

Chapter 12

Verbal Constructions

Abstract In this chapter we look at some structures to which you have already been introduced at various times in the text. This chapter focuses on the form and function of verbal constructions. The chapter is divided into three parts, each one of which explores a different type of verbal construction. Section 12.1 examines gerund phrases. Section 12.2 delves into participial phrases. Section 12.3 considers the *to* + verb or infinitive phrases.

Keywords verbal phrases • gerund phrases • participial phrases • infinitive phrases

Introduction

Certain structures are called verbals because they are derived from verbs but do not inflect for person and tense, nor combine with an auxiliary verb to form verb phrases. In other words, although they are formed from verbs, they do not function as verbs. Verbals include *gerunds*, *participles*, and *infinitives*. These combine with other elements to form gerund, participial, and infinitive phrases.¹

12.1 Section 1: Gerunds and Gerund Phrases

Verbals are classified into three types: *gerunds*, *participles*, and *infinitives*. Gerunds and present participles look identical since they both end in *-ing*. Since form does not equal function in English, we distinguish between gerunds and the different functions of present participles based on the role of each in a sentence. Infinitives consist of *to* + base verb.

(1) They like <i>swimming</i> .	gerund , object of verb <i>like</i>
(2) I am <i>going</i> home right now.	present participle , part of verb phrase <i>am going</i>
(3) This is a <i>birding</i> course.	participial adjective , modifying <i>course</i>
(4) Ray needs <i>to leave</i> soon.	infinitive , object of verb <i>needs</i>

¹Some grammar books call verbal phrases non-finite phrases.

In the first sentence, *swimming* occurs after the main verb *like*. It occurs without an auxiliary verb, so it cannot be part of a progressive verb phrase. In the second sentence, we know that *going* is part of a verb phrase, *am going*. As we saw in Chap. 6, *am* is the auxiliary verb *be* for *going* and is inflected for person (1st person singular) and tense (present). Together, *am* and *going* form the present progressive. In the third sentence, *birding* comes before the noun *course* to describe which type of course. In the last sentence, the main verb *needs* inflects for person (3rd person singular) and tense (present) and is followed by the infinitive, *to leave*.

What is a gerund phrase?

A gerund is a verbal that functions as a *noun*. A gerund phrase consists of a verbal, modifier(s), object(s), and/or complement(s). Because a gerund, and by extension a gerund phrase, functions as a noun, it occupies and acts in a sentence the way a noun does: as subject, direct object, object of the preposition, and complement.

Examples: Functions of Gerunds and Gerund Phrases

<i>Studying</i> is hard work. <i>Studying English grammar</i> is hard work.	subject , non-count noun, singular verb
Some students enjoy <i>studying</i> . Some students enjoy <i>studying English grammar</i> .	object of verb <i>enjoy</i> ; certain verbs followed by nouns or gerund
Nothing stops Lucy from <i>studying</i> . Nothing stops Lucy from <i>studying English grammar</i> .	object of preposition <i>from</i>
Lucy's favorite activity is <i>studying</i> . Lucy's favorite activity is <i>studying English grammar</i> .	subject complement renaming or identifying subject of verb

A gerund or gerund phrase can be made negative by adding *not*:

Not studying can be a problem.

Not studying English grammar can be a problem.

Both Discovery Activities 1 and 2 focus on helping you distinguish between gerund phrases and verb phrases. Discovery Activity 1 is easier than Discovery Activity 2 because it uses short, teacher-made sentences. Discovery Activity 2 is more difficult because it uses authentic material. Try both and see how well you do. The answers to all Discovery Activities in this chapter are at the end of the chapter in the Answer Key.

Discovery Activity 1: Gerunds Versus Participles

Identify the *-ing* forms in the sentences below.

- If the *-ing* is a gerund, underline and label only this form.
- If the *-ing* is part of a progressive verb phrase, underline and label the entire verb phrase.

Example:

Lucy's favorite activity is studying. **gerund**

Lucy is studying at the library. **present progressive verb phrase**

- Her sole occupation was writing short stories.
- Teaching is a special vocation.
- Their grandmother was vacationing in Florida when the storm hit.
- The club is holding a social next month.
- Driving without a license is illegal.
- The long trip with her young children was driving her crazy.
- Joseph's hobby is rebuilding antique cars.
- Never eat strawberries without washing them.

This second Discovery Activity is similar to the previous one but uses authentic excerpts. You may find this Discovery Activity more challenging than the first one.

Discovery Activity 2: Identifying the Different Functions of Gerunds and Gerund Phrases

Look at the following excerpts.

- Underline the gerunds and gerund phrases.
- Identify the function of each gerund and gerund phrase you underlined.

A.

I worked the last shift at Dave's Dogs, and I was supposed to start shutting down a half hour before closing so I could clean up for the day crew. [Evanovich, J. (2005). *Eleven on top* (p. 1). New York: St. Martin's.]

B.

"They'll be investigating you, Mrs. Pollack, because the reporters are much better at investigating than the police are." [Thompson, V. (2016). *Murder on St. Nicholas Avenue*. Kindle iPad Version. Retrieved from Amazon.com]

C.

Challenging each other's opinions comes so naturally to Americans that most of the time they aren't even aware that they are doing it. [Sakamoto, S., & Naotsuka, R. (1982). *Polite fictions: Why Japanese and Americans seem rude to each other* (p. 56). Tokyo: Kinseido.]

D.

Knowing the rules is not at all the same thing as playing the game. Even now, during a conversation in Japanese I will notice a startled reaction, and belatedly realize that once again I have rudely interrupted by instinctively trying to hit back the other person's bowling ball.[Sakamoto, S. & Naotsuka, R. (1982). *Polite fictions: Why Japanese and Americans seem rude to each other* (p. 85). Tokyo: Kinseido.]

Are gerunds difficult for ESL/EFL learners?

