

Sentence Development Tutorial

Tutorial 17: **Verbal Phrases**

This Tutorial includes two files:

- **Lesson (17a_Verbal_Phrases_Lesson)**

In order to learn the material presented in this tutorial more effectively, as you read you should take notes in a place that you can reference later. If it is convenient, you could print the tutorial and annotate it so you can keep it for future reference.

- **Exercises (17b_Verbal_Phrases_Exercises)** – located in the same area as the lesson)

- It has highlighted areas for you to answer the exercises using an application such as Adobe Acrobat Reader.
- Download and save this file as your own; you will share it with an instructor after you complete the lesson and exercises.

Please contact the Writing Center with any questions or difficulties:

csmtwc@smccd.edu or 650-574-6436.

Verbal Phrases

Consider the following sentences:

- **Reviewing** the case, the jury discovered many new points of argument.
- **Committed** to justice, the jury reviewed the facts in the case very carefully.
- The jury, **committed** to justice, reviewed the facts in the case very carefully.
- **To review** the facts in the case properly, the jury requested two more days.

In your notes, explain how these sentences are similar.

As you may have noticed, each of these sentences has a phrase that contains a verb and that is set off from the rest of the sentence with commas. The phrase is underlined, and the verb that it contains is in boldface. This kind of phrase is called a **verbal phrase** or a **verbal**. It is important to understand that each sentence is complete, *without* the verbal. That is, each sentence has a subject and a verb and is a complete idea, and the verbal simply provides extra information.

	<i>subject</i> <i>verb</i>
<u>Reviewing the case,</u>	the [jury] <i>discovers</i> many new points of argument.
<i>verbal phrase or verbal</i>	<i>complete sentence</i>

	<i>subject</i> <i>verb</i>
<u>Committed to justice,</u>	the [jury] <i>reviewed</i> the facts in the case very carefully.
<i>verbal phrase or verbal</i>	<i>complete sentence</i>

<i>subject</i>		<i>verb</i>
The [jury],	<u>committed to justice,</u>	<i>has reviewed</i> the facts in the case very carefully.
	<i>verbal phrase or verbal in the middle of a complete sentence</i>	

	<i>subject</i> <i>verb</i>
<u>To review the facts in the case properly,</u>	the [jury] <i>will request</i> two more days.
<i>verbal phrase or verbal</i>	<i>complete sentence</i>

In the previous examples, you can see that verbals can be located at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of a sentence. They *always* contain a verb and are *always* set off from the rest of the sentence with a comma.

You can use the verbal sentence style to combine two sentences, no matter what verb tenses the sentences use, as shown below.

present tense verb

Reviewing the case, the [jury] *discovers* many new points of argument.

past tense verb

Committed to justice, the [jury] *reviewed* the facts in the case very carefully.

present perfect verb

The [jury], **committed to justice**, *has reviewed* the facts in the case very carefully.

future tense verb

To review the facts in the case properly, the [jury] *will request* two more days.

Now consider these two sentences:

subject verb

The bus [driver] carefully *eases* the bus out of the parking garage.

subject verb

[He] *fails* to notice the “Just Married” banner and tin cans trailing behind his vehicle.

Note that the subject of both sentences is the bus driver. (“He” is the bus driver.) Because both sentences have the same subject, these sentences can be combined using a verbal phrase:

subject verb

Carefully easing the bus out of the parking garage, the bus [driver] *fails to notice*

verbal phrase or a verbal complete sentence

the “Just Married” banner and tin cans trailing behind his vehicle.

Notice the verb “eased” is changed to “easing” and the implied subject [driver] of the verbal is dropped to create an -ing verbal phrase. The verbal is set off from the complete sentence with a comma.

Principle I: The **implied subject** of the verbal phrase **must be the same** as the actual grammatical subject of the sentence. So if you want to combine sentences using a verbal phrase structure, make sure that the **subjects of both sentences are the same**.

Let’s look at some of our previous examples to see how this works:

subject verb

Reviewing the case, the [jury] *discovered* many new points of argument.

Who is “reviewing the case”? The “jury” is the implied subject of the verbal as well as the actual grammatical subject of the sentence.

subject verb

Committed to justice, the [jury] *reviewed* the facts in the case very carefully.

Who is “committed to justice”? The “jury” is the implied subject of the verbal as well as the actual grammatical subject of the sentence.

subject verb

Carefully **easing** the bus out of the parking garage, the bus [driver] *failed* to notice the “Just Married” banner and tin cans trailing behind his vehicle.

Who is “carefully easing the bus out of the parking garage”? The “driver” is the implied subject of the verbal as well as the actual grammatical subject of the sentence.

