THE PARTICIPLE PHRASE

Recognize a participle phrase when you find one.

A participle phrase will begin with a present or past participle. If the participle is present, it will dependably end in *ing*. Likewise, a regular past participle will end in a consistent *ed*. Irregular past participles, unfortunately, conclude in all kinds of ways. (See this list for examples.)

Since all phrases require two or more words, a participle phrase will often include objects and/or modifiers that complete the thought.

Here are examples:

- Crunching caramel corn for the entire movie
- Washed with soap and water
- Stuck in the back of the closet behind the obsolete computer

Participle phrases always function as adjectives, describing a nearby noun or pronoun.

Read these examples:

- The horse *trotting up to the fence* hopes that you have an apple or carrot.

  *Trotting up to the fence* modifies the noun *horse*.

- The water drained slowly in the pipe *clogged with dog hair*.

  *Clogged with dog hair* modifies the noun *pipe*.

- *Eaten by mosquitoes*, we wished that we had made hotel, not campsite, reservations.

  *Eaten by mosquitoes* modifies the pronoun *we*. 
Do not confuse a present participle phrase with a gerund phrase.

Present participle phrases and **gerund phrases** are easy to confuse because they both begin with an *ing* word. The difference is the function that they provide in a sentence. A present participle phrase will always act as an **adjective** while a gerund phrase will always behave as a **noun**.

Consider these examples:

- **Walking on the beach**, Delores dodged the jellyfish that had washed ashore.
  
  *Walking on the beach* = present participle phrase describing the noun *Delores*.

- *Walking on the beach* is painful if jellyfish have washed ashore.
  
  *Walking on the beach* = gerund phrase, the **subject** of the **verb** is.

- **Waking to the buzz of the alarm clock**, Freddie cursed the arrival of another Monday.
  
  *Waking to the buzz of the alarm clock* = present participle phrase describing the noun *Freddie*.

- Freddy hates waking to the buzz of the alarm clock.
  
  *Waking to the buzz of the alarm clock* = gerund phrase, the **direct object** of the **verb** *hates*.

- After a long day at school and work, LaShae found her roommate Ben eating the last of the leftover pizza.
  
  *Eating the last of the leftover pizza* = present participle phrase describing the noun *Ben*.

- Ben's rudest habit is eating the last of the leftover pizza.
  
  *Eating the last of the leftover pizza* = gerund phrase, the **subject complement** of the **verb** *is*. 
Punctuate a participle phrase correctly.

When a participle phrase introduces a **main clause**, separate the two sentence components with a comma.

This is the pattern:

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Participle Phrase + , + Main Clause
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Read this example:

Glazed with barbecue sauce, the rack of ribs lay nestled next to a pile of sweet coleslaw.

When a participle phrase concludes a main clause and is describing the word right in front of it, you need no punctuation to connect the two sentence parts.

This is the pattern:

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Main Clause + Ø + Participle Phrase
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Read this example:

Mariah risked petting the pit bull wagging its stub tail.

But when a participle phrase concludes a main clause and modifies a word farther up in the sentence, you will need a comma.

This is the pattern:

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Main Clause + , + Participle Phrase
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Read this example:

Cooper enjoyed dinner at Audrey's house, agreeing to a large slice of cherry pie even though he was full to the point of bursting.

The house, of course, is not doing the agreeing; Cooper is! Because of the distance between **Cooper** and the participle phrase that describes him, the comma is necessary.
Do not misplace or dangle participle phrases.

Introductory participle phrases are the most common modifier to **misplace** or **dangle**. In clear, logical sentences, you will find these modifiers right next to the words that they describe.

*Shouting with happiness, William* celebrated his chance to interview at SunTrust Bank.

Notice that the participle phrase sits right in front of *William*, the one doing the shouting.

If too much distance separates an introductory participle phrase and its target, the modifier is misplaced.

*Draped neatly on a hanger, William* borrowed Grandpa’s old **suit** to wear to the interview.

The suit, not William, is on the hanger! The modifier must come closer to the word it is meant to describe:

*For the interview, William* borrowed Grandpa’s old **suit**, which was draped neatly on a hanger.

If the sentence fails to include a target, the modifier is dangling.

*Straightening his tie and smoothing his hair, the appointment time for the interview had finally arrived.*

We assume William is about to interview, but where is he in the sentence? We need a target for the participle phrase *straightening his tie and smoothing his hair*.

*Straightening his tie and smoothing his hair, William* was relieved that the appointment time for the interview had finally arrived.