you would have the same problem. Keys, even “Amaury’s keys,” do not slip on wet sidewalks; people, like Amaury, do.

3. Place the Participle as Close as Logically Possible to the Noun it Modifies.

Misplaced: Crying and screaming, Mrs. Williams led three-year old Mindy away from the toy store.

Correct: Mrs. Williams led three-year old Mindy, crying and screaming, away from the toy store.

Grammar Worksheets: Misplaced and Dangling Participles

Exercises: Rewrite each sentence to eliminate any misplaced or dangling participles.

1. Shaken, not stirred, James Bond likes his martinis.

2. While driving to the Homestead Campus, a pillow fell from James's car.

3. Shocked by the foul language on television, the remote control dropped from Aunt Sherry's hand.

4. Running across Tropical Park, the paddle boats on the lake appeared to be floating on air.

5. Attacked by the school bully, the backpack fell from Abner's shoulder.

6. Walking barefoot through the tall grass, dew drops felt good between my toes.

7. Driven by insatiable ambition and greed, the computer ran Henry's stock trading program all day.

8. Confused by the new layout of the house, the soiled diaper fell off the baby as he cried and ran from room to room.

9. Staring up at the tall buildings, the wallet fell from Jasmine's purse.