If we don't follow Principle I to make sure that the implied subject of the verbal phrase is the same as the grammatical subject of the sentence, the meaning may be very different than we intend, as shown in the following example:

subject *verb*

[Andre] watched the pig.

subject verb verb

[The pig] *was snorting and rolling* around in the mud.

Note that the subject of the first sentence is “Andre” and the subject of the second sentence is “pig.” The subjects are different.

When the two sentences are combined using a verbal phrase sentence structure, it sounds as if Andre is the one who is snorting and rolling around in the mud, *not* the pig:

subject verb

Snorting and rolling around in the mud, [Andre] *watched* the pig.
verbal phrase complete sentence

verbal phrase

complete sentence

This sentence is **not logical**. Since the implied subject of the verbal phrase “Snorting and rolling around in the mud” is not the same as “Andre,” the grammatical subject of the complete sentence, we have created what is called a “dangling modifier.”

Sentences with different subjects cannot be combined. If you want to combine sentences using a verbal, make sure that the subjects of the sentences are the same.

As shown in the following examples, verbals come in three forms: the present participial verbal (**-ing form**), the past participial verbal (**-ed form**), and the infinitive verbal (**to + verb form**):

Reviewing the case, the [jury] *discovers* many new points of argument.
(present participial)

(present participial)

Committed to justice, the [jury] *reviewed* the facts in the case very carefully.

(past participial)

To review the facts in the case properly, the [jury] *will request* two more days.

(the infinitive)

Please note that Principle I applies to all three verbal forms.

Note: Since the infinitive verbal or *to + verb* form verbals are used far less frequently in writing than the other two forms, this tutorial will concentrate on *-ing* and *-ed* verbals.

Present Participial Verbals or *-ing* Verbals

Conveying Different Meanings

The present participial or ***-ing* verbal** is useful in expressing two types of logical relationships between ideas:

1. simultaneous action

Example:

Kissing her children goodnight, Magdalena tucked in their sheets and turned off the light.

(About the same time that Magdalena kissed her children, she tucked in their blankets and turned off the light.)

2. cause and effect (The verbal is the part of the sentence which expresses the cause.)

Example:

Speaking in a soft but firm voice, Alejandro was able to calm the dog and stop its barking.

(That is, Alejandro's soft but firm voice caused the dog to calm down and stop its barking.)

By inserting a time word, such as *while*, *before*, or *after* in front of the *-ing* verbal, you can also specify time sequence, as shown in the following examples:

While washing her hair, Tanisha grabbed the conditioner.

In this sentence, Tanisha washed her hair about the same time that she grabbed the conditioner.

Before washing her hair, Tanisha undid the 300 tiny braids covering her head.

In this sentence, Tanisha first undid her braids and then washed her hair.

Principle II: Present participial or *-ing* verbal phrases can show simultaneous action or cause and effect. By adding a time word like *before*, *after* or *while* to the verbal, you can also show time sequence.

Combining More than Two Sentences with a Verbal

You can also use present participial verbals or ***-ing* verbals** to combine more than two sentences. Before we combine the sentences, we must first use Principle I to make sure that all the sentences have the same subject, as shown in the following example. In this example, the subject of all three

sentences is the same since “she” and “daughter” are the same person. Therefore, these sentences can be combined with a verbal.

Sentences to be Combined:

subject verb
My [daughter] jumps up and down on my bed.

subject verb
[She] pretends that she is in the circus.

subject verb
[She] shrieks with excitement.

There are many ways to combine these three sentences with a verbal. Following are some possible combinations. The verbal phrases have been underlined. Although the most common location of a present participial verbal is at the beginning of a sentence, it can occur in the middle or at the end of the sentence, too. In the examples, you can also see that you can string more than one verbal phrase together, separating them with a comma or “and.” In fact, using more than one verbal phrase in a sentence can create long, gorgeous sentences.

My daughter jumps up and down on my bed, pretending that she is in the circus and shrieking with excitement.

Shrieking with excitement, pretending that she is in the circus, my daughter jumps up and down on my bed.

My daughter, pretending that she is in the circus, jumps up and down on the bed and shrieks with excitement.

Jumping up and down on my bed and shrieking with excitement, my daughter pretends that she is in the circus.

Jumping up and down on my bed, pretending that she is in the circus, my daughter shrieks with excitement.

Please open your 17b exercises file and complete Exercises 1 through 3.

Past Participial Verbals or -ed Verbals

The past participial verbal phrase (also known as the **-ed** verbal) is a descriptive phrase usually located at the beginning of a sentence. The **-ed** verbal describes the subject of the sentence. It expresses the subject’s state of being. Following are some examples:

*verbal phrase**subject**verb*

Determined not to miss the train to Washington, D.C., [Mohammed] ran as fast as he could though Grand Central Station, with only five minutes left until the train was scheduled to depart.

