

POWER SENTENCES - USING PARTICIPIAL PHRASES

★ **Participles** are words that are based on verbs but function as adjectives. They show action, so they act like verbs, but they also describe, so they act like adjectives. They modify nouns or pronouns.

★ A **present participle** is formed by adding -ing to a verb.

EXAMPLE: *We saw a flying fish.* (The present participle *flying* comes from the verb *fly*, but like an adjective, modifies the noun *fish*.)

★ A **past participle** is usually formed by adding -ed to a verb.

EXAMPLE: *They ate the cake intended for the party.* (The past participle *intended* comes from the verb *intend*, but like an adjective, modifies the noun *cake*.)

★ **Participial phrases** are groups of words that begin with a participle and are used as adjectives. They may contain modifiers and complements. They always answer one of these questions: What is he doing? What is she doing? What are they doing? (*people*) What is it doing? (*place or thing*)

PRESENT PARTICIPLE: *Neglecting his friends, Curtis read the newspaper.*

PAST PARTICIPLE: *Neglected by his friends, Carl read the newspaper.*

★ **Participial phrases** can occur at various places in a sentence. You may find them in the beginning of a sentence (*opener*), between a subject and verb (*s-v split*), or at the end of a sentence (*closer*).

EXAMPLES:

Opener: *Buried in a nearby leather armchair, Spencer V. Silverthorne, a young buyer for Nuget's department store, slumbered.*
Walter Lord, *A Night to Remember*

S-V Split: *Sophie, sitting on the Big Friendly Giant's hand, peeped out of the cave.*
Roald Dahl, *The Big Friendly Giant*

Closer: *She turned toward the window, pressing her cheeks to the little glass panes to cool them of their smarting.*
Rachel Field, *Calico Bush*

Punctuation Guidelines

- ★ When a participial phrase begins a sentence, a comma should be placed after the phrase.

EXAMPLE: *Arriving at the store, we found that it was closed.*

- ★ If the participle or participial phrase comes in the middle of a sentence, it should be set off with commas only if the information is not essential to the meaning of the sentence.

EXAMPLE: *Sid, watching an old movie, drifted in and out of sleep.* (Here the phrase *watching an old movie* is “extra” information, so commas are put around the phrase.)

EXAMPLE: *The guy wearing the chicken costume is my cousin.* (The phrase *wearing the chicken costume* has no commas around it because the phrase is not “extra.” If we removed the phrase, we wouldn’t know who the speaker was referring to.)

- ★ When a participial phrase comes at the end of a sentence and is separated from the word it modifies, a comma usually comes before it.

EXAMPLE: *Leonardo da Vinci worked hard, filling his notebook with sketches.*

Avoid Misplaced or Dangling Participial Phrases

- ★ In order to prevent confusion, a participial phrase must be placed as closely as possible to the noun it modifies, and the noun must be clearly stated.

EXAMPLES: *Carrying a heavy pile of books, his foot caught on a step.* (His foot was not carrying the books.)
Carrying a heavy pile of books, he caught his foot on a step.

EXAMPLES: *Draped neatly on a hanger, William borrowed Grandpa’s old suit to wear to the interview.* (William was not draped on a hanger.)
Before the interview, William borrowed Grandpa’s old suit, draped neatly on the hanger.