- ***Learner difficulties***

ESL/EFL learners are sometimes confused by sentences where a gerund is functioning as a subject complement after the verb. In the sentence *Lucy's favorite activity is studying*, for instance, *is studying* looks identical to the present progressive verb phrase *Lucy is studying*.

In addition, low-proficiency ESL/EFL learners may be confused by words that end in *-ing* but are not gerunds or participles. Such words include *during*, *nothing*, *wedding*, *evening*, and *morning*.

Since gerunds function as nouns, can we also use them in a possessive sense?

12.1.1 Possessive Gerunds

Since gerunds function as nouns, they can take possessive pronouns or be preceded by nouns with the possessive 's inflection.

<i>His coming late</i> created problems.	possessive pronoun before gerund phrase
<i>Jude's writing</i> was very good.	possessive 's inflection, proper noun before gerund phrase
<i>The cat's purring</i> soothed the baby.	possessive 's inflection on noun phrase before gerund phrase

Is the possessive gerund structure unusual?

Although the possessive gerund is not the most common gerund construction, it is found in both written and spoken English. Consider this excerpt, taken from an interview with actress Julia Louis-Dreyfus in a popular magazine, *Entertainment Weekly*.

To Louis-Dreyfus, Moore embodied a strong 1970s career woman who wasn't perfect—far from it. “*Her being* able to play humiliation as well as she did was very appealing,” says the actress, 45, no stranger to self mockery. [Stack, T. (2006, December 1). Julia Louis-Dreyfus' inspiration: Mary Tyler Moore. *Entertainment Weekly*. Retrieved from <http://www.ew.com/article/2006/11/24/what-julia-louis-dreyfus-loves-about-mary-tyler-moore>]

Consider also this headline from the website mom.me:

Cats' Purring Proven to Help Human Health in Numerous Ways [<http://mom.me/pets/cats/19946-cats-purring-proven-help-human-health-numerous-ways/>]

This ends our discussion of gerunds and we will now explore participles.

12.2 Section 2: Participles and Participial Phrases

A participle is derived from a verb with the *-ing* or *-ed* inflection. A participial phrase consists of a participle, either *-ing* or *-ed*, modifier(s), object(s), and/or complement(s). Participial phrases function like *adjectives* and modify nouns or pronouns, and occasionally function as *adverbs*. Consider the sentence:

Driving all day, Tony arrived home in time for the party.

Here *Driving all day* is a participial phrase modifying the noun *Tony*, the subject of the verb *arrived*.

What do you mean by “modifying Tony”?

Driving all day is telling us something about Tony. In this case, it is describing what he did. We will see more examples of participial phrases and what they modify in this section.

We've looked at so many present participles and their different functions. Could you review what the different functions of present participles are before exploring participial phrases?

12.2.1 *Types of Participles*

In Chap. 4, we looked at adjectives ending in *-ing* and *-ed*, which we called participial adjectives. As you will recall, we labeled these types of adjectives participial adjectives because they are derived from verbs but are not part of full verb phrases (auxiliary + past or present participle).

In Chaps. 5 and 6, we discussed participles as being the *-ing* or *-ed* form of the main verb that accompanies an auxiliary verb in order to form a verb phrase. As you will remember, *present participle* refers to the *-ing* form used with present progressive forms of the verb phrase. *Past participle* refers to the *-ed* form used

with past progressive forms of the verb phrase or with passive voice.² In Chaps. 9 and 10, we looked at adverbial and relative clauses, which we saw can be reduced. When these clauses are reduced, they become participial clauses.³

The Different Types of Participles	
I read a <i>boring</i> book last night.	participial adjective modifying <i>book</i>
I am <i>reading</i> a good book today. I was <i>reading</i> a good book all night long.	present participle , part of present and past progressive verb phrases, both parts of verb phrase required (<i>be</i> + <i>V-ing</i>)
The mother has <i>scolded</i> her child many times. The mother had <i>scolded</i> her child repeatedly.	past participle , part of present and past perfect verb phrases, both parts of verb phrase required (<i>have</i> + <i>V-ed</i>)
<i>Running too quickly</i> , the child fell down.	participial phrase with present participle, modifying <i>the child</i>
<i>Concerned for her health</i> , Nora made a doctor's appointment.	participial phrase with past participle, modifying <i>Nora</i>

Often *-ed* participial phrases are closely related to the passive voice:

The teacher <i>was annoyed</i> by the students' behavior.	past passive voice
<i>Annoyed by the students' behavior</i> , the teacher gave them extra work.	participial phrase

What are the different functions of verbs with the -ed endings?

The Different Functions of -ed	
The students <i>asked</i> about their grades.	simple past tense
The teacher has <i>e-mailed</i> them the assignment.	past participle , part of verb phrase <i>has e-mailed</i> (<i>have</i> + <i>V-ed</i>)
The land was <i>conquered</i> in the 1700s.	past participle , part of past passive verb phrase <i>was conquered</i> (<i>be</i> + <i>V-ed</i>)
The <i>agitated</i> politician called the reporter.	participial adjective modifying <i>politician</i>
The people in my neighborhood are <i>concerned</i> citizens.	participial adjective , complement position describing subject, <i>The people in my neighborhood</i>
<i>Disturbed by the loud music</i> , the neighbors complained.	participial phrase modifying <i>the neighbors</i>

²The *-ed* participles also include the irregular *-en* forms such as *chosen*, *drunk*, and *forgotten*.

³Note that not all participial phrases are reduced relative or adverbial clauses.

Discovery Activity 3 focuses on identifying the various functions of the *-ed*. The excerpts include simple past tense verbs, verb phrases with past participles, participial adjectives, and participial phrases. Be sure to focus on sentence position and function to help you in identifying each type of *-ed*.

Discovery Activity 3: Identifying the Different Functions of *-ed*

Look at the following excerpts.

Underline all the *-ed* forms you find and identify each one.

- Remember that there are numerous irregular forms that do not end in *-ed*, such as *eaten* or *drunk*.