(Mohammed was determined; that is, the verbal describes the subject's state of being.)

verbal phrase
subject
subject
verb

Exhausted from studying all night, both [Naomi] and [Yuri] *have fallen* asleep in the middle of their final exams.

(Naomi and Yuri are exhausted; that is, the verbal describes the subjects' state of being.)

verbal phrase subject verb

Embarrassed by his mother's praise, [Patrick] blushed.

(Patrick was embarrassed; that is, the verbal describes the subject's state of being.)

Principle III: A past participial verbal or an *-ed* verbal always describes the state of being of the subject of the sentence.

In the examples that follow, the past participial verbals or ***-ed*** verbals have been underlined. Most ***-ed*** verbals are located at the beginning of the sentence, but in these examples, you can see that, like the ***-ing*** verbal, the ***-ed*** verbal can be located in the middle or at the end of the sentence:

Clenched together in shivering passion, lovers everywhere wonder why life is so brief.
Lovers everywhere wonder why life is so brief, **clenched** together in shivering passion.
Lovers everywhere, **clenched** together in shivering passion, wonder why life is so brief.

As you recall from Principle I, if you want to use any kind of verbal to combine sentences, the sentences must have the **same subject**. But if you want to form an **-ed** verbal, you must also make sure that one of the sentences describes the subject's state of being. That is, it must contain a **to be** verb followed by the past participle of the verb. **To be** verbs include **am, is, are, was, were**. The past participle is the form of the verb that would be used with *have*. In the following examples, the past participle appears in italics: have **frightened**, have **determined**, have **controlled**.

Principle IV: Before combining two sentences to form one sentence with an *-ed* verbal, you must make sure that both sentences have the same subject and that one of the sentences describes the subject's state of being. That is, one sentence must contain a *to be* verb followed by the past participle of the verb.

Let's consider the pair of sentences in Example 1.

Example 1

The girl was determined to earn all As in her courses this semester.
The girl studied four hours each night after supper.

The sentences have the same subject, “girl.” One sentence describes the state of being of the subject, the girl. That is, the sentence contains a *to be* verb (“was”) followed by a past participle (“determined”). Therefore, these sentences could be combined with an *-ed* verbal.

Possible *-ed* Verbal Combinations of Sentences for Example 1:

Determined to earn all As in her courses, the girl studied four hours every night.

or

The girl, **determined to earn all As in her courses**, studied four hours every night.

or

The girl studied four hours every night, **determined to earn all As in her courses**.

Consider another pair of sentences in Example 2:

Example 2

José is embarrassed about how silly he acted back then.

He doesn’t want to see the girl he had a crush on in middle school.

“José” is the subject of both sentences. (“He” is José.) The first sentence describes José’s state of being; the subject’s state of being is “embarrassed.” In this sentence, “embarrassed,” the past participle of the verb “embarrass,” follows “is,” a *to be* verb. Therefore, these sentences can be combined with an *-ed* verbal:

Possible *-ed* Verbal Combinations of Sentences for Example 2:

Embarrassed about how silly he acted back then, José doesn’t want to see the girl that he had a crush on in middle school.

or

José, **embarrassed about how silly he acted back then**, doesn’t want to see the girl that he had a crush on in middle school.

or

José doesn’t want to see the girl that he had a crush on in middle school, **embarrassed about how silly he acted back then**.

Now consider the following pair of sentences in Example 3:

Example 3

Kendro hurried to his computer.

He checked his email and Facebook page.

Since “He” in the second sentence refers to “Kendro” in the first sentence, “Kendro” is the subject of both sentences. But neither sentence expresses Kendro’s state of being. There is no *to be* verb and no past participle. Therefore, you cannot correctly combine these sentences by using the *-ed* verbal.

INCORRECT *-ed* Verbal Combination of Sentences for Example 3:

Hurried to his computer, Kendro checked his email and Facebook page.

Clearly, this sentence is **not logical** and makes no sense because “hurried to his computer,” does not describe Kendro’s state of being.

Please open your 17b exercises file and complete Exercises 4 and 5.

Final Activity

Instructions:

1. Review a classroom essay that you are working on and try to incorporate verbal phrases into your own writing.
2. Make an appointment for a conference with an instructor working in the Writing Center. To make this appointment, sign up using the same method you use to make essay conference appointments. Be sure to include a comment or note that you are meeting about a tutorial.
3. During this appointment, the instructor will make sure you understand the concepts covered in this tutorial, answer any questions that you might have, review your answers to the exercises, and check to see if you can incorporate the skill into your writing.