

What Are Participles and Participial Phrases?

Participles are verbals that act like adjectives. **Participial phrases** include a participle and all of its modifiers to form a phrase. Do not confuse verbals with verb phrases. Remember, verb phrases show the action of a sentence and are the main verb and any associated helping verbs. A verbal, on the other hand, is a verb (usually with an *-ed* or *-ing*) that acts like an adjective

The girls are **swimming** in the lake. (verb phrase: are + swimming = present progressive)

Swimming in the lake are the girls. (participle)

NOTE: Notice that the verbal phrase has a helping verb and the participle does not. This is an easy clue to look for to help determine if the word(s) in question is a verb or a participle. Be aware, though, that standard past tense verbs do not have helping verbs and can also end in *-ed*. Use this tip to “help” you, but do not fully rely on it 100 percent.

As a reminder from your verb lessons, remember that participles exist in two forms—present and past. Present participles end in *-ing* and past participles end in *-ed*. Past participles refer to previous actions but don’t always end in *-ed* as in the case of irregular verbs. This is where the hint mentioned above comes in very handy. Whether or not the verb is regular or irregular, if it is used as a verb in this form it will have a helping verb. If it is not used as a verb, there will be no helping verb. As a reminder, the helping verbs associated with the present participle and the past participle are: am, is, are, was, were, have, has, had. Participles and Participial phrases do NOT have helping verbs associated with their use, but can occur in the sentence as the main verb—as in the examples above.

Examples:

In the examples below, notice how the *-ed* and *-ing* words are used in the sentence. **Verbal phrases** are in bold, and **participles** are marked in red. The noun / pronoun being modified is underlined.

Apparently alone in the house, John **was unnerved** by the sound of a **crying** baby.

Disgusted, Marsh **threw** her mostly **eaten** hot dog in the trash. (eaten = irregular verb)

Her **dancing** bear, a pet she **had loved** for years, suddenly **jumped** the fence.

The family **moved** in their brand- new **prefabricated** home.

The television show **spoke** of the ancient Mayans’ **forgotten** past. (irregular use)

Ryan **spotted** his girlfriend **walking hand in hand with another guy**.

Dropping the groceries on the counter, Molly **ran** to her bedroom to check on the dog.

View the image to the right. How many participial phrases can you create from the actions or “imagined” actions?



Well of Death stuntmen—Dar Yasin—wikimedia.org