Example:

The tired scientist had finished the research praised by his peers when he retired.

tired: participial adjective

finished: part of past perfect verb phrase *had finished*

praised: part of participial phrase *praised by his peers* modifying *the research*

retired: regular past tense verb

A.

... living on the bacon and coffee supplied by the nation's charity, people in Memphis remained fascinated by character. [Keith, J. (2012). *Fever season: The story of a terrifying epidemic and the people who saved a city*. Kindle iPad Version. Retrieved from Amazon.com]

B.

Case studies, supplemented by simulations, are not the cornerstone of business school education. Revered above all else are the lessons to be learned from "just going out and doing it." Entrepreneurship... has become the avocation of young men and women raised to believe they can do anything... [Bennis, W. & Thomas, R. (2002). *Geeks & geezers* (p. 64). Boston: Harvard University Press.]

C.

While the CRC made hurried plans to evacuate the people left in town, a crime spree underlined the city's precarious position. At least two hundred robbers moved into the city, attracted by the thousands of unoccupied houses stretching down the streets... [Keith, J. (2012). *Fever season: The story of a terrifying epidemic and the people who saved a city*. Kindle iPad Version. Retrieved from Amazon.com]

12.2.2 Sentence Position of Participial Phrases

We find participial phrases in three positions: before a main clause (initial position), after a noun phrase they are modifying (middle position), or after a main clause (final position).

Examples: Different Sentence Positions of Participial Phrases	
<p><i>Wanting to improve her grade</i>, the student asked the teacher for help.</p> <p><i>Worried about the coming snowstorm</i>, they stocked up on supplies.</p>	<p>initial modifying <i>the student</i></p> <p>initial modifying <i>they</i></p>
<p>The children's mother, <i>insisting on their cooperation</i>, asked them to clean their rooms.</p> <p>The students, <i>concerned about their grades</i>, e-mailed the instructor.</p>	<p>middle modifying <i>the children's mother</i></p> <p>middle modifying <i>the instructor</i></p>
<p>The neighbor noticed the tall man <i>talking on his cell phone</i>.</p> <p>We couldn't get out the car <i>blocked in by a truck</i>.</p>	<p>final modifying <i>the tall man</i></p> <p>final modifying <i>the car</i></p>

What kind of punctuation do we need to use when participial phrases occur in different positions?

As illustrated in the sentences above, when the participial phrase occurs in

- initial position, that is, before a main clause, we put a comma after the participial phrase.
- middle position, we put a comma before and after the participial phrase *unless* it is *essential* to the meaning of the sentence:

Students *needing extra help* should contact the Writing Center.

The girl *wearing the red dress* is Jason's fiancée.

In these two examples we see how the participial phrases serve to add crucial information about the noun phrases they are modifying.

- final position, we put a comma before the participial phrase unless it is *essential* to the meaning of the sentence.

There is a new rule *requiring different documentation for student loans*.

I didn't call him, *thinking it was too late*.

Here in the first example, the participial phrase is essential to the meaning of the sentence. In the second example, the participial phrase is providing “extra” or non-essential meaning.

12.2.3 Functions of Participial Phrases

Participial phrases generally function as adjectives modifying nouns and noun phrases, and occasionally function as adverbs. These are often reduced adverb clauses (see Chap. 9). Because participial phrases are a more formal form of sentence structure, we usually use them in writing rather than in speaking.

Examples: Functions of Participial Phrases

The passengers, <i>waiting for takeoff</i> , began to complain.	adjectival modifying <i>the passengers</i>
<i>Realizing they were in danger of failing</i> , the students studied harder.	adverbial modifying verb <i>studied</i>

How can I tell the difference between gerund phrases and participial phrases?

12.2.3.1 Participial Phrases Versus Gerund Phrases

The key to distinguishing gerund and participial phrases is to consider their function in a sentence. An *-ing* participle is functioning as a **noun** and part of a **gerund phrase** if it is:

- the subject of the verb
- the direct object of the verb
- the object of a preposition, or
- the subject complement of a linking verb

An *-ing* participle is functioning as an **adjective** and part of a **participial phrase** if it is:

- modifying a noun or a noun phrase

and functioning as an adverb if it is:

- modifying a verb or verb phrase

Is there anything else that will help me distinguish the -ing participle in a gerund phrase versus a participial phrase?

An easy way to help you differentiate between the two structures is to try substituting *it*. If the gerund or gerund phrase is functioning as a noun, you can substitute *it* and the sentence is still grammatical. *Doing crossword puzzles* relaxes Lyle.

It relaxes Lyle. The snowstorm prevented us from *driving home*.

The snowstorm prevented us from *it*.

If, on the other hand, the participle is part of a participial phrase and functioning as an adjective, substituting *it* will give you a nonsense sentence:

While waiting for takeoff, the flight attendants passed out magazines.

**It*, the flight attendants passed out magazines.

The man, *speeding too quickly*, slid off into a ditch.

*The man, *it*, slid off into a ditch.

Discovery Activity 4 practices identifying gerund phrases and participial phrases. This activity uses teacher-generated sentences. Discovery Activity 5 also practices identifying gerund and participial phrases but with authentic excerpts.

Discovery Activity 4: Distinguishing Between Gerund Phrases and Participial Phrases

Look at the following excerpts.

Decide whether the italicized phrases are participial phrases or gerund phrases.

- If you are unsure, try substituting *it* for the underlined phrase.

Example:

participial phrase

Concerned about the cost of gas, Geraldine decided to carpool.

- The candidate contested the outcome of the election, *claiming voter fraud*.
- Working even after retirement age*, George has been indispensable to the company.
- You should consider *doing your homework more carefully*.
- Exhausted by the climb*, Taylor collapsed by the side of the road.
- Taking a vacation* is important for all of us.
- Brenda, *taking a deep breath*, continued her talk.
- Getting up early* is hard when you're tired.

Try two or three excerpts in this next Discovery Activity. Compare your answers to those in the Answer Key. If you have no mistakes, you may wish to move on to the next section.

