

Verbals

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Verbals

The difference between a verbal and a verb is basically in the way it is used in a sentence. A verbal can be used as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb; it is never a verb. However, it is derived from a verb and in certain ways it retains a measure of “verbiness.”

Participles

Present participles and past participles (two of the principal parts of a verb) are commonly used with auxiliary verbs to form verb phrases: *is working, has worked, was stating, was stated, has been stated, is going, has been going, has gone, is sitting, has sat.*

When present or past participles are used *without* auxiliary verbs, they are verbals. When used as adjectives, to modify nouns or pronouns, these sorts of verbals are simply called participles.

Note: Present participles always need a helping verb to create a main (or finite) verb: you cannot create a complete thought with *John swimming*. Past participles need auxiliaries too, but since the form of verbs in the past tense and past participial tense are often the same, it may appear as though past participles do not need auxiliaries. *John sat* uses a past tense verb – *John has sat* uses the past participial form of the same verb.

Note 2: The meaning of the word “participial” is “relating to or involving a participle.” We describe tenses of participles as the present *participial* tense or the past *participial* tense. When words join with participles, as described below, they are *participial phrases*.

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A simple participle is used exactly like an adjective, next to its noun:

a *startling* cry; the *strolling* kittens; the *abandoned* toy.

A participle or a participial phrase may appear in any of several positions in a sentence, but often it modifies the subject of the sentence:

Sitting, he played his harmonica. (modifies he)

Laughing gaily, she turned away. (modifies she)

Shaking his fist at me, he walked back to the car. (modifies he)

Seen from across the valley, the red roofs are very distinct. (modifies roofs)

The auctioneer, *pausing for a moment*, looked down into the crowd.

(modifies auctioneer)

The candles *lighted* (or *lit*) *in the living room* looked very nice. (modifies candles)

He showed us the book *opened at the first page*. (modifies the direct object, book)

Participles can end in -ing, -ed, -en, or have an irregular ending.

Gerunds

A gerund looks like a present participle; it always ends in -ing: *going*, *writing*, *swimming*, *adventuring*.

It is always used as a noun. Some grammarians call this a noun participle.

His *skating* is remarkable (subject)

She enjoys *lying* in the hammock. (direct object)

Playing a musical instrument affords relaxation. (subject)

Mr. Jones objects to your *using* his lawn. (object of prep.)

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Verbal Phrases

You will notice in several of the examples above that the verbal is often accompanied by a variety of other words, forming a verbal phrase. Infinitives, participles, and gerunds *all* can create phrases. Here is where their “verb” heritage rears its head.

Verbals can be modified or have objects and complements in the same manner as a verb. Thus, verbal phrases may include modifying adjectives, adverbs, prepositional phrases, direct objects – even indirect objects and subject complements. Remember that these modifiers and/or complements are working with the verbal, forming its interior grammar, not the rest of the sentence.

Ranging for food keeps Manny and Tilde happy.

[When I decided to move the feed bag (to the basement),] they were happy.

The crew saw Manny’s bowl roll down the stairs.

The final example above is tricky. First, the infinitive is hidden because its marker *to* is absent. Second, there are two generally recognized ways to describe the action here:

- 1) “bowl” is the subject of the infinitive “to roll”;
- 2) “bowl” is DO and “to roll” (or “to roll down the stairs”) is an OC.

Most grammarians are proponents of the first theory of analysis; we shall be too.

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Infinitives

An infinitive is generally a form of a verb preceded by the infinitive marker *to*. It looks like this:

to go, to swim, to laugh, to write, to consider.

Infinitives can be formed in varied tenses (so can participles and gerunds). Auxiliary verbs help them to do so and such helping verbs are then considered part of the infinitive. Infinitives can have active or passive voice.

| | <i>Active</i> | <i>passive</i> |
|----------|--------------------------------|--|
| present: | to see, to steal | to be seen, to be stolen |
| perfect: | to have seen to have stolen | to have been seen to have been stolen |

Just like participles and gerunds, infinitives can form phrases with objects and complements:

To have seen the duck seemed lucky. (*Duck* is the object of the infinitive; the entire phrase acts as subject of the sentence.)

The young ragamuffins hoped to paint the driveway blue. (*Driveway* is the object of the infinitive; the entire phrase serves as direct object of the main verb *hoped*.)

Sometimes the sign of the infinitive, *to*, is omitted:

Help Denny tip that expensive plate. [w/ its phrase, acting as DO]

CeCe watched the fish snap at the fisherman. [w/ its phrase, acting as DO]

Can you feel the floor move? [w/ its phrase, acting as DO]

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Infinitives can function as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs:

I hate *to go*. (noun, DO)

To have fallen would have been nasty. (noun, subject)

It is time *to go*. (adj., modifies *time*)

There are plenty of jobs *to be done*. (adj, modifies *jobs*)

He always plays *to win*. (modifies the verb *plays*)

We were unable *to go*. (modifies the adjective *unable*)

To be fully informed, Josephine read her local webpage. (adverbial, modifying the entire clause)

Infinitives have greater complexity than discussed here. For additional discussion, especially about pseudo-subjects of infinitives, please see the Verbal PowerPoint on our class blog.

Find it here: <https://blogs.stockton.edu/grammar/files/2021/10/Verbals.pdf>