Objective: To define the uses of participles and provide sample sentences and practice exercises that will illustrate how participles can be used effectively in one’s own writing.

What this handout will:

- Define participles, both present participles and past participles
- Define the uses of participles
- Provide sample sentences that illustrate how participles can be used correctly in a sentence
- Present exercises for students to practice identifying participles in a sentence

What is a participle: According to the Purdue Online Writing Lab, the definition of a participle is: “…a verbal that is used as an adjective, modifying a noun or pronoun,” (for a definition of verbal, see the glossary section at the end of this handout). Additionally, a participial phrase can be used as to describe or modify a noun or pronoun (more information on participial phrases is available in the section below).

- More simply, a participle is a kind of verb that describes the action or “state of being” of a noun or pronoun (Purdue OWL).
- A participle should be placed as close as possible to the noun(s) or pronoun(s) it describes or modifies, so that it is easy to see what the participle is modifying or describing. The noun(s) or pronoun(s) being modified should be clearly stated (Purdue OWL).
- There are two types of participles: present participles and past participles.
  - **Present participles**: verbs in present tense that end in -ing, and are used to modify, or describe, a noun or pronoun.
    - *That flying turkey is coming straight towards me!*
    - *Flying* is the present continuous form of the verb fly. Because the verb flying is used to describe the state of the action being completed by the *turkey*, it is the present participle of this sentence. (for more information on verb tenses, please see the Verb Tenses handout at: http://www.sfsu.edu/~carp1/pdf/Writing%20Skills/Grammar/Verb%20Tenses.pdf)
    - *The sound of singing birds brings joy to her heart.*
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Participles

- **Singing** is the present continuous form of the verb sing. Because singing modifies the noun *birds*, making it more specific, it is the present participle of this sentence.

- **Past participles:** verbs in past tense, ending in *-ed, -en, -d, -t, -n*, or *-ne*, and are used to modify, or describe, a noun or pronoun.
  - *Last weekend my mother and I repaired the patio furniture that had broken in Thursday’s storm.*
  - **Broken** is the past perfect tense form of the verb break. Because broken is used as an adjective to describe the patio furniture, it is the past participle of this sentence.
  - *According to SF Weekly, the fried butter was the most popular food item at last year’s Alameda County Fair.*
  - **Fried** is the simple past tense form of the verb fry. Because fried is used as an adjective to describe the butter, it is the past participle of this sentence.

- **Participial Phrase:** According to the Purdue Online Writing Lab, a participial phrase “a group of words consisting of a participle and the modifier(s) and/or noun(s), pronoun(s), or noun phrase(s) that function as the direct object(s), indirect object(s), or complement(s) of the action or state expressed in the participle”
  - A participial phrase can be simply described as an *adjectival phrase* that begins with a participle (Grammar Monster).
  - Participial phrases most often appear at the beginning of a sentence, and are used to describe something in the main clause.
  - When a participial phrase is used at the beginning of a sentence, it is separated from the main clause by a comma.
  - When constructing a participial phrase, it is important to remember that present participles can be used in past tense sentences, and past participles can be used in present tense sentences without changing the tense of that sentence.
  - *Standing in the warm summer rain, Jamie reflected on how lucky she was to live in California.*
    - In this sentence, the participial phrase *standing in the warm summer rain* is used to describe the noun *Jamie*. Standing is the present continuous tense form of the verb stand, and is used to describe what Jamie was doing in the rain, making it the participle.
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- The noun Jamie is placed immediately following the comma to clearly show that Jamie is the noun being described by the participial phrase standing in the warm summer rain.

- A participial phrase can also appear after the noun(s) or pronoun(s) it modifies, and should be placed immediately following the noun(s) or pronoun(s) it modifies.

- When I arrived at the party I found John sleeping on the couch.

- In this sentence, the participial phrase sleeping on the couch is used to describe the noun John. Sleeping is the present continuous tense form of the verb sleep, and is used to describe what John was doing on the couch, making it the participle.

- The participial phrase sleeping on the couch is placed immediately following the noun John to clearly show that John is the noun being described by the participial phrase.

- If a participial phrase is not immediately located before or after the noun(s) or pronoun(s) it modifies, and if the noun(s) or pronoun(s) being modified is not immediately stated, you risk creating a dangling modifier.

- Incorrect: Working all day in the hot sun, her skin felt like it was getting sunburned.

- In this sentence, the participial phrase working all day in the hot sun becomes a dangling modifier because it is not clearly stated who or what is performing the action described. Surely, her skin could not be considered as the noun that has been working all day in the hot sun.

- Correct: Working all day in the hot sun, she felt like her skin was getting sunburned.

- Because the pronoun she immediately follows the participial phrase working all day in the hot sun, it is clearly understood that she is completing the action described by the participial phrase working all day in the hot sun.

Below is a set of exercises designed to help you practice identifying past and present participles.

Instructions: Identify the participle or participles in the following sentences and determine whether they are in the past or present tense.

1. I love waking up to the light of the rising sun.

   Participle: waking
   Tense: present


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Participle

2. Running in a state of panic, Johnny crossed the entire campus in under 10 minutes to barely make it to his test on time.

Participle: Running
Tense: present

3. Mary only ate cookies baked by her grandmother.

Participle: baked
Tense: past

4. Beaten by his opponent, Jeremiah left the boxing ring determined to become a better fighter.

Participle: beaten
Tense: past

5. Looking up at the clouds, Maleah wondered what turn her life would take next.

Participle: looking
Tense: present

6. The snake, startled by a passing hiker, hissed loudly and rattled its tail to warn anyone around that he was dangerous.

Participle: startled
Tense: past

Glossary:

- **Verbal**: words whose base is a verb, but act like something else, i.e. a noun or adjective
- **Adjective**: a word that modifies, or describes, a noun or pronoun (Purdue OWL).
- **Adjectival phrase**: a group of words consisting of an adjective and the modifiers used to describe a noun or pronoun (Grammar Monster).
- **Dangling modifier**: a word or phrase that modifies a word not clearly stated in the sentence (Purdue OWL).

References:


