



A participle is any verb form used as an adjective.

Participial phrase: A **participle** is an adjective made out of any verb form. Note that gerunds always end in *-ing*, but participles can end in *-ing*, *-ed*, *-en*, or any verb form. Participles always act as adjectives to modify nouns or pronouns. A participle might be by itself, or it might join with other words to make a **participial phrase**:

- a participle: **The leaning fence needed to be reinforced.**
- a participle: **Cleopatra eyed the broken dish.**
- a participle: **The cracked window let in a draft.**

A **participial phrase** is a participle that has its own modifiers or its own object:

- a participial phrase: **Hunting the whale, Ahab was obsessed.**
- a participial phrase: **Queequeg watched his captain plotting daily.**
- a participial phrase: **The *Pequod*, descending rapidly, sank.**

The introductory participial phrase: There is a special type of participial phrase that we must master because when used correctly, it is one of the most powerful elements that we can bring into our writing, and when used incorrectly, it makes us sound foolish. The **introductory participial phrase** is a participial phrase that comes at the beginning of the sentence, that modifies the subject, and that is set off by a comma:

- Watching from a distance, the monster studied Dr. Frankenstein.**
- Crying in terror, the villagers fled from the monster.**

The introductory participial phrase lets us inject energy and power into the sentence, but if we break the rules, we get disaster—a **misplaced modifier**:

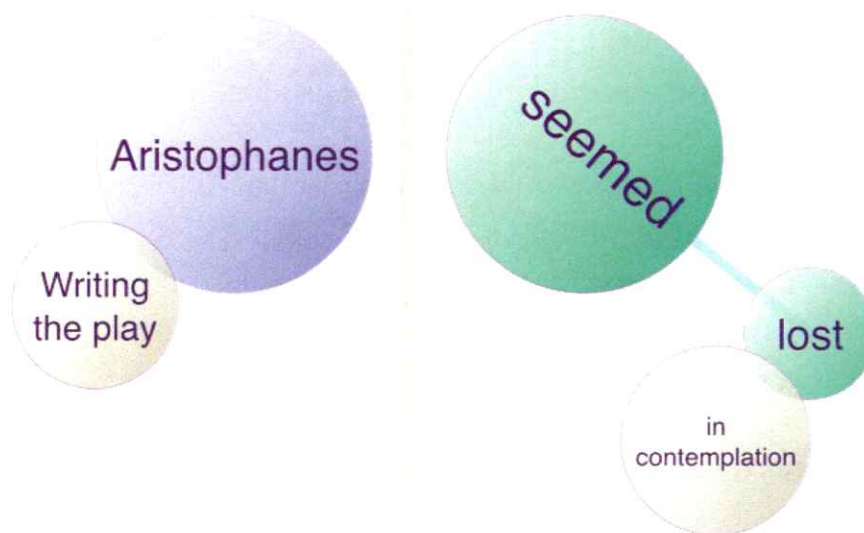
- Chewing his gum, a fly flew past Dillon's ear.**
- Covered in new leaves, Maya planted the tree.**



A participial phrase is a group of words acting as an adjective, and so we identify the participle as an adjective and think of the phrase in the same way that we think of other modifiers:

Writing	the	play,	Aristophanes	seemed	lost	in	contemplation.
adj.	adj.	n.	n.	v.	adj.	prep.	n.
				subj.	LVP	S.C.	
-----participial phrase-----				-----prep. phrase-----			

Here is a classic **introductory participial phrase** acting as an adjective, modifying the subject of the sentence, and set off by a comma. The sentence has a past tense linking verb *seemed* that creates an equation: *Aristophanes seemed lost*.



It can be difficult at first to realize that a verbal is not a verb in the sentence. After all, a word like *writing* certainly sounds verby. The trick is to find the real verb, which here is *seemed*. For the real verb you can always identify the verb's tense, but notice that the participle *writing* does not form a tense and does not have a subject. We could say *Aristophanes seemed lost* but not *Aristophanes writing play*. It is important to see this common pattern: the introductory participial phrase, modifying the subject, set off by a comma.

