

VERBALS AND VERB PHRASES

Infinitives, gerunds, and particles are called verbals because they are derived from verbs but used as some other part of speech. Like verbs, verbals may take subjects and complements and be modified by adverbs. A verbal, when taken together with its related words, become a **verbal phrase**.

I. The Infinitive

An infinitive is derived from a verb, is preceded by the word “to” and is used as an adjective, as an adverb, or--most often--as a noun.

1. To save is difficult. (noun-subject)
2. She wanted to go. (noun-direct object)
3. He has money to burn. (adjective-how much money)
4. They studied to learn. (adverb-why they studied)

An **infinitive phrase** consists of a simple infinitive together with its subject, object, modifiers or any combination.

Examples:

1. She expected to marry soon.
2. She expected George to marry her soon.
3. To earn a good salary is his desire.
4. Her plan is to learn automotive engineering.
5. We tried to help the survivors.

Note: In some sentences the “to” is omitted; for example, “She made the boy obey her.” To prove that obey is indeed an infinitive, substitute the verb forced for the verb made.

II. The Gerund

Examples:

1. Swimming is good exercise.
2. He loved reading.
3. She gave dieting a try.
4. He fond of sleeping.

A gerund is derived from a verb, ends with the suffix “-ing,” and functions only as a noun.

Examples:

1. Getting a new job is sometimes difficult.
2. The personal office suggests sending applications early.
3. He got the job by appearing early.
4. Going to the dentist takes courage.

III. The Participle

A participle is derived from a verb and is used as an adjective.

The **present participle** ends in “ing” (for example, talking, swimming, running, and being).

The **past participle** is derived from the past participle form of a verb (for example, talked, frozen, swum, done).

Examples:

1. The laughing man stumbled over a broken rock.
2. The annoyed mother tried to calm the screaming child.
3. She gave the fallen man a helping hand.

Participial phrases consist of simple participles and their objects, complements, modifiers, or a combination.

Examples:

1. Nervously eating fruitcake, she told us about the man buried in the cellar.
2. George listened to the girl reading poetry.
3. The man leading the march is Rev. Jesse Jackson.
4. The lady reading to the students teaches at Tulsa Community College.

There are several important reasons for you to be able to recognize and use phrases correctly:

1. Phrases are sentence parts.
2. The proper placement of phrases is important. They should occupy the same sentence placement as the part of speech they represent.
3. Recognizing a phrase can help you avoid errors called misplaced modifiers and fragments.

Although verbals are verb forms, they are never used as verbs.