

Verbals

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

Verbal Forms

A verbal is a form of a verb used as an adjective, adverb, or noun. There are three types of verbals: participles, gerunds, and infinitives. Each of them can be used by itself or as part of a verbal phrase.

Infinitives

An **infinitive** is the basic form of a verb, preceded by the word *to*. It can serve as a noun, adjective, or adverb.

EXAMPLES: **To fly** would be fun.
To fly is a noun that serves as the subject of the sentence.

Erika is the woman **to visit**.
To visit is an adjective modifying the noun *woman*.

To win, I will have to work very hard.
To win is an adverb that modifies the verb *work*. It answers the question, "Why?"

Participles

A **participle** is the present progressive tense (*-ing*) or the past tense (*-ed*) of a verb used as an adjective.

EXAMPLES: The **crying** baby reached for his mother.
Here, *crying* (a form of the verb *to cry*) is an adjective describing the noun *baby*.

Frightened, the **panicking** boy jumped away from the spider.
Frightened, the past participle of the verb *to frighten*, describes the noun *boy*.
Panicking is the present participle form of the verb, *to panic*. It modifies the noun *boy*.

Gerunds

A **gerund** is the present progressive (*-ing*) form of a verb used as a noun.

EXAMPLES: **Dancing** is not allowed in the library.
Dancing is the subject of the sentence; the verb *to dance* is made into a noun.

Mark dislikes **singing**.
Singing is the direct object of the verb *dislikes*. Mark dislikes what? *Singing*.

Verbal Phrases

Although a verbal may consist of a single word, **objects**, **complements**, and **modifiers** may be added to the original participle, gerund, or infinitive to make it into a verbal phrase.

Objects

There are two types of objects: **direct objects** and **indirect objects**.

A **direct object** receives the action of the verb.

EXAMPLES: **Eating the pizza** was no small task.
The pizza is the direct object of the gerund, *eating*. It answers the question, Eating what?

To win the prize would make my day!
The prize is the direct object of the infinitive, *to win*. It answers the question, To win what?

An **indirect object** names the noun *to whom* or *for whom* the action was done.

EXAMPLE: **Giving her those roses** was the hardest thing I've ever done.
The noun, *roses*, is the direct object of the verb, *giving*. It answers the question, "Giving what?" The pronoun, *her*, is the **indirect object**. It answers the question, "To whom?"

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Complements

Complements rename or define nouns (subjects or objects) in the sentence.

EXAMPLES: **Being the oldest child**, she did a lot of free babysitting.
 The noun, *child*, is the complement of the subject of the sentence, *she*.

To make him happy is nearly impossible.

The pronoun, *him*, is the direct object of the verb, *to make*. It answers the question, "To make what/whom?" The adjective, *happy*, is a complement, which defines *him*.

Modifiers

Although verbals are modifiers, they may also take modifiers themselves. These **modifiers** describe or clarify the verbals.

EXAMPLES: **Eating quickly**, I had no time to talk.
 Quickly describes *how* I was eating.

Walking to the park, they saw a deer.

To the park modifies the word *walking* by describing *where* they were walking.

Common Errors

Verbal phrases are the source of many common errors, including sentence fragments and misplaced modifiers.

Sentence Fragments

Verbal phrases can never stand alone as a sentence. Many sentence fragments are actually verbal phrases that should be attached to a neighboring sentence.

FRAGMENT: **Making our party complete**. Erin brought the cake.

CORRECT: **Making our party complete**, Erin brought the cake.

Misplaced Modifiers

Sometimes, a verbal may be located too far from the word it modifies, confusing the meaning of the sentence. Such misplaced modifiers should be moved closer to the words they modify.

UNCLEAR: Joe ate the chicken **sitting in the chair**. (Who is sitting in the chair, *Joe* or *the chicken*?)

CLEAR: **Sitting in the chair**, Joe ate the chicken. (It is now clear that *Joe* is in the chair.)

Dangling Modifiers

If the word that a verbal describes is not actually in the sentence, the verbal is a dangling modifier. To correct such a problem, the modified word should be added to the sentence.

DANGLING: **Having sent the letter overnight**, it will probably arrive on time.

Who has sent the letter? The subject of the sentence is *it* (the letter), but *having sent the letter overnight* cannot modify the letter. The sender is not in the sentence.

CLEAR: **Having sent the letter overnight**, we think it will arrive on time.

The subject of the verbal, *we*, is included in the sentence.