

Grammar Reference

Participle (-ing and -ed) clauses

Meaning and use

Present and past participles are used as parts of certain verb constructions but they can be used in a number of different ways.

Present participle (verb-ing) clauses can be used without a subject pronoun and an auxiliary when the subject of the sentence does two things at the same time or when one action interrupts another.

I was sitting on the sofa. I was watching TV. = Two actions at the same time:
*I was sitting on the sofa **watching** TV.*

I was running for the bus. I fell over. = One action interrupted by another:
*I fell over **running** for the bus.*

They can be used to explain why someone did something. In this case, the participle clause usually comes first.

***Being** exhausted I fell asleep on the train.* =
I fell asleep on the train because I was exhausted.

***Seeing** the bus come round the corner he started to run.* =
He started to run because I saw the bus come round the corner.

Another use is in a shortened form of an **active relative clause**:

*Is that someone **knocking** at the door?* =
Is that someone **who is knocking** at the door?

*Do you know the man **talking** to your mother?* =
Do you know the man **who is talking** to your mother?

Past participle (verb-ed) clauses can be used without a subject pronoun and auxiliary in shortened forms of **passive relative clauses**.

*The dog **hit** by the car wasn't hurt.* =
The dog **that was hit** by the car wasn't hurt.

*The gold **stolen** in the robbery was never recovered.* =
The gold **that was stolen** in the robbery was never recovered.

Take note: perfect participles (having + past participle)

If you are talking about two actions that happen one after the other, you can use a perfect participle for the first one. You can use a comma between the actions if you like.

***Having missed** the bus, we decided to drive into town.* =
We missed the bus. We decided to drive into town.

***Having finished** the cake we started on the cheese.* =
We finished the cake. We started on the cheese.

The same meaning can also be expressed with **after + present participle**.

***After missing** the bus we decided to drive into town.* =
We missed the bus. We decided to drive into town.

***After finishing** the cake, we started on the cheese.* =
We finished the cake. We started on the cheese.

Take note: hanging participles

Be careful when using present participle clauses that the subjects of the clauses are the same.

***Walking** down the street the trees looked beautiful in the autumn sun.*

In this sentence we expect the participle clause: **Walking down the street** to have the same subject as the main clause: **the trees looked beautiful ...** The subject is **the trees** and obviously the trees weren't walking down the street! This meaning of this sentence is better expressed in this example:

***Walking** down the street, I noticed the trees **looking** beautiful in the autumn sun.*