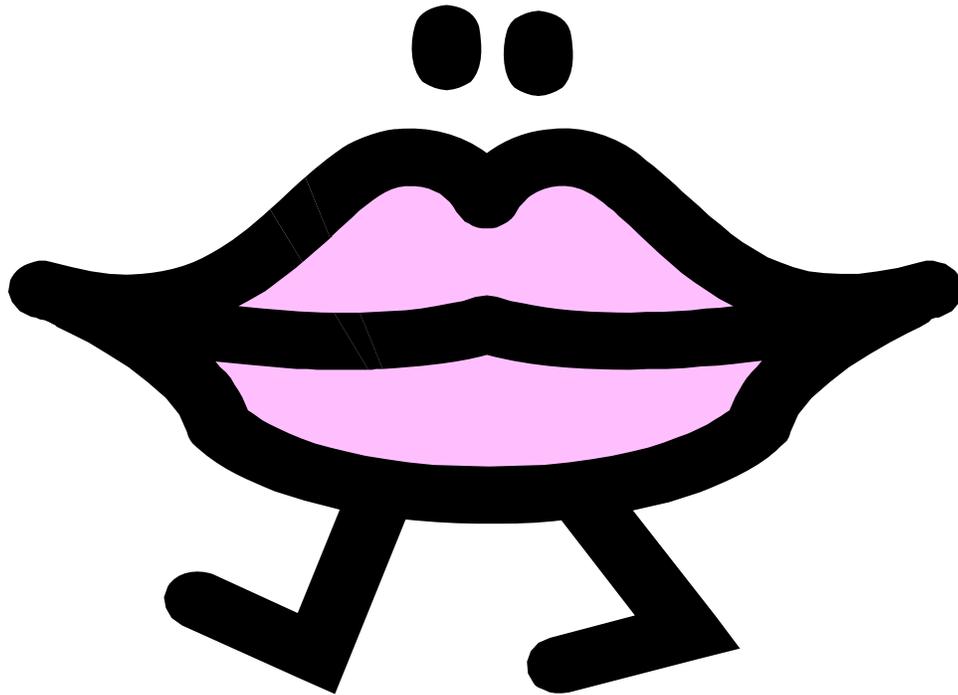


# Verbal Phrases



**ASC Learning Packet**  
**College of the Redwoods**

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# Infinitives

An infinitive is a verbal consisting of the word *to* plus a verb (in its simplest "stem" form) and functioning as a noun, adjective, or adverb. The term *verbal* indicates that an infinitive, like the other two kinds of verbals, is based on a verb and therefore expresses action or a state of being. However, the infinitive may function as a subject, direct object, subject complement, adjective, or adverb in a sentence. Although an infinitive is easy to locate because of the *to* + verb form, deciding what function it has in a sentence can sometimes be confusing.

- *To wait* seemed foolish when decisive action was required. (subject)
- Everyone wanted *to go*. (direct object)
- His ambition is *to fly*. (subject complement)
- He lacked the strength *to resist*. (adjective)
- We must study *to learn*. (adverb)

Be sure not to confuse an infinitive--a verbal consisting of *to* plus a verb--with a prepositional phrase beginning with *to*, which consists of *to* plus a noun or pronoun and any modifiers.

**Infinitives:** to fly, to draw, to become, to enter, to stand, to catch, to belong

**Prepositional Phrases:** to him, to the committee, to my house, to the mountains, to us, to this address

**An Infinitive Phrase** is a group of words consisting of an infinitive and the modifier(s) and/or (pro)noun(s) or noun phrase(s) that function as the actor(s), direct object(s), indirect object(s), or complement(s) of the action or state expressed in the infinitive, such as:

We intended *to leave early*.

**The infinitive phrase functions as the direct object of the verb *intended*** to leave (infinitive) early (adverb)

I have a paper *to write before class*.

**The infinitive phrase functions as an adjective modifying *paper*** to write (infinitive) before class (prepositional phrase as adverb)

Phil agreed *to give me a ride*.

**The infinitive phrase functions as the direct object of the verb *agreed***. to give (infinitive) me (indirect object of action expressed in infinitive) a ride (direct object of action expressed in infinitive)

They asked *me to bring some food*.

**The infinitive phrase functions as the direct object of the verb *asked*** me (actor or "subject" of infinitive phrase) to bring (infinitive) some food (direct object of action expressed in infinitive)

Everyone wanted *Carol to be the captain of the team*.

**The infinitive phrase functions as the direct object of the verb *wanted***. Carol (actor or "subject" of infinitive phrase) to be (infinitive) the captain (subject complement for *Carol*, via state of being expressed in infinitive) of the team (prepositional phrase as adjective)

**Actors:** In these last two examples the actor of the infinitive phrase could be roughly characterized as the "subject" of the action or state expressed in the infinitive. It is somewhat misleading to use the word *subject*, however, since an infinitive phrase is not a full clause with a subject and a finite verb. Also notice that when it is a pronoun, the actor appears in the objective case (*me*, not *I*, in the fourth example). Certain verbs, when they take an infinitive direct object, require an actor for the infinitive phrase; others can't have an actor. Still other verbs can go either way, as the charts below illustrate.

**Verbs that take infinitive objects without actors:**

agree	begin	continue	decide
fail	hesitate	hope	intend
learn	neglect	offer	plan
prefer	pretend	promise	refuse

**Gerunds**

A gerund is a verbal that ends in *-ing* and functions as a noun. The term *verbal* indicates that a gerund, like the other two kinds of verbals, is based on a verb and therefore expresses action or a state of being. However, since a gerund functions as a noun, it occupies some positions in a sentence that a noun ordinarily would, for example: subject, direct object, subject complement, and object of preposition.

**Gerund as subject:**

- *Traveling* might satisfy your desire for new experiences.
- The study abroad program might satisfy your desire for new experiences.

Gerund as direct object:

- They do not appreciate my *singing*.
- They do not appreciate my assistance.

### Gerund as subject complement:

- My cat's favorite activity is *sleeping*.
- My cat's favorite food is salmon.

### Gerund as object of preposition:

- The police arrested him for *speeding*.
- The police arrested him for criminal activity.

*A Gerund Phrase is a group of words consisting of a gerund and the modifier(s) and/or (pro)noun(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 gerund, such as:*

*Finding a needle in a haystack* would be easier than what we're trying to do.

**The gerund phrase functions as the subject of the sentence.** Finding (gerund) a needle (direct object of action expressed in gerund) in a haystack (prepositional phrase as adverb)

Newt's favorite tactic has been *lying to his constituents*.

**The gerund phrase functions as the subject complement** lying to (gerund) his constituents (direct object of action expressed in gerund)

You might get in trouble for *faking an illness to avoid work*.

**The gerund phrase functions as the object of the preposition *for*** faking (gerund) an illness (direct object of action expressed in gerund) to avoid work (infinitive phrase as adverb)

*Being the boss* made Jeff feel uneasy.

**The gerund phrase functions as the subject of the**

**sentence.** Being (gerund) the boss (subject complement for *Jeff*, via state of being expressed in gerund)

**Punctuation-A gerund virtually never requires any punctuation with it.**

**Points to remember:**

1. A gerund is a verbal ending in *-ing* that is used as a noun.
2. A gerund phrase consists of a gerund plus modifier(s), object(s), and/or complement(s).
3. Gerunds and gerund phrases virtually never require punctuation.

### **Exercise on Gerunds:**

Underline the gerunds or gerund phrases in the following sentences and label how they function in the sentence (subject, direct object, subject complement, object of preposition).

1. Swimming keeps me in shape.
2. Swimming in your pool is always fun.
3. Telling your father was a mistake.
4. The college recommends sending applications early.
5. He won the game by scoring during the overtime period.
6. Her most important achievement was winning the national championship.
7. Going to work today took all my energy.
8. Fighting for a losing cause made them depressed.

### **Participles**

A participle is a verbal that is used as an adjective and most often ends in *-ing* or *-ed*. The term *verbal* indicates that a participle, like the other two kinds of verbals, is based on a verb and therefore expresses action or a

state of being. However, since they function as adjectives, participles modify nouns or pronouns. There are two types of participles: present participles and past participles. Present participles end in *-ing*. Past participles end in *-ed*, *-en*, *-d*, *-t*, or *-n*, as in the words *asked*, *eaten*, *saved*, *dealt*, and *seen*.

