

Phrases

What is a phrase? Phrases are like fragments; they do not express a complete thought because they do not have a subject and a predicate.

Prepositional Phrases

Prepositional phrases begin with prepositions and end with objects of the preposition. For instance, in the sentence “The snow fell *on the ground*,” *on* is the preposition that starts the phrase and *ground* is the object that ends it. You could also say, “The snow falls *on the cold, damp ground*.” In this sentence, the prepositional phrase is *on the cold, damp ground* because it still starts with a preposition and ends with the object of the preposition, even though several words are in between to describe *ground*.

Participle Phrases

What is a participle? Participle: verb + ending (ing, -en, -ed, -t) that acts like a modifier.

A **participial phrase** is a participle and all the words that relate to it; participle phrases can function as adjectives or adverbs.

How do I find them? Participle phrases have three characteristics: They can be removed and the sentence will still make sense; they have an ending such as “-ing,” “-en,” “-ed,” or “-t”; they can be moved around some and still make sense in the sentence.

Can I have an example? “The snow *falling at North Greenville* is beautiful.” In this sentence, *falling* is a participle because fall is a verb and has had an “-ing” ending added to it. *Falling at North Greenville* is the participial phrase because *at North Greenville* describes where snow is *falling*. The whole phrase—*falling at North Greenville*—is just describing the word snow. If you took out the participial phrase, the sentence would still make sense: “The snow is beautiful.”

Gerund Phrases

Gerunds are a lot like participles, but instead of working as a modifier (like an adjective or adverb), they act like nouns (because of this, they can almost never be logically moved around in a sentence and cannot logically be removed entirely). They also ALWAYS end in “-ing.” Gerunds can form phrases, just like participles do.

I want an example. In the sentence, “*Traveling at North Greenville* will be difficult with the heavy snowfall,” the gerund is *traveling* and the gerund phrase is *traveling at North Greenville*. How do we know that? Well for one, “traveling” ends with “-ing” (a big clue!). Second, the whole phrase *traveling at North Greenville* is operating as the subject as a sentence (not working as a description, which is why we know it is not a participle phrase). Finally, you can test to see if the phrase is a gerund phrase by omitting it: “Will be difficult with the heavy snowfall” does not make sense, so we know that it must indeed be working as a noun in gerund form.

Infinitive Phrases

What is an infinitive? The word “to”+ verb. For example, “to run,” “to leap” and “to blathe” would all be considered infinitives.

An **infinitive phrase** is composed of an **infinitive**, its object (if there is one) and everything in between that describes the object (that is why it is called a *phrase*!). What makes infinitive a phrase distinctive is that they will always start with “to” and an unchanged verb and end with an object; they also are not as limited as gerunds or participles because they may work like modifiers (adverbs, adjectives) or like subjects (nouns).

Example? In the sentence, “*To live through the snow storm* is his only goal,” we instantly can suspect that an infinitive is at work because the sentence has *to live* in it. *To live* begins the infinitive phrase, *to live through the snow storm*.

Clauses

What is a clause? A clause, unlike a phrase, is a group of words with a subject and a predicate. There are two types: independent and dependent.

Independent Clauses

An independent clause is a clause that can stand alone. It is a simple sentence.

Dependent Clauses

A dependent clause also has a subject and predicate, but it cannot stand alone. Dependent clauses require something else to complete them; otherwise, they are fragments.

This is an Independent Clause: The man who slipped on the ice looked embarrassed.

This is a Dependent Clause: The man who slipped on the ice.

But wait! There's more! Dependent clauses can work like adverbs, adjectives, or nouns in complex sentences.

Noun Clauses

Noun clauses function as nouns in the sentence and since they do, they have noun characteristics (can't be deleted or moved).

Example: *Why he jumped on the ice* was a major topic of discussion. In this sentence, *Why he jumped on the ice* is a dependent clause working as a noun. You can test this by replacing the clause with an ordinary noun. For instance, "*Dr. Epting* was a major topic of discussion." The noun fits, so we know that the clause must be a noun clause.

Adjective Clauses (Also called "Relative Clauses")

Adjective Clauses: Adjective Clauses act as adjectives. That means that they modify nouns, pronouns, or other noun substitutes in a sentence and often answer "Which one?" or "What kind?"

Example: The students *who go sledding on the ice* should be careful. In this sentence, *who go sledding on the ice* is an adjective phrase that describes the students.

***Hint:** The sentence should make sense even if the adjective clause is removed entirely. In the case of our example, "The students should be careful" makes sense.

Adverb Clauses

Adverb clauses: Adverb clauses work like adverbs. That is, they function as modifiers of verbs, other modifiers (like adverbs), and sentences. Adverb clauses typically are used in sentences combined with an independent clause.

Example 1: *Although she didn't want snow*, Lisa was glad to have a day off of school. Again, this sentence still makes sense without the adverb clause: "Lisa was glad to have a day off of school."

Example 2: Many adverb clauses express time and can appear at the end of a sentence. For example, "I saw Lisa *when I went outside to go sledding*."