Discovery Activity 5: Gerund Phrase or Participial Phrase?

The gerund phrases and participial phrases have been italicized in the following excerpts.

Label each one.

- If it is a gerund phrase, label it **GP**.
- If it is a participial phrase, label it **PP**.

A.

Drawing conclusions from chimpanzees and gorillas overlooks an important point: At some moment back then, we got language (and all that goes with it) and they did not. [Lakoff, R. (2004). *Language and women's place: Text and commentaries* (p. 117). In M. Bucholtz (Ed.), New York: Oxford.]

B.

Looking back over three years of magazines, we found twenty-three articles hyping plastic surgery, and one hundred more whose tone presumed or implied that their readers were unhappy with aging. [Blyth, M. (2004). *Spin sisters* (p. 101). New York: St. Martin's Press.]

C.

Using the backside of its bucket, the loader awkwardly patted the reeking mass into one solid rectangular cube. [Royte, E. (2005). *Garbage land: On the secret trail of trash* (p. 45). New York: Little, Brown & Company.]

D.

Frowning in his dress shirt and polished brown shoes, Apuzzi picked is way over a sofa cushion, across the slippery frame of a foldout bed, and in between two black garbage bags. [Royte, E. (2005). *Garbage land: On the secret trail of trash* (p. 46). New York: Little, Brown & Company.]

E.

Achieving a rich, moist brown humus in a sanitary landfill is nothing but a romantic fantasy! [Royte, E. (2005). *Garbage land: On the secret trail of trash* (p. 89). New York: Little, Brown & Company.]

F.

Watching Twla Tharp and her dancers, I was reminded that business managers routinely complain that they don't have time to "practice" being leaders. [Bennis, W., & Thomas, R. (2002). *Geeks & geezers* (p. xiv). Boston: Harvard Business School Press.]

Discovery Activity 6 practices recognizing and identifying the different functions of the *-ed* and *-ing* participles.

Discovery Activity 6: Identifying the Different Participles and Functions

Look at the following excerpts.

1. Underline all the examples of participles you can find.
2. Identify the function of each participle you have identified.

Example:

Sitting by the lake, I was watching the diving loons.

Sitting: part of participial phrase by the lake

watching: present participle, part of past progressive verb phrase *was watching*

diving: participial adjective modifying noun *loons*

A.

I opened the door and there was Mel, standing in the hallway, with a tall gentlemen standing behind him. [Wilder, G. (2005). *Kiss me like a stranger* (p. 95). New York: St Martin's.]

B.

President Johnson watched the developing demonstrations in St. Augustine warily. Just a year earlier, as vice president, he had attended a dinner in preparation for the upcoming anniversary. [Kotz, N. (2005). *Judgment days* (p. 126). New York: Houghton Mifflin.]

C.

Stepping out of his darkened, oddly painted pickup and gaining his footing, he swallowed a little, his lower lip drooping and damp. [Theroux, P. (2015). *Deep South: Four seasons on back roads*. Kindle iPad Version. Retrieved from Amazon.com]

D.

The biggest problem I had during the seven weeks of filming was trying not to break up laughing when I was acting in a scene with Bob Newhart... I always felt like saying, "Well, Bob started it... " On the last day of filming... we were outside in downtown Los Angeles, which was supposed to be New York. We finished filming at midnight, and the producer sent Bob and me home in the same fake Yellow Cab, along with a pile of our own clothing that we had loaned to the production... When we got to Bob's home in Beverly Hills, we both got out of the cab, carrying a bundle of Bob's clothes. [Wilder, G. (2005). *Kiss me like a stranger* (p. 111). New York: St. Martin's.]

Since participles don't inflect for time, do all participial phrases refer to the same time?

12.2.4 Time in Participial Phrases

12.2.4.1 Perfect Participial Phrases

As we discussed in the beginning of this chapter, participles in participial phrases are called verbals because they do not inflect for time the way verbs do. However, participles, unlike gerunds, do have two different forms for a type of time reference. The basic *-ing* or *-ed* participle, with which we have been working up to now, indicates general or non-specific time. When we want to indicate a sequence of events, we use a *perfect participial phrase* to indicate the *earlier* event. The perfect participial phrase consists of *having* + past participle:

Having reached a decision, the jurors returned to the courtroom.
The crowd dispersed, **the concert having ended**.

Keeping in mind again that form is not equal to function, do not confuse perfect participial phrases with participial phrases with the main verb *have*:

Having one's own house is a goal of many adults.
Many people feel stressed, **having too much to do and too little time to relax**.

Perfect participial phrases must include the past participle, as in *having reached* or *having ended* in the example sentences.

Are there also passive participial phrases?

12.2.4.2 Passive Participial Phrases

Participial phrases can be in the passive (see Chap. 8). Passive participial phrases can also express two different types of time references. Passive participial phrases referring to general time consist of *being* + past participle:

Being watched by millions of viewers, the news anchor became a household name throughout the country.

To indicate a sequence of events in the passive, we use *having* + *been* + past participle:

Having been sequestered for two weeks during the trial, the jurors were happy to return home.

Do ESL/EFL learners have difficulties with participial phrases and gerund phrases?

- **Learner difficulties**

More proficient ESL/EFL learners, especially those enrolled in writing courses, may be encouraged to use participial phrases to add variety to their writing and to avoid short, choppy sentences. For practice, they may be given sentences and asked to rewrite or combine them to include participial phrases. While learners may have little trouble with such exercises, in their own writing they may avoid the use of such phrases or use them incorrectly, especially if these structures are not found in or are different from those in their own language. For example, instead of using a participle, ESL/EFL learners may use an inflected verb:

*The girl *sits* over there is a student in Professor Danik's class.

Both ESL/EFL learners and inexperienced native speakers may write participial phrases in sentences and create what are called *dangling modifiers*. After a participial phrase, the noun or noun phrase immediately following

refers to the preceding participial phrase. At times, however, when the participial phrase is in initial sentence position, writers will use a noun or noun phrase in the main clause that cannot logically be the one the participial phrase is supposed to refer to.