- The *crying* baby had a wet diaper.
- *Shaken*, he walked away from the *wrecked* car.
- The *burning* log fell off the fire.
- *Smiling*, she hugged the *panting* dog.

***A participial phrase is a group of words consisting of a participle and the modifier(s) and/or (pro)noun(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, such as:***

*Removing his coat*, Jack rushed to the river.

**The participial phrase functions as an adjective modifying *Jack*.** Removing (participle) his coat (direct object of action expressed in participle)

Delores noticed her cousin *walking along the shoreline*.

**The participial phrase functions as an adjective modifying *cousin*** walking (participle) along the shoreline (prepositional phrase as adverb)

Children *introduced to music early* develop strong intellectual skills.

**The participial phrase functions as an adjective modifying *children*** introduced (to) (participle) music (direct object of action expressed in participle) early (adverb)

*Having been a gymnast*, Lynn knew the importance of exercise.

**The participial phrase functions as an adjective modifying *Lynn*.** Having been (participle) a gymnast (subject

complement for *Lynn*, via state of being expressed in participle)

**Placement:** In order to prevent confusion, a participial phrase must be placed as close to the noun it modifies as possible, and the noun must be clearly stated.

- *Carrying a heavy pile of books*, his foot caught on a step. \*
- *Carrying a heavy pile of books*, he caught his foot on a step.

In the first sentence there is no clear indication of who or what is performing the action expressed in the participle *carrying*. Certainly *foot* can't be logically understood to function in this way. This situation is an example of a [dangling modifier](#) error since the modifier (the participial phrase) is not modifying any specific noun in the sentence and is thus left "dangling." Since a person must be doing the carrying for the sentence to make sense, a noun or pronoun that refers to a person must be in the place immediately after the participial phrase, as in the second sentence.

**Punctuation:** When a participial phrase begins a sentence, a comma should be placed after the phrase.

- *Arriving at the store*, I found that it was closed.
- *Washing and polishing the car*, Frank developed sore muscles.

If the participle or participial phrase comes in the middle of a sentence, it should be set off with commas only if the information is not essential to the meaning of the sentence.

- Sid, *watching an old movie*, drifted in and out of sleep.
- The church, *destroyed by a fire*, was never rebuilt.

Note that if the participial phrase is essential to the meaning of the sentence, no commas should be used:

- The student *earning the highest grade point average* will receive a special award.
- The guy *wearing the chicken costume* is my cousin.

If a participial phrase comes at the end of a sentence, a comma usually precedes the phrase if it modifies an earlier word in the sentence but not if the phrase directly follows the word it modifies.

- The local residents often saw Ken wandering through the streets. (The phrase modifies *Ken*, not *residents*.)
- Tom nervously watched the woman, alarmed by her silence. (The phrase modifies *Tom*, not *woman*.)

**Points to remember:**

1. A participle is a verbal ending in *-ing* (present) or *-ed, -en, -d, -t, or -n* (past) that functions as an adjective, modifying a noun or pronoun.
2. A participial phrase consists of a participle plus modifier(s), object(s), and/or complement(s).
3. Participles and participial phrases must be placed as close to the nouns or pronouns they modify as possible, and those nouns or pronouns must be clearly stated.
4. A participial phrase is set off with commas when it: a) comes at the beginning of a sentence, b) interrupts a sentence as a nonessential element, or c) comes at the end of a sentence and is separated from the word it modifies.

**Exercise on Participles:**

Underline the participial phrase(s) in each of the following sentences, and draw a line to the noun or pronoun modified.

1. Getting up at five, we got an early start.
2. Facing college standards, the students realized that they hadn't worked hard enough in high school.
3. Statistics reported by the National Education Association revealed that seventy percent of American colleges offer remedial English classes emphasizing composition.
4. The overloaded car gathered speed slowly.
5. Gathering my courage, I asked for a temporary loan.

In each of the following sentences, underline the participial phrase(s), draw a line to the word(s) modified, and punctuate the sentence correctly. Remember that some sentences may not need punctuation.

6. Starting out as an army officer Karen's father was frequently transferred.

7. Mrs. Sears showing more bravery than wisdom invited thirty boys and girls to a party.

8. The student left in charge of the class was unable to keep order.

9. Applicants must investigate various colleges learning as much as possible about them before applying for admission.

10. The crying boy angered by the bully began to fight.