

A verbal is a form of a verb used as an adjective, adverb, or noun. There are three types of verbals: participles, gerunds, and infinitives. Each of them can be used by itself or as part of a verbal phrase.

PARTICIPLES

A **participle** is a verb in either the present progressive tense (*-ing*) or the past tense (usually *-ed*) form that is used as an adjective.

EXAMPLES: The **crying** baby reached for his mother. (*Crying*, a form of the verb *to cry*, modifies or describes the noun *baby*.)

Frightened, the **panicking** boy jumped away from the spider. (*Frightened*, the past participle derived from the verb *to frighten*, modifies the noun *boy*. *Panicking* is the present participle form of the verb, *to panic*. It also modifies the noun *boy*.)

GERUNDS

A **gerund** is the present progressive (*-ing*) form of a verb used as a noun.

EXAMPLES: **Dancing** is not allowed in the library. (*Dancing*, a form of the verb *to dance*, is the subject of the sentence. What is not allowed? *Dancing*.)

Mark dislikes **singing**. (*Singing* is the direct object of the verb *dislikes*. Mark dislikes what? *Singing*.)

INFINITIVES

An **infinitive** is usually a verb preceded by the word *to*. It can serve as a noun, adjective, or adverb.

EXAMPLES: **To fly** would be fun. (*To fly* is a noun that serves as the subject of the sentence.)

Erika is the woman **to visit**. (*To visit* is an adjective modifying the noun *woman*.)

To win, I will have to work very hard. (*To win* is an adverb that modifies the verb *work*. It answers the question, "Why?")

VERBAL PHRASES

Although a verbal may consist of a single word, **objects**, **complements**, and/or **modifiers** may be added to the original participle, gerund, or infinitive to make it into a verbal phrase.

OBJECTS

There are two types of **objects**: **direct objects** and **indirect objects**. A **direct object** receives the action of the verb. An **indirect object** names the noun *to whom* or *for whom* the action was done.

EXAMPLES: **Eating the pizza** was no small task. (*The pizza* is the direct object of the gerund, *eating*. It is the answer to the question, "Eating what?")

To win the prize would make my day! (*The prize* is the direct object of the infinitive, *to win*. It is the answer to the question, "To win what?")

Giving her those roses was the hardest thing I've ever done. (The noun, *roses* [modified by *those*], is the direct object of the verb, *giving*. It answers the question, "Giving what?" The pronoun, *her*, is the **indirect object**. It answers the question, "To whom?")

COMPLEMENTS

Complements rename or define nouns (subjects or objects) in the sentence.

EXAMPLES: **Being the oldest child**, she did a lot of free babysitting. (The noun, *child* [*the* and *oldest* both modify *child*], is the complement of the subject of the sentence, *she*.)
To make him happy is nearly impossible. (The pronoun, *him*, is the direct object of the verb, *to make*. It answers the question, "To make what/whom?" The adjective, *happy*, is a complement, which defines *him*.)

MODIFIERS

Although verbals are modifiers, they may also take modifiers themselves. These modifiers describe, limit, or clarify the verbals.

EXAMPLES: **Eating quickly**, I had no time to talk. (*Quickly* describes *how* I was eating.)
Walking to the park, they saw a deer. (*To the park* modifies the word *walking* by describing *where* they were walking.)

A FEW CAUTIONS

Verbal phrases are the source of many common errors:

SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

Verbal phrases can never stand alone as a sentence. Many sentence fragments are actually verbal phrases that should be attached to a neighboring sentence.

FRAGMENT: **Making our party complete**. Erin brought the cake.
CORRECT: **Making our party complete**, Erin brought the cake.

MISPLACED MODIFIERS

Sometimes, a verbal may be located too far from the word it modifies, causing the meaning of the sentence to become unclear. Such modifiers should be moved closer to the words they modify.

UNCLEAR: Joe ate the chicken **sitting in the chair**. (Who is sitting in the chair, *Joe* or *the chicken*?)
CLEAR: **Sitting in the chair**, Joe ate the chicken. (It is now clear that *Joe* is in the chair.)

DANGLING MODIFIERS

If the word that a verbal describes is not actually in the sentence, the verbal is a dangling modifier. To correct such a problem, the modified word should be added to the sentence.

DANGLING: **Having sent the letter overnight**, it will probably arrive on time. (Who has sent the letter? The subject of the sentence is *it* [the letter], but *having sent the letter overnight* cannot modify the letter. The sender is not in the sentence.)
CLEAR: **Having sent the letter overnight**, we think it will arrive on time. (The subject of the verbal, *we*, is included in the sentence.)

HELPING VERBS

Participles and gerunds never have helping verbs. If the *-ing* form of a verb follows a helping verb, it is a verb, not a verbal.

EXAMPLE: The man *is* **amusing** the teacher.