



Checking Participle Phrases

Participle phrases and information for readers but can become problematic for reasons such as confusing the subject of the sentence and leading to incorrect comma use. Knowing what a participle is and how to use them effectively can tighten your writing and make it clear and engaging for readers.

What is a Participle?

The term refers to words usually used as verbs to name an action, but here the verb is used to modify nouns or pronouns, therefore acting as an adjective or adverb.

They come in two forms:

1. Present (ending with –ing), such as leveling, heating, etc.
2. Past (ending with –ed, -en, -t, -n, or –ne), such as talked, lost, known, etc.

Participle Use

As one-word modifiers:

Ex. The *raging* river swept the raft down to the rocks.

Here, the participle *raging* modifies the noun *river*, and the relationship is clear, as the words are closely connected.

When using an entire phrase, a participle combines with other words to form an adjective to modify the noun/pronoun:

Ex. *Squeezing the rope tightly*, she swung out over the lake.

The example sentence has the participle *squeezing* with the object *rope* and the adverb *tightly*.

Note that for clarity, the participle phrase is immediately followed by the pronoun, *she*, to show the noun being modified. When the participle and the noun are not clearly connected, we call that a dangling modifier.

Comma Use for Participle Phrases

We can also note the comma between the participle phrase and the independent clause. When a participle phrase starts a sentence, we use a comma after the phrase.



Similarly, when the participle phrase is at the end of sentence and distanced from the noun, it also is separated by a comma.

Ex. He walked quickly down the alley, stumbling over the waste of long closed vendors.

When the participle phrase is in the middle of a sentence, we must consider whether it is restrictive or nonrestrictive. Restrictive phrases are essential to the meaning of a sentence while nonrestrictive phrases add extra information which does not change the sentence's meaning. Restrictive phrases are not set off by commas while nonrestrictive phrases are set off by commas.

A great resource on composition, *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White, provides a helpful test for such phrases: if the participle phrase can be written as its own sentence, then it is a nonessential which should be set off in commas.

For questions, additional resources, or scheduling a session to review your writing, visit the Learning Center website for Writing Resources at [ECC Learning Center - Writing Resources](#).

