

PARTICIPLE TENSE & DANGLING PARTICIPLES

Participles

As Verbs: Participles are verbs with –ed, -en or –ing endings which are combined with a form of “are” or “have” in order to indicate a time or condition in which the action is taking place.

Examples: I am running. We are jumping. We have jumped. We have stolen the apple pie.

As adjectives: When used alone, participles function as adjectives.

Examples: Stolen pies. Crumbled cookies. Running water.

Participial Phrases

Can be formed from the verb’s present participle (-ing form) and from its past participle (-ed form). Participle phrases function as adjectives and use participles to replace and shorten phrases that describe (modify) the main subject of a sentence. Participle phrases can help your writing “flow” more easily by eliminating choppy or repetitive sentences.

Examples: Consider the following ordinary sentences and their changes.

A. The train reached Washington at 4:30 a.m. It was running right on schedule.

- 1) Running right on schedule, the train reached Washington at 4:30 a.m.
- 2) The train, running right on schedule, reached Washington at 4:30 a.m.
- 3) The train reached Washington at 4:30 a.m., running right on schedule.

B. The census takers go from door to door. The census takers interview millions of people.

- 1) Going from door to door, census takers interview millions of people.
- 2) The census takers interview millions of people, going from door to door.

Maintaining Clear Subjects with Participial Phrases

Introductory participle phrases must describe the subject of the sentence. This rule is especially important when a sentence contains more than one noun.

Dangling participles occur when it is unclear what the participle phrase is describing.

Examples:

- Landing at the airport, the reporters surrounded the president's plane.
- Having bitten several pedestrians, the owner forcibly muzzled his dog.
- Wondering irresolutely what to do next, the clock struck twelve.
- Having been starved for days, the ham sandwich waited appealingly.

In the first two sentences, it is hard to know which noun is being described by the participle phrases. Did the man in the second sentence bite the pedestrians, or was his dog the attacker?

In the last two sentences, the subject is missing from the sentence. This absence creates a dangling participle. Dangling participles describe something which is implied, but not clearly stated.

To avoid confusion about the subject of a sentence with participle phrases, place the subject immediately after the participle phrase.

Consider the previous examples with the subject clarified: (the participial phrase and subject are in bold)

- **Landing at the airport on time, the president's plane** was surrounded by reporters.
- **Having bitten several pedestrians, the dog** was muzzled by his owner.
- **Wondering irresolutely what to do next, I** listened as the clock struck twelve.
- **Having been starved for days, I** found the ham sandwich waiting appealingly.