

As you read, watch for sentences that follow this pattern and add them below.

PATTERN 12: INTRODUCTORY OR CONCLUDING PARTICIPLES



Explanation

As we have seen, modifiers come in a variety of forms—single words, groups of words (phrases), even clauses. One unique kind is the participial modifier, a verb form that, used as a single word or as part of a phrase, functions as a modifier. Participles have three forms:

- present* (ending in *-ing*)
- past* (normally ending in *-d* or *-ed*)
- irregular* (so *irregular* that you will have to memorize these!)

Example

Persevering, determined to succeed, driven by wanderlust, blest with discipline, the pioneers forged a civilization out of a wilderness.

- Persevering* (present regular)
- determined* (past regular)
- driven* (past irregular)
- blest* (past irregular)

The dictionary is a good resource if you are unsure of irregular participial forms. Remember that all participles function as adjectives, modifying nouns. Also, you can place participial modifiers at the beginning or the end of a sentence as long as it is absolutely clear what they modify.

In the following sentences, note how shifting the movable participial phrase to various positions creates subtle changes in meaning or emphasis. Does the second example work as well as the first or third one? If you set off the participial phrase in example two with a pair of commas, what would the sentence be saying? Would its meaning change as a result of the commas? Remember, when you set off modifiers with a pair of commas

or other punctuation, you tell your reader this material is not really needed to communicate the main message.

Guarding us with their powerful guns, the heavily armed soldiers at the Rio conference looked ominous.

The heavily armed soldiers guarding us with their powerful guns at the Rio conference looked ominous.

NOTE: Here the phrase is *restrictive* or *essential*, suggesting that specific soldiers were guarding us. See in the following example how the phrase is commentary and thus *nonrestrictive*.

The heavily armed soldiers at the Rio conference, guarding us with their powerful guns, looked ominous.

Once you are familiar with what a participle is, PATTERN 12 will be simple. Although participial modifiers may come at the beginning and at the end of the sentence, they may also come as interrupters at any point.

CAUTION: Do not dangle participles! Be sure to place them next to the word they modify. You will have no trouble with them if you remember not to “shift subjects” at the comma: The subject of your sentence must be the idea or person you describe in the modifying phrase, not some other person or word. Inadvertent danglers usually result in unintentional humor or illogical statements, like the following:

Walking onto the stage, the spotlight followed the singer.

Overgrown with moss, the gardener cleaned his seed flats for spring planting. (Overgrown with moss is the participial phrase here.)

The three boys tried to steal my bike while going on an errand.

The man in the advertisement is shown standing in the middle of a stream holding an ax surrounded by trees.

See examples below for modifiers that don’t dangle.

Examples

The man failed the driver’s test given that he did not study at all.

NOTE: *Given* is the participle here.

Expecting a spectacular display, the crowd eagerly awaited the fireworks.

Inspired by the reach of the woods and the magnificent view, he was able to finish his novel.

Printed in Old English and bound in real leather, the new edition of *Beowulf* was too expensive for the family to buy.

NOTE: *Printed* and *bound* are the participles here.

Professional examples

“Standing at the very center of those paradoxes, the old Taoists shrugged and let out a sigh of relief, accepting that they could not resolve them.”—Wes “Scoop” Riker, *Crazy Wisdom*

“Running in and out of the sun, you met what seemed total obscurity inside.”—Eudora Welty, “The Corner Stone”

“Faced with such obstacles, readers are at first tenacious.”—William Zinsser, “Simplicity”

“Sprawled on the sofa, I finally faced up to the grim task, took the list out of my notebook, and scanned it.”—Russell Baker, “Becoming a Writer”

Sentence for analysis

In the following sentences, locate the participial modifiers. Do they work well?

Appearing on television talk shows, crisscrossing the country on the campus lecture circuit, invited to be on important programs, fad theorists and former criminals become the darlings of our society before we forget and discard them for others.

Exercises

Try these exercises:

1. (Rewrite the following sentence, beginning it with an *-ed* word.) If you water your African violets carefully, they will burst into bloom.

2. (Rewrite the following sentence, beginning it with an *-ed* or *-en* word.)
 The underdog team, the Braves, beat the Giants, but the Giants won the World Series. _____

3. (Supply the missing words in this sentence. Begin with an *-ing* word.)
 _____ the student
 skipped his next class.

4. (Begin the following sentence with an *-ed* word. Follow the *-ed* word with one *-ly* modifier.) _____
 _____, the child finally dozed off to sleep.

5. (Supply the missing words in the sentence. Begin with an *-ing* word. Follow the *-ing* word with an *-ly* word.) _____
 _____, the cheetah leaped from the lower branch to the top of the tree.

6. (Rewrite the following sentence with a participial phrase at the *end*.)
 The people on the bus obeyed the driver's instructions. _____

7. (Supply the missing words in this sentence. Begin the missing word group with an *-ing* word.) Spring weather always brightens my spirits _____

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