

HOW ARE YOUR PARTICIPLES?

Now, I realise that participles are not everybody's cup of tea. If the thought of participles turns you cold and clammy, stop reading straight away and have a lie down. It's not a problem. Many people live long and fulfilling lives without tangling with participles at all.

If you are still here, you'll want to discuss what participles mean to you and your learner. That's great.

Participles are verb forms. There are two sorts: *present participles* and....wait for it.....*past participles*.

Spot the participle

- Present participles are easy to identify: they all end with *-ing*.

*Drusilla's **coming** to tea tomorrow.*

*Wonderful! I've been **looking** forward to her visit for ages.*

- Past participles are a bit harder to recognise. Most of them (the regular verbs) have past participles that end in *-ed*, so they look like the past tense. But they're different!

*Rupert **looked** tenderly into Dolores's eyes as they sat at the table for two.*
(Whole verb = *looked* - is one word)

*Mavis, have you **looked** closely at this photo of Rupert and Dolores? It's quite remarkable!* (Whole verb = *have..looked* – so *looked* is a past participle.)

It's easier to tell when the verb is irregular, because then the past tense and the past participle usually look different.

*To his alarm, Rupert **saw** tears in Dolores' eyes.*

*I've just **seen** Dolores, Mavis! She looks terrible!*

The use of participles

Participles are used to make up verb forms containing more than one word – like

*Who's **been eating** the biscuits again?*

***Have** you **fed** the cat, Albert?*

My personal theory is that they are called *participles* because they are only *part* of a verb. We probably shouldn't say, for example

*Who **eating** the biscuits again?*

Or

*You **fed** the cat, Albert?*

at least in standard English.

We must acknowledge however that there are other kinds of English. For you and me, forms like *I **seen*** and *he **done*** are signs of a world going mad. But they are used and are therefore OK English in some situations. Not for your learner. (But we all hear *someone rung you yesterday* from time to time, and it really isn't a big deal. (Certainly not worth losing friends over.)

Our learners have to come to terms with the fact that

- Every sentence in English needs a verb in it

And

- Sometimes the verb is one word and sometimes it's two words (or even three). This can be quite tricky for learners, especially since one is allowed to put all sorts of other words between the bits of the **verb**.

***Have** you really **been running** this ostrich farm all by yourself, Persephone?
I'd never **have believed** it !*

You *will have* already **noticed** that the **participle** is always accompanied by an *auxiliary* verb that *helps* to complete the verb.

- The *present participles* go with parts of the verb "be" – is, are, was, were.

*Claude **is** looking forward to Jonquil's visit.
The penguins **were** waddling in single file towards the water.*

- The *past participles* go with part of the verb "have" - has, have, had

*I **have** always wanted to write a grammar book.
Colonel Blunder **had** barely finished his whisky when the door burst open.*

Participles in disguise

Just to make things even more interesting, participles pop up in other roles too: for example, they can appear as *adjectives*

*What a **thrilling** performance, my dear! I'm quite exhausted by all the emotion!*

Participle forms can act as *nouns* in a sentence

*Hortense just adores **knitting**!*

Do keep an eye out for participle activity – not just in grammar books but in everyday communication.