*Rushing to get to class, Anne's computer fell down and broke.

*Driven by panic, the banks experienced a run on money.

Although these sentences may initially sound correct, the questions to ask is whether or not a computer can rush to class or whether banks can be driven by panic. Since an introductory participial phrase modifies the noun or noun phrase immediately following it, the answer here is "no." The sentences need to be rewritten as, for instance:

Rushing to get to class, Anne dropped her computer and broke it.

Driven by panic, people ran to withdraw their money from the banks.

This type of error is of concern in formal writing but not in informal writing. As such, it tends to be focused on in advanced ESL/EFL writing classes. The first error, using an inflected verb instead of a participle, is grammatically incorrect in spoken as well as in informal and formal written English.

The last type of verbal we will look at in this chapter is the *infinitive*.

12.3 Section 3: Infinitives and Infinitive Phrases

The infinitive, as we have seen previously, is *to* + base or simple verb. Infinitives can combine with other words to form *infinitive phrases*. You may be puzzled why many grammarians categorize infinitives as verbals. The reason is that infinitives do not inflect for person and number, and can function as nouns, objects, adjectives, adverbs, and complements.

Examples: Functions of Infinitive Phrases

<i>To find a good job</i> is an important goal	subject of verb <i>is</i>
Most people want <i>to find a good job</i> .	object of verb <i>want</i>
The teacher has a lot of work <i>to do tonight</i> .	adjective modifying <i>work</i>
The teacher is leaving now <i>to get to her class</i> .	adverb modifying <i>is leaving now</i>
Her class is difficult <i>to teach in a lecture hall</i> .	adjective complement modifying <i>difficult</i>

Although infinitives can function as the subject of the clause and come in initial position, this is considered formal and generally not found in informal spoken or written English.

Infinitives and infinitive phrases function as *adjectives* when they modify a preceding *noun*. They function as *adverbs* when they modify a *verb* or an entire *sentence*. When infinitives and infinitive phrases function as adverbs, they are expressing a purpose.

How can I decide if the infinitive or infinitive phrase is functioning as an adverb?

Crucial to deciding whether or not an infinitive or infinitive phrase is functioning as an adverb is to ask the question “Why?” For example, in the sentence *The teacher is leaving now to get to her class*, we can ask, “Why is the teacher leaving now?” The response, *to get to her class*, answers the “why” and tell us that the infinitive phrase is functioning as an adverb to modify the verb phrase *is leaving now*.

How do we make infinitives negative?

Infinitives can be made negative by placing *not* before *to* + the simple or base verb.

She decided **not** *to go* home.

We find it difficult **not** *to yawn* in Mr. Davie’s class.

Can we make infinitives passive?

Infinitives can be made passive by using *to* + *be* + past participle. Because *be* follows *to*, it does not change form. In Discovery Activity 3, Excerpt B, we saw an example of the passive infinitive:

Revered above all else are the lessons *to be learned* from “just going out and doing it.” [Bennis, W., & Thomas, R. (2002). *Geeks & geezers* (p. 64). Boston: Harvard University Press.]

Can infinitives make time references?

12.3.1 Perfect Infinitives and Infinitive Phrases

Infinitives do not inflect for time, but, like participial phrases, infinitive phrases can indicate time sequence by using *to* + *have* + past participle:

The parents were lucky *to have found* this specialist for their sick child.

The perfect infinitive can be used with the progressive aspect to emphasize duration. This construction consists of *to* + *have* + *been* + present participle:

He was too scared *to have been telling* lies the entire time.

The perfect infinitive can also be used in passive voice. This construction consists of *to* + *have* + *been* + past participle:

Shelly was surprised *to have been offered* the job.

12.3.2 Sentence Patterns with Infinitive Phrases

12.3.2.1 Infinitives as Direct Objects of Verbs

The most common sentence position of infinitives and infinitive phrases is after a main verb. When infinitives and infinitive phrases follow verbs, they are functioning as objects. We examined this pattern in Chap. 5 when we discussed which verbs are followed by gerunds, which by infinitives, and which by a gerund or an infinitive. In this chapter, we focus on the verbs that are followed exclusively by infinitives.

Common Verbs Followed by Infinitives

afford	come	forget	offer	resolve	use
agree	consent	happen	pretend	seem	volunteer
arrange	decide	hope	proceed	struggle	want
ask	deserve	learn	profess	tend	wait
care	determine	manage	prove	threaten	wish
claim	fail	mean	refuse	undertake	

The verbs in this chart are followed immediately by an infinitive or an infinitive phrase and function as the direct object of the verb.

At times adverbs may come before the infinitive or an infinitive phrase:

He agreed **immediately** *to come for the interview*.

In formal prescriptive grammar, an adverb should not come between the *to* and simple verb of an infinitive. When this does occur, it is referred to as a *split infinitive*.

He prepared *to* **immediately** *come* for the interview.

Although the split infinitive is frowned upon in formal prescriptive grammar, many native speakers ignore this prohibition in both spoken and written English.

12.3.2.2 Verb + Indirect Object + Infinitive

Some verbs in English follow a slightly different pattern. These verbs require an *indirect object* between the main verb and the infinitive or the infinitive phrase. The indirect object may be either a noun or pronoun. Remember that the infinitive or infinitive phrase is the direct object of the verb.

Some teachers allow **their students** *to use the textbook during the test*.

The sergeant commanded **them** *to leave*.

Common Verbs Followed by Indirect Object + Infinitive				
advise	command	get (=cause)	order	require
allow	convince	hire	permit	teach
authorize	direct	inspire	persuade	tell
appoint	encourage	instruct	remind	urge
cause	forbid	invite	request	warn
challenge	force	motivate		

Does this pattern always apply?

