

Verbals: Participles

1 Here's the Idea

A **verbal** is a verb form that acts as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb. Verbals may be participles, gerunds, or infinitives.

- A **participle is a verb form that functions as an adjective**. Like adjectives, participles modify nouns or pronouns.

MODIFIES MODIFIES
Smiling, he ate another fried chicken wing.
↑ PRONOUN ↑ NOUN

Participles may be **present participles** or **past participles**.

LITERARY MODEL

It [*Tyrannosaurus rex*] came on great
oiled, resilient, striding legs.

—Ray Bradbury, "A Sound of Thunder"

PAST PARTICIPLE

PRESENT PARTICIPLE

WORD MODIFIED

A **participial phrase** consists of a participle plus its modifiers and complements. The whole phrase below modifies *he*.

MODIFIER

COMPLEMENT

Foolishly wasting time, he studied the broken creature.

To learn about the present and past participle forms of verbs, see p. 130.

2 Why It Matters in Writing

By using modifiers made from action verbs, you can make your descriptions more lively and vivid.

LITERARY MODEL

And then, for some reason, Millicent
thought of the heather birds. Swooping
carefree over the moors, they would go singing
and crying out across the great spaces of air ...
their wings flashing quick and purple in the
bright sun.

PARTICIPIAL PHRASES

WORDS MODIFIED

—Sylvia Plath, "Initiation"

1 Here's the Idea

- A gerund is a verb form that ends in **-ing** and functions as a noun. A gerund phrase consists of a gerund plus its modifiers and complements.

GERUND

Flying an airplane while tired can be dangerous.

GERUND PHRASE

Like nouns, gerunds and gerund phrases can act as subjects, complements (direct objects, indirect objects, or predicate nominatives), or objects of prepositions.

Gerund Phrases

Function	Example
Subject	Flying got Icarus into trouble.
Direct object	Icarus tried using wings made of wax.
Indirect object	He wanted to give flying like a bird a chance.
Predicate nominative	His mistake was straying too close to the sun.
Object of preposition	The result of doing so was melted wings and a dip in the sea.



Don't confuse a gerund with a present participle. A gerund, as in the sentences above, can be replaced by the word *something*.

2 Why It Matters in Writing

Gerunds and gerund phrases let you turn verbs into nouns so that you can talk about actions and activities as things. Using gerunds can improve the fluency of your sentences and make them more concise.

STUDENT MODEL

DRAFT

Some people write poetry. Pegasus—the mythical horse with wings—could be ridden. The two experiences have often been compared.

REVISION

Writing poetry has often been compared to **riding Pegasus**—the mythical horse with wings.

1 Here's the Idea

- An infinitive is a verb form, usually beginning with the word **to**, that can act as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb. An infinitive phrase consists of an infinitive plus any modifiers and complements.

INFINITIVE

To find water striders, look in a freshwater pond.

INFINITIVE PHRASE

Infinitive Phrases

Function	Example
Noun (Subject)	To skate along the surface of the water is easy for the water strider.
Noun (Direct object)	Water striders need to find food in the water without sinking themselves.
Noun (Predicate nominative)	The trick is to use surface tension for support.
Adjective	The water strider is an interesting insect to watch on a calm summer day.
Adverb	To detect insects falling into the water near them, water striders use sense organs on their legs.

2 Why It Matters in Writing

By using infinitive phrases to combine sentences, you can sharpen the relationship between ideas.

STUDENT MODEL

DRAFT

Many moth species have evolved with an owl-face pattern on their wings. The pattern scares away birds.

REVISION

Many moth species have evolved with an owl-face pattern on their wings that serves **to scare away birds**.

