

A participle is a verb form that can be used as an adjective to modify nouns or pronouns. There are two types of participles—present participles and past participles—both of which express action or a state of being. Present participles end in “-ing”: i.e., change (base form)/**changing** (present participle), frighten/**frightening**, confuse/**confusing**.

Past participles of all regular verbs end in “-ed” or “-d”: i.e., change (base form)/**changed** (past participle), frighten/**frightened**, confuse/**confused** (“-ed” form); also share/**shared**, hear/**heard** (“-d” form). However, irregular verbs have various past participle endings: “-en,” “-t,” “-n,” or “-ne”: i.e., speak/**spoken** (“-en” form), keep/**kept** (“-t” form), throw/**thrown** (“-n” form), shine/**shone** (“-ne” form).

USING PARTICIPLES WITH REGULAR VERBS

The present participle (“-ing” form) is used to describe a person or thing that produces an effect or causes an experience, for example, “The **moving** speech inspired the audience.” Used as a present participle, the base form of the verb “move” is replaced with “moving” (“-ing” form) to modify the word “speech,” which implies that the speech caused the audience to be moved. In another example (“We live in a **changing** society.”), the base form of the verb “change” is replaced with “changing” (“-ing” form) to modify the word “society,” implying that we live in a society that is undergoing change.

Use the past participle (“-ed” or “-d” form) to describe a person or thing that has an effect produced on it or has undergone an experience, as illustrated in the following sentence: “As a result of the accident, the woman was a **changed** person.” In this case, the “woman” experienced some element of “change” after her involvement in an “accident,” which left her “a **changed** person.”

- a **changing** society (present participle using the indefinite article “a”), a **changed** (past participle) person
- an **interesting** (present participle using the indefinite article “an”) book, an **interested** (past participle) student
- the **offending** statement (present participle using the definite article “the”), the **offended** (past participle) party

USING PARTICIPLES WITH IRREGULAR VERBS

For regular verbs, the present participle ends with “-ing,” and the past tense of a verb is the same as the past participle: talk (base form), talked (past tense), **talked** (past participle). However, irregular verbs do not follow a pattern of development, so they can often be confusing; as such, there is no choice but to memorize them.

- a **falling** (present participle) star, a **fallen** (past participle) comrade (“-en” form)
- a **buying** spree, a **bought** item (“-t” form)
- a **giving** person, a **given** answer (“-n” form)
- an **undoing** experience, an **undone** person (“-ne” form)

PRESENT AND PAST PARTICIPLES WITH AUXILIARY VERBS

Participles also have properties of a verb with present and past forms that can take an object. Present participles are used with the auxiliary verb “be” to form the progressive tenses that indicate ongoing action in the present, past, and future:

- “I **am working** on my term paper.” (present progressive)
- “I **was working** on my term paper.” (past progressive)
- “I **will be working** on my term paper.” (future progressive)

The past participle may also be used with the helping verb “have,” as well as “has” and “had,” to form the perfect tenses, the form a verb takes to show a completed action in the present, past, and future:

- She **has finished** her assignment. (present perfect)
- She **had finished** her assignment. (past perfect)
- She **will have finished** her assignment. (future present)

In addition, forms of the auxiliary verb “be” can be combined with the past participle to form the passive voice, the form of a verb that expresses a state of being when the subject is being acted on rather than performing the action or the verb form, for example: “He **was thrilled** by the experience.” In this sentence, the pronoun “he” is the subject being acted on by the verb form “**was thrilled**,” which expresses a state of being.

UNDERSTANDING PARTICIPIAL PHRASES

The combinations of auxiliary verbs and participles as outlined above are known as participial phrases, which include a present or past participle and its objects, complements, and modifiers. Functioning as adjectives, participial phrases most often appear immediately following the noun or pronoun they modify, for example: “The film was an extraordinary achievement, **combining brilliant direction and unique artistic vision.**” In this sentence, the participial phrase highlighted in bold modifies the noun “achievement.” However, participial phrases can also precede the word they modify: “**Playing with a painful injury,** the team’s captain inspired the other players.” In this case, the participial phrase modifies the noun “captain.”