When these verbs are used in the passive, the original **indirect object becomes the subject** of the passive sentence. Thus, there is no longer an indirect object between the verb and the infinitive:

Some teachers allow **their students** *to use the textbook during the test*.
Students were allowed to use the textbook during the test.

The sergeant commanded **them** *to leave*.
They were commanded *to leave*.

Are there any other patterns with the infinitive?

12.3.2.3 Verb + (Indirect Object) + Infinitive

Some verbs may or may not take an indirect object before the infinitive. The difference lies in the meaning. When the verb is followed only by an infinitive or an infinitive phrase, it is being used intransitively (see Chap. 5). When it is followed by an object + infinitive, it is being used transitively.

The teacher expected <i>to leave</i> late.	intransitive ; teacher is expecting to leave
The teacher expected us <i>to leave</i> late.	transitive ; teacher is expecting someone else (<i>us</i>) to leave

Common Verbs + Optional Indirect Object + Infinitive				
ask	choose	like	prefer	want
beg	expect	need	prepare	wish

12.3.2.4 Infinitives After *Be* + Certain Adjectives

Infinitives or infinitive phrases can follow *be* + certain adjectives. These adjectives generally express mental states or emotion:

She was **eager** to hear the news.

I am **pleased** to meet you.

***Be* + Common Adjectives Followed by Infinitives**

amazed	content	eligible	lucky	sad
angry	difficult	fortunate	pleased	shocked
anxious	delighted	glad	proud	sorry
ashamed	determined	happy	ready	surprised
astonished	disappointed	hesitant	relieved	upset
careful	disturbed	likely	reluctant	wrong
certain				

Some of the *-ed* participial adjectives here have *-ing* participial adjective counterparts that can also be followed by an infinitive or an infinitive phrase. When the *-ing* participial adjective counterpart is used, the sentence often includes the filler or dummy *It* subject:

It was surprising to see how quickly he recovered after the accident.

It was shocking to hear the news.

The subject pronoun *It* is referred to as a “filler” or “dummy” subject because it does not refer to anything. This *It* simply fulfills the grammatical requirement of English that every main verb must have a subject.

12.3.3 *Base Verbs or “Bare Infinitives” and Causative Verbs*

Certain verbs are followed by the verb without the *to*. This type of verb as we have seen, is frequently referred to as a *bare* or *simple* infinitive or just the simple or base verb. These verbs include the so-called causatives verbs.

What is a causative verb?

In Chap. 8 we discussed the causative verb *get*. The label *causative* is also commonly used with the verbs *help*, *have*, *let*, and *make* because they express the idea that “X” causes “Y” to do something. The causative verbs *have*, *let*, and *make* are followed by an object and the base verb.

The verb *make* when used in a causative sense implies that “X” compels “Y” to do something:

Marcia’s dad *made* her *do* her homework this afternoon.

The verb *let* when used in a causative sense implies that “X” allows “Y” to do something.

Marcia’s dad *let* her *watch* a movie last night.

The verb *help* may be followed by either a base verb or the infinitive:

They *helped clear* the yard of debris.

They *helped to clear* the yard of debris.

See how well you do in identifying infinitives in Discovery Activity 7.

Discovery Activity 7: Identifying Infinitives

Underline the infinitives in the excerpts.

A.

Practice and performance come to be viewed as inseparable... The key to practicing in the midst of performance is to identify where opportunities exist... Find ways to notice yourself in action, to experiment with different ways of behaving in real time, and to adjust your behavior... [Bennis, W., & Thomas, R. (2002). *Geeks & geezers* (p. 178). Boston: Harvard University Press.]

B.

Since one man’s patron is generally another man’s client, a chain of such relationships extends from the top to the bottom of society... The anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers coined the term “lopsided friendship” to describe this bond between social unequals. To call such an arrangement friendship may seem to stretch the word beyond all recognition. [Bellow, A. (2003). *In praise of nepotism: A natural history* (p. 37). New York: Doubleday.]

C.

References to *The Godfather* permeate popular culture... Real gangsters are even said to have adopted the rituals and language of the Corleone family... [Bellow, A. (2003). *In praise of nepotism: A natural history* (p. 29). New York: Doubleday]

What kinds of problems do ESL/EFL learners have with infinitives and infinitive phrases?

- **Learner difficulties**

Low-proficiency ESL/EFL learners at times confuse infinitives with prepositional phrases beginning with *to*. For such ESL/EFL learners, it is helpful to stress that the *to* of an infinitive is followed by a verb describing an action, an event, or a state, such as *to write*, *to walk*, and *to teach*. Prepositional phrases beginning with *to*, in contrast, have a noun or noun phrase after the *to*. Compare, for instance:

The girl wants <i>to walk</i> .	infinitive
The girl is walking <i>to the store</i> .	prepositional phrase
The girl wants <i>to walk to the store</i> .	infinitive + prepositional phrase

In our first sentence, *to* is followed by the verb *walk*. We know that it is not the noun *walk* because of sentence position and the lack of other preceding words that indicate noun function, such as articles. In the second sentence, *to* is followed by *the* + a noun. This indicates that *to* is functioning as a preposition and part of a prepositional phrase. In the last sentence, *to walk* is an infinitive followed by a prepositional phrase. We know this because of the sentence position of *to walk* after the verb *wants* and the words following the second *to* (article *the* + noun *store*). This tells us that the first *to* is part of the infinitive and the second *to* a preposition. An analysis such as this can help learners see how to focus on context rather than on form since, in English, form is not related to function.

A related area of difficulty for many ESL/EFL learners is remembering which verbs require an indirect object before the infinitive and which ones do not:

The teacher arranged *me* to have a tutor.

Still another area of difficulty for ESL/EFL learners, particularly at lower levels of proficiency, is remembering to include the *to* before an infinitive when an object comes between it and the main verb:

*Her friend encouraged her *study* for the university.

On the other hand, ESL/EFL learners may include *to* after verbs that take only the base verb:

*The teacher made me *to do* my homework over again.

*Allison let the teacher *to give* her extra help.

12.4 Summary

Verbals

- There are three types of verbals: gerunds, participles, and *to* infinitives. They are called verbals because they lack inflections for person, number, and, in the case of gerunds, time.

Gerunds	Participles	Infinitives
• are <i>-ing</i> forms of verbs.	• are <i>-ing</i> and <i>-ed</i> forms of verbs.	• consist of <i>to</i> + base verb.
• function as nouns. • can be in subject, object, or complement position.	• function as adjectives and sometimes as adverbs.	• function as subject, object, adjective, adverb, and complement.
	• can indicate general time or prior time.	• can indicate general time or prior time.
	• can be used in passive voice.	• can be used in passive voice.

Forms of the Participle in Participial Phrases

	active	passive
general time	requiring	required
progressive aspect	∅	being required
perfect (first event in a sequence)	having required	having been required
perfect progressive form	having been requiring	∅

Infinitive Patterns

I offered <i>to help</i> .	main verb + infinitive
She convinced <i>him to leave</i> .	main verb + required object + infinitive
I wanted him <i>to leave</i> .	main verb + (optional object) + infinitive
I wanted <i>to leave</i> .	

Causative Verbs

- consist of bare or simple verb.
- express idea that “X” causes “Y” to do something.

get	make	let	have	help
-----	------	-----	------	------

12.5 Practice Activities

Activity 1: Identifying Gerund Phrases and Their Functions

Underline each gerund phrase.

Label the function of each gerund phrase.

Example:

The boss considered hiring a new office manager. **object of verb**

- (a) Swimming laps is vigorous exercise.
- (b) Avery gave up skiing after she broke her leg.
- (c) Candidates for public office do not object to releasing their tax returns.
- (d) Winning the Tour de France is a significant accomplishment.
- (e) Her favorite hobby is hiking.
- (f) Demanding satisfaction, the customer insisted on seeing the manager.

Activity 2: Identifying Different Functions of Participles

1. Underline each participle of a verb phrase, participial adjective, or participial phrase.
2. Identify the function of each one.

Example:

Given our soaked clothes, we needed to wait until they had dried.

Given our soaked clothes: participial phrase

dried: past participle, part of past perfect verb phrase *had dried*

- (a) I was awakened by the howling wind rattling the windows.
- (b) The levees broke, letting the heavily polluted water pour through the streets.
- (c) The chef is becoming famous for his amazing dishes using only locally sourced ingredients.
- (d) The yard of the abandoned house is filling with rusting toys, broken machinery, discarded bottles, and decaying vegetation, creating an unwelcome eyesore in the neighborhood.
- (e) Choosing whether to travel to a mountain resort or to a beach in the Caribbean proved to be a difficult decision.

Activity 3: Identifying the Different Types of –ing Participles

Look at the following excerpts.

1. Underline all the *–ing* forms you find.
2. Identify each *–ing* form you have underlined.

Example:

The people are sitting in a speeding bus, enjoying the view.

sitting: present participle, part of present progressive verb phrase

speeding: participial adjective

enjoying: participle introducing participial phrase

A.

I remember my mother telling me when my kids were small and I was working hard that it was the best time of my life. [Blyth, M. (2004). *Spin sisters* (p. 78). New York: St. Martin's Press.]

B.

Walking home after the party, I also realized that I had to acknowledge from the start that I was part of the girls' club whose members are experts at telling and selling stories to American women. [Blyth, M. (2004). *Spin sisters* (p. 3). New York: St. Martin's Press.]

C.

Watching playful dolphins keep up with speeding boats, diving and leaping near the front, or bow, you'd think that these marine animals must be incredibly fast swimmers. [Gordon, D. (2005, June/July). 10 Cool things about dolphins. *National Geographic Kids*, p. 18]

D.

Darkness lurked over the parking lot, and the rain came down in sheets... Alyssa berated herself for forgetting her umbrella. Rushing to the car, she noticed that the lights were out... She sank into the driver's seat of her Honda, resting her forehead on the steering wheel. [Carroll, R. (2008). *Bayou corruption*. Kindle iPad Version. Retrieved from Amazon.com]

Activity 4: Identifying Participles and Their Functions

Label the type and function of each italicized participle in the following excerpt. When you paraphrase what's been *said*, or repeat the specifics of what you have *heard*, there can be no doubt that you have *listened* and *understood* the speaker. This is especially effective when you are *disagreeing* with your conversation partner or have *listened* to her explain something highly complex or technical. *Paraphrasing* the speaker clarifies that you understood correctly. Or it can help the speaker recognize that you misunderstood what she was *attempting* to communicate... In an emotionally *charged* situation, you gain a side benefit of *defusing* anger when you repeat the specifics of what the other person stated... *Skilled* customer service managers know that by *repeating* what an angry customer is *saying*, they can reduce the level of hostility. *Remaining* calm while doing so sends a message about your own professionalism and poise. [Fine, D. (2002). *The fine art of small talk* (p. 52). Englewood, CO: Small Talk Publishers.]

Activity 5: Identifying Infinitive Phrases versus Prepositional Phrases with To

- Underline the infinitive phrases and the prepositional phrases.
- Label the infinitive phrases **IP** and the prepositional phrases **PP**.
 - Can you explain what clues there are that help you identify the function of *to*?

Example:

They go to the school around the corner. PP (indicates direction)
Some students like to study. IP (part of verb phrase)

- Some residents ignored official orders to leave their homes.
- The risk of widespread contamination and disease had left the police with no choice but to use force, if necessary, to evacuate any resident who refused to leave.
- Those who had lost their homes in the storm were forced to go to relatives or to shelters.
- The sick and elderly asked the police to help them move to other safer areas.

- (e) In a move to defend himself, the politician prepared to come back to his home state to face his accusers of failing to prepare adequately before the storm.

Activity 6: Distinguishing the Different Verbal Constructions

1. Underline the gerund phrases, participial phrases, and infinitive phrases.
2. Identify what each one is.

A.

