

#8

Verbals

When is a verb not a verb? When it's a verbal. You may have noticed verbs ending in –ing or verbs that have “to” before them. Be careful with these. Depending on how they are being used, they might not be verbs at all. Here's what they could be.

Gerunds – A verb ending in –ing that is functioning like a noun.

Participles – A verb ending in –ing or the past participle form that is functioning like an adjective.

Infinitives – A verb preceded by the word “to” that is functioning as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb.

Verbs ending in –ing: Gerund or Participle?

Ask yourself what the word is doing in the sentence. Is it a subject or object? If so, it's a **gerund**, and should be treated as a noun.

Examples:

- Running is my favorite leisure activity. (In this sentence, running is the grammatical subject, which tells us that it is a gerund).
- Getting into college is difficult. (Same deal).
- I love fishing. (fishing is a direct object – again, a gerund).

If the –ing word is describing something, then it is a **participle**.

Examples:

The man churning the butter is my father. (In this sentence, churning is describing the subject “man,” which tells us that it is a participle).

Trembling with fear, I opened the door. (Here, trembling is modifying the subject I. It is a participle).

The stolen car was never located. (Stolen is a past participle form of the verb steal. It is functioning as an adjective modifying the noun car).

*Note – the words accompanying the participle are part of a single grammatical unit known as a *participial phrase*. The whole phrase works together as one modifier. In the first example sentence, the phrase “churning the butter” is the participial phrase because, taken as a whole, it indicates which man the sentence is talking about.

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One more thing to be aware of: not all verbs ending in -ing are gerunds or participles. Sometimes they are progressive verbs. If the -ing verb is preceded by any form of “to be” (am, are, is, was, were, will be), it is a verb in the progressive form.

To + Verb:

Any time a verb is preceded by the word to, it is an infinitive. Infinitives can work as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs.

Examples:

- (As a noun) To give up in the middle of the game is unacceptable. (To give up is the subject of this sentence. It is an infinitive noun).
- (As an adjective) Do you have anything to do while you wait? (To do is an adjective because it is modifying the noun anything).
- (As an adverb) I will go with him to seek revenge. (To seek is an adverb because it is explaining *why* I will go).

*Note - Again, as with participles, any words or phrases accompanying the infinitive are part of a single grammatical unit known as an *infinitive phrase*. For example, in the first sentence, “To give up in the middle of the game” is the infinitive phrase.

PRACTICE: Now try some yourself.

Write two sentences using the verb “eat” first as a noun, then as a participle.

1. _____
—

2. _____
—

Now write some sentences using infinitives. You can decide if you want them to function as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs.

1. _____
—

2. _____
—