

# Campus Academic Resource Program

## Participles

This handout will:

- Define both present and past participles and how to use them
- Define participial phrases
- Provide sample sentences that illustrate how participles can be used correctly in a sentence
- Present exercises for students to practice identifying participles in a sentence

### What is a participle?

According to the Purdue Online Writing Lab, a **participle** is: "...a verbal that is used as an **adjective**, modifying a noun or pronoun," (for a definition of **verbal**, see the glossary section at the end of this handout). Additionally, a participial phrase can be used to describe or modify a noun or pronoun (more information on participial phrases is available in the section below).

- A participle is a kind of verb that describes the action or "state of being" of a noun or pronoun (Purdue OWL).
- A participle should be placed as close as possible to the noun(s) or pronoun(s) it describes or modifies so that it is easy to see what the participle modifies or describes. The noun(s) or pronoun(s) modified should be clearly stated (Purdue OWL).
- There are two types of participles: **present participles** and **past participles**.
  - **Present participles:** verbs in present tense that end in **-ing**, and are used to modify or describe a noun or pronoun.
    - *That flying turkey is coming straight towards me!*
      - Flying is the present continuous form of the verb "to fly." Because the verb "flying" is used as an adjective to describe the state of the action completed by the *turkey*, it is the present participle of this sentence. (for more information on verb tenses, please see the Verb Tenses handout at: <http://carp.sfsu.edu/content/helpful-handouts>)
    - *The sound of singing birds brings joy to her heart.*
      - Singing is the present continuous form of the verb "to sing." Because "singing" acts as an adjective to modify the noun *birds*, making it more specific, it is the present participle of this sentence.
  - **Past participles:** verbs in past tense, ending in **-ed, -en, -d, -t, -n, or -ne**, and are used to modify, or describe, a noun or pronoun.
    - *Last weekend my mother and I repaired the patio furniture that had broken in Thursday's storm.*
      - Broken is the past perfect tense form of the verb "to break." Because "broken" is used as an adjective to describe the *patio furniture*, it is the past participle of this sentence.
    - *According to SF Weekly, the fried butter was the most popular food item at last year's Alameda County Fair.*

# Campus Academic Resource Program

## Participles

- *Fried* is the simple past tense form of the verb “to fry.” Because “fried” is used as an adjective to describe the *butter*, it is the past participle of this sentence.

### Participial Phrases

According to the Purdue Online Writing Lab, a **participial phrase** is “a group of words consisting of a participle and the modifier(s) and/or noun(s), pronoun(s), or noun phrase(s) that function as the direct object(s), indirect object(s), or complement(s) of the action or state expressed in the participle.”

- A participial phrase can be simply described as an adjectival phrase that begins with a participle (Grammar Monster).
- Participial phrases most often appear at the beginning of a sentence, and describe something in the main clause.
- When a participial phrase is used at the beginning of a sentence, it is separated from the main clause by a comma.
- When constructing a participial phrase, remember that present participles can be used in past tense sentences, and past participles can be used in present tense sentences without changing the tense of that sentence.
  - ***Present Participle Phrase in a Past Tense Sentence***
    - *Standing in the warm summer rain, Jamie reflected on how lucky she was to live in California.*
      - In this sentence, the participial phrase *standing in the warm summer rain* describes the noun *Jamie*. “Standing” is the present continuous tense form of the verb “to stand.” “Standing” describes what Jamie was doing in the rain, making it the participle.
      - This sentence is past tense because the verb “to reflect” is in its past tense form, “reflected.”
      - The noun *Jamie* is placed immediately following the comma to clearly show that Jamie is the noun described by the participial phrase *standing in the warm summer rain*.
  - ***Past Participle Phrase in a Present Tense Sentence***
    - *Admired by many, Keegan understands his duty as a hall monitor.*
      - In this sentence, the participial phrase *admired by many* describes the noun *Keegan*. “Admired” is the simple past form of the verb “to admire.” “Admired” describes how Keegan is considered by others, making it the participle.
      - This sentence is present tense because the verb “to understand” is in its present tense form, “understands.”
- A participial phrase can also appear after the noun(s) or pronoun(s) it modifies, but should be placed immediately following the noun(s) or pronoun(s) it modifies.

# Campus Academic Resource Program

## Participles

- Example: *When I arrived at the party I found John sleeping on the couch.*
  - In this sentence, the participial phrase *sleeping on the couch* is used to describe the noun *John*. “Sleeping” is the present continuous tense form of the verb “to sleep”, and describes what John was doing on the couch, making it the participle.
  - The participial phrase *sleeping on the couch* is placed immediately following the noun *John* to clearly show that John is the noun being described by the participial phrase.
- **Note:** If a participial phrase is not immediately located before or after the noun(s) or pronoun(s) it modifies, and if the noun(s) or pronoun(s) being modified is not immediately stated, you risk creating a **dangling modifier**.
  - Incorrect: *Working all day in the hot sun, her skin felt like it was getting sunburned.*
    - In this sentence, the participial phrase *working all day in the hot sun* becomes a dangling modifier because it is not clearly stated who or what performs the action described. Surely, her skin could not be considered as the noun that has been working all day in the hot sun.
  - Correct: *Working all day in the hot sun, she felt like her skin was getting sunburned.*
    - Because the pronoun *she* immediately follows the participial phrase *working all day in the hot sun*, it is clearly understood that she is completing the action described by the participial phrase working all day in the hot sun.

### Exercises

Identify the participle or participles in the following sentences and determine whether they are in the past or present tense.

1. I love waking up to the light of the rising sun.

Participle:

Tense:

2. Running in a state of panic, Johnny crossed the entire campus in under 10 minutes to barely make it to his test on time.

Participle:

Tense:

3. Mary only ate cookies baked by her grandmother.

Participle:

Tense:

4. Beaten by his opponent, Jeremiah left the boxing ring determined to become a better fighter.

Participle:

Tense:

5. Looking up at the clouds, Maleah wondered what turn her life would take next.

Participle:

Tense:

## Campus Academic Resource Program

### Participles

6. The snake, startled by a passing hiker, hissed loudly and rattled its tail to warn anyone around that he was dangerous.

Participle:

Tense:

#### Glossary:

**Adjective:** a word that modifies, or describes, a noun or pronoun (Purdue OWL).

**Adjectival phrase:** a group of words consisting of an adjective and the modifiers used to describe a noun or pronoun (Grammar Monster).

**Dangling modifier:** a word or phrase that modifies a word not clearly stated in the sentence (Purdue OWL).

**Participle:** a kind of verb that describes the action or “state of being” of a noun or pronoun (Purdue OWL).

**Participle Phrase:** an adjectival phrase that begins with a participle (Grammar Monster).

**Verbal:** words whose base is a verb, but act like something else, i.e. a noun or adjective.

# Campus Academic Resource Program

## Participles

### Works Cited

"Dangling Modifiers and How to Correct Them." Purdue OWL: Gerunds, Participles, and Infinitives. Purdue U, n.d. Web. 9 May 2014.

"Participles." Purdue OWL: Gerunds, Participles, and Infinitives. Purdue U, n.d. Web. 9 May 2014.

Shrives, Craig. "What are Participles?". Grammar-Monster.com. n.p. n.d. Web. 9 July 2014.

ANSWER KEY: 1. rising (present participle); 2. running (present); 3. cooked (past); 4. beaten (past); 5. looking (present); 6. startled (past)