She took a moment to hover in the doorway, drawing in the sweet smell of Tara's lingering perfume... Bending over, she retrieved clean clothes and her personal toiletries before marching into the hall to the bathroom. [Carroll, R. (2008). *Bayou corruption*. Kindle iPad Version. Retrieved from Amazon.com]

B.

On this chilly late afternoon, other painters were absorbed in working on separate panels of the mural... A car swung by, music blaring... a heavysset woman got out, leaving the music playing. [Theroux, P. (2015). *Deep South: Four seasons on back roads*. Kindle iPad Version. Retrieved from Amazon.com]

C.

After the call, Bo didn't speak to Sue Nell at all, but went ahead with his planning as if she weren't there... Arrayed on the floor in front of her was a tangle of fish hooks... The voices faded as they walked down the steps, Bo accompanying them to their cars. [Thompson, M. (2013). *Hurricane season*. Kindle iPad Version. Retrieved from Amazon.com]

Activity 7: Dangling Modifiers

1. Rewrite each sentence to avoid dangling modifiers. There may be more than one option to do so.
2. Consider what benefits such an activity might or might not have for learners of English.
 - (a) Having successfully completed the paper, the grade was excellent.
 - (b) Sipping margaritas in the bar, the band sounded off-key.
 - (c) Unwilling to evacuate in time, the Red Cross couldn't save all the stranded refugees.
 - (d) Walking along the beach, the wind was blowing sand into their faces.

12.6 Answer Key

Discussion: Discovery Activity 1

- (a) *writing*, part of gerund phrase *writing short stories*
 gerund phrase functioning as complement describing subject of verb, *Her sole occupation*

- (b) *teaching*, gerund, subject of *is*
- (c) *vacationing*, present participle, part of past progressive verb phrase *was vacationing*; adverbial clause *when the storm hit* describes past action that interrupted another ongoing past action *was vacationing in Florida*.
- (d) *holding* part of present progressive verb phrase *is holding*
- (e) *Driving*, gerund, part of subject gerund phrase *Driving without a license*
- (f) *driving*, present participle, part of past progressive verb phrase *was driving*
- (g) *rebuilding antique cars*, gerund phrase, functioning as a complement because naming or describing subject of verb, *Joseph's hobby*
- (h) *washing* gerund, part of gerund phrase *washing them*, object of preposition *without*

Discussion: Discovery Activity 2

Excerpt A

shutting down	gerund after <i>start</i> ; can be followed by either gerund, as here, or infinitive; object of <i>start</i>
closing	gerund after preposition <i>before</i> object of <i>before</i>

Excerpt B

(at) investigating	gerund after preposition <i>at</i> ; first <i>investigating</i> not a gerund but part of future progressive verb phrase <i>will be investigating</i>
--------------------	--

Excerpt C

Challenging	gerund, part of gerund phrase <i>Challenging each other's opinions</i> , subject of <i>comes</i>
-------------	--

Excerpt D

Knowing	gerund, part of gerund phrase <i>Knowing the rules</i>
playing the game	gerund, part of gerund phrase <i>playing the game</i> , complement of <i>is</i> , functioning as complement because naming or describing subject of verb
trying	gerund, object of the preposition <i>by</i>

Discussion: Discovery Activity 3*Excerpt A*

supplied	part of participial phrase <i>supplied by the nation's charity</i>
remained	simple past tense
fascinated	participial adjective

Excerpt B

supplemented	part of participial phrase <i>supplemented by simulations</i>
Revered	part of participial phrase <i>Revered above all else</i>
learned	part of passive infinitive phrase <i>to be learned</i>
raised	part of participial phrase <i>raised to believe</i>

Excerpt C

hurried	participial adjective
underlined	simple past tense
moved	simple past tense
attracted	part of participial phrase <i>attracted by the thousands of... streets</i>
unoccupied	participial adjective

Discussion: Discovery Activity 4

Gerund phrases:	Sentences c, e, and g
Participial phrases:	Sentences a, b, d, and f

Discussion: Discovery Activity 5*Excerpt A. GP**Excerpt B. PP**Excerpt C. PP**Excerpt D. PP**Excerpt E. GP**Excerpt F. PP*

Discussion: Discovery Activity 6*Excerpt A*

opened	simple past
standing	part of participial phrase <i>standing in the hallway, standing behind him</i>

Excerpt B

watched	simple past
developing	participial adjective
attended:	past participle, part of past perfect verb phrase <i>had attended</i>
upcoming:	participial adjective

Excerpt C

Stepping	part of participial phrase <i>Stepping out of his darkened, oddly painted pickup</i>
gaining	part of participial phrase <i>gaining his footing</i> (noun)
swallowed	simple past
darkened	participial adjective
painted	participial adjective
drooping	part of participial phrase <i>drooping and damp</i>

Excerpt D

filming	gerund, object of preposition <i>of</i>
trying	present participle, part of past progressive verb phrase <i>was trying</i>
laughing	gerund, after phrasal verb <i>break up</i> (verb + preposition, also called particle)
acting	present participle, part of past progressive verb phrase <i>was acting</i>
saying	gerund, after the idiom <i>feel like</i> , which is followed by a gerund or noun
started	simple past
filming	gerund, object of preposition <i>of</i>
supposed	participial adjective, complement position after linking verb <i>was</i>
filming	gerund, after verb requiring gerund, <i>finish</i>
loaned	past participle, part of past perfect verb phrase <i>had loaned</i>
carrying	part of a participial phrase <i>a bundle of Bob's clothes</i>

Discussion: Discovery Activity 7*Excerpt A*

to be viewed (passive infinitive)

to identify

to notice

to experiment

to adjust

The key to practicing, to functioning as preposition, followed by gerund *practicing*

Excerpt B

to describe

To call... friendship, functioning as the subject of the main clause

to stretch

Excerpt C

to have adopted, perfect infinitive