

Gerunds, Participles, and Infinitives

Words are divided into different categories depending on their use and function. These categories are what we like to call the **parts of speech**. There are eight parts of speech in the English language: *nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, conjunctions, prepositions, and interjections*. Today, we'll actually be talking about *gerunds, participles, and infinitives*. Now, you're probably wondering how those are related to the parts of speech, right? Well, for the sake of understanding these concepts, just think of those three as various ways in which the different parts of speech can be used. In other words, the main parts of speech are your tools, and our three topics for today are the projects you need the tools for.

A **gerund** is a word that is created with a **verb** but functions as a noun, always ending in -ing. Being used as a noun, a gerund can function as a subject, a subject complement, a direct object, an indirect object, or an object of a preposition. It's important to note that though gerunds may look a lot like present participles, they are **not** the same thing. Gerunds are specifically placed in the noun position of a sentence whereas present participles are placed with the verb phrase, usually as modifiers.

Here is an example of a gerund in the *subject* position:

Brushing your hair prevents it from tangling.

In this sentence, the word *brushing* is the gerund functioning as the subject of the sentence.

If a gerund were to be the complement of a subject in a sentence, it would look like this:

Her number one priority is *working*.

Working is functioning as a complement to the subject, *priority*.

Gerunds can also function as the object of a sentence. Here's an example where the gerund is the object of a preposition:

"There is no use in *standing* in line for three hours," grandma said.

In this sentence, *standing* follows the preposition *in*, making it the object of the preposition.

Very similar to gerunds are participles. **Participles** are words created from verbs that are then used as adjectives to modify **nouns** in a sentence. They can also be used as introductions to adverbial phrases. There are *present* and *past* participles. *Present* participles always end in *-ing* and correlate to events taking place in the current tense. The *past* participle can be either *regular* or *irregular* and refers to events that have already happened. Differentiating between participles and gerunds can be a little tricky sometimes because participles can actually function as gerunds. For our purposes today, we're going to look at some rather straightforward examples. When using a participle as an adjective, you might come across a sentence like this:

The *browning* fruit should be put outside for composting.

Browning is a present participle (noted by the *-ing* ending) that is modifying the noun *fruit*.

I spent the whole day *studying* math.

In this sentence, *studying* is a present participle that is working as the beginning of an adverbial phrase in the sentence. The phrase *studying math* is modifying the verb *spent*. How did I spend the whole day? Studying math.

Both of those examples were *present* participles, meaning the words ended in *-ing* to denote something happening in the current time. As mentioned, there are such things as *past* participles. Past participles can have varied word endings (depending on the word being used); Most commonly, you will see *-d* or *-ed* added to the end of a word. Let's look at a couple of examples:

The windows were *cracked* when the rain storm came through.

Here, the word *cracked* is the past participle working as an adjective to modify the noun *windows*.

He continued forward *cautioned* by the desolate streets.

Cautioned is the past participle in the sentence functioning as the beginning of an adverbial phrase describing the word *continued*.

Additionally, participles can also appear as **multi-part verbs**. The *multi* comes from attaching an auxiliary verb or helping verb to the main verb being used in the sentence.

Joan was baking fresh cookies for her grandkids.

In this sentence, only one helping verb is used, *was*; It is paired with the participle *baking* to create a multi-part verb.

Joan has been baking all morning.

The helping verb in the sentence: *has been* Participle: *baking*

Joan would have been reading all morning if her grandkids hadn't said they were coming over.

Helping verb: *would have been* Participle: *reading*

Knowing how to form different endings of the participles allows for a variety of meanings to be conveyed. Unlike gerunds and participles, *infinitives* do not change their endings; they are always in the simple, singular form.

Infinitives are singular verbs usually preceded by the word *to*. They do not have any special suffixes, they're just simple in nature. In other words, the verbs are *unconjugated*. Infinitives can be used as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb. Most likely when you are dealing with infinitives, you will be dealing with the present infinitive; that's what we'll be looking at today. The *to* is used with the infinitive to show the purpose of something or maybe to express someone's opinion. Let's look at some examples of infinitives!

Noun Josh wants *to study* as soon as he gets home from school.

Adjective Today, she wants to show Josh a new game *to play*.

Adverb Josh played the new game with his sister instead of studying *to make* her happy.

We've discussed quite a bit today. Remember, gerunds are words that are formed from verbs and used as nouns, always ending in *-ing*; participles are words created from verbs that can be used as adjectives or in adverbial phrases, also ending in *-ing* (unless expressing past tense); and infinitives are verbs that take the simple tense and follow the preposition *to*.