Lesson 8
Parts of Speech: Verbals

Some forms of verbs take a special role in sentences. Verbals are verbs that are used as nouns, adjectives, and adverbs instead of as predicate verbs. There are three basic types of verbals.

The first type of verbal, called a gerund, is formed by adding *ing* to the end of a verb and is used as a noun:

*Selling* is an acquired skill.

*Selling* (a gerund) is the subject of this sentence, and *is* is the predicate verb.

Be careful not to mistake gerunds for predicate verbs that use an *ing* ending. Compare these sentences:

Predicate verb: He is merchandising a new product.
Gerund: He has a knack for merchandising.

In the second sentence, *has* is the predicate verb, and *merchandising* is the object of a phrase.

The major problem that arises with gerunds is the use of a possessive noun or pronoun with them. The following sentence is incorrect:

We appreciate *you* calling about this matter.

Because *calling* takes the place of a noun in this sentence, *you* must be changed to a possessive pronoun, like this:

We appreciate *your* calling about this matter.

Only the second sentence below is correct:

Incorrect: Deborah delaying will jeopardize the whole program.
Correct: Deborah's delaying will jeopardize the whole program.

You can decide whether to use a possessive noun or pronoun with a gerund by replacing it with another noun. For example, if you replace the word *delaying* with the word *temper*, you will find that you must use a possessive noun in order to make sense:

Deborah's temper will jeopardize the whole program.

In the following exercises, circle the sentences that use gerunds correctly:

1. Waiting for anything makes me impatient.
2. His handling of the irate customer was admirable.
3. You saw the result of George training.
4. Take the results to manufacturing.
5. You could attribute the difference to them cheating.
The second kind of verbal is the participle, which serves in sentences as an adjective. In the following sentences, observe how the participles formed from the verb *finish* are used to modify nouns:

- The assistant put the **finishing** touches on the letter.
- The **finished** assignment is in Ms. Boromisa's office.

In both of these sentences, a form of the verb *finish* is used to provide additional information about nouns: *touches* and *assignment*. Other verbs—*put* and *is*—work in these sentences as predicate verbs.

In the following exercises, underline the participles:

6. The established procedures are rarely followed.
7. Use a roasting bag to avoid an overdone turkey.
8. Twice-audited Hodgkins & Company has become more careful with its record keeping.
9. The closed factory will be reopening in May.
10. During the editing process, most written reports are strengthened.

The third form of verbal is the infinitive, which you have probably heard of (as in "splitting infinitives"). An infinitive, such as *to be*, may function as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb. For example, in this sentence the infinitive works as a noun—in fact, as the subject of the sentence:

- **To err** is human. (What is human?)

Here it is a noun too, but this time it's the object of the sentence:

- **We hope to grow** this year. (We hope what?)

In the following sentence, the infinitive works as an adjective:

- Their plan **to grow** was hampered by a weak economy. (What kind of plan?)

And here the infinitive works as an adverb:

- It eventually grew **to be** a very large company. (How did it grow?)

Now, about splitting infinitives: In general, you should avoid putting any word or phrase between *to* and the rest of the infinitive. But sometimes you must split an infinitive to protect your sentence's clarity or smoothness. For example, splitting the infinitive in this sentence is acceptable:

- The best policy is to regularly **inspect** and **service** all the equipment.

But this one becomes awkward when the infinitive is split:

- To predictably, promptly, and reliably **call** on customers is part of your job.
It would be better like this:

To call on customers predictably, promptly, and reliably is part of your job.

In the following exercises, circle the words that split an infinitive and draw an arrow to show where they would fit in more smoothly and logically:

11. Our goal is to, with your help, track down the error.

12. Did you tell her to promptly call me?

13. To cheerfully service these accounts, you need patience.

14. We have been trying to desperately avoid bankruptcy.

15. Ms. McMichaels tends to, with her great sense of timing, know just when she should sell.

In the next set of exercises, draw circles around the verbals and draw lines to the words they modify (if they indeed modify anything):

16. Handling explosives is our main business.

17. Your plan to analyze these trends is sound.

18. The trading experts recommend patience.

19. We planned to finish by Wednesday.

20. Streamlined DiTex has more flexibility than some of its competitors.

A glaring sign of carelessness in writing is the use of different types of verbals in situations that call for parallel structure. For instance, the following sentence is hard to read:

Your responsibilities include gathering sales figures, analysis of those figures, and to report them to management.

You could solve the problem by putting all the underlined verbals in the same form:

  gathering, analyzing, and reporting
  collection of, analysis of, and reporting of
  to gather, to analyze, and to report

Many other sentences can be improved by introducing parallelism:

Nonparallel:  He was an expert in writing and had learned well how to speak.
Parallel:    He was an expert in writing and speaking.
Parallel:    He had learned well how to write and to speak.

In the following exercises, cross out and add words to give the sentences a parallel structure:

21. These were my goals: finding suitable markets and to outline a plan for penetrating them.
22. Standing firm is more difficult than to allow an exception.

23. She has demonstrated an ability to plan and skill at organizing.

24. This remarkable new product will help you to keep your time organized and with writing your correspondence.

25. Retraining people already on the payroll is better than to hire new people.

If you would like to know more about verbals, consult a grammar book on these topics:

- dangling modifiers
- misplaced modifiers
- verbal nouns
- gerunds
- parallelism
- verbal phrases
- infinitives
- participles


Lesson 8: Check Your Answers

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