Verbs

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

Verbal Forms
A verbal is a form of a verb used as an adjective, adverb, or noun. There are three types of verbals: participles, gerunds, and infinitives. Each of them can be used by itself or as part of a verbal phrase.

Infinitives
An infinitive is the basic form of a verb, preceded by the word to. It can serve as a noun, adjective, or adverb.

EXAMPLES:
To fly would be fun.
To fly is a noun that serves as the subject of the sentence.

Erika is the woman to visit.
To visit is an adjective modifying the noun woman.

To win, I will have to work very hard.
To win is an adverb that modifies the verb work. It answers the question, “Why?”

Participles
A participle is the present progressive tense (-ing) or the past tense (-ed) of a verb used as an adjective.

EXAMPLES:
The crying baby reached for his mother.
Here, crying (a form of the verb to cry) is an adjective describing the noun baby.

Frightened, the panicking boy jumped away from the spider.
Frightened, the past participle of the verb to frighten, describes the noun boy.
Panicking is the present participle form of the verb, to panic. It modifies the noun boy.

Gerunds
A gerund is the present progressive (-ing) form of a verb used as a noun.

EXAMPLES:
Dancing is not allowed in the library.
Dancing is the subject of the sentence; the verb to dance is made into a noun.

Mark dislikes singing.
Singing is the direct object of the verb dislikes. Mark dislikes what? Singing.

Verbal Phrases
Although a verbal may consist of a single word, objects, complements, and modifiers may be added to the original participle, gerund, or infinitive to make it into a verbal phrase.

Objects
There are two types of objects: direct objects and indirect objects.

A direct object receives the action of the verb.

EXAMPLES:
Eating the pizza was no small task.
The pizza is the direct object of the gerund, eating. It answers the question, Eating what?

To win the prize would make my day!
The prize is the direct object of the infinitive, to win. It answers the question, To win what?

An indirect object names the noun to whom or for whom the action was done.

EXAMPLE:
Giving her those roses was the hardest thing I’ve ever done.
The noun, roses, is the direct object of the verb, giving. It answers the question, “Giving what?” The pronoun, her, is the indirect object. It answers the question, “To whom?”
**Verbals**

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**Complements**

Complements rename or define nouns (subjects or objects) in the sentence.

**Examples:**

- **Being the oldest child,** she did a lot of free babysitting.
  - The noun, *child*, is the complement of the subject of the sentence, *she*.

- **To make him happy** is nearly impossible.
  - The pronoun, *him*, is the direct object of the verb, *to make*. It answers the question, “To make what/whom?” The adjective, *happy*, is a complement, which defines *him*.

**Modifiers**

Although verbals are modifiers, they may also take modifiers themselves. These modifiers describe or clarify the verbals.

**Examples:**

- **Eating quickly**, I had no time to talk.
  - *Quickly* describes *how* I was eating.

- **Walking to the park**, they saw a deer.
  - *To the park* modifies the word *walking* by describing *where* they were walking.

**Common Errors**

Verbals are the source of many common errors, including sentence fragments and misplaced modifiers.

**Sentence Fragments**

Verbals can never stand alone as a sentence. Many sentence fragments are actually verbal phrases that should be attached to a neighboring sentence.

**Fragment:** Making our party complete. Erin brought the cake.

**Correct:** Making our party complete, Erin brought the cake.

**Misplaced Modifiers**

Sometimes, a verbal may be located too far from the word it modifies, confusing the meaning of the sentence. Such misplaced modifiers should be moved closer to the words they modify.

**Unclear:** Joe ate the chicken sitting in the chair. (Who is sitting in the chair, Joe or the chicken?)

**Clear:** Sitting in the chair, Joe ate the chicken. (It is now clear that Joe is in the chair.)

**Dangling Modifiers**

If the word that a verbal describes is not actually in the sentence, the verbal is a dangling modifier. To correct such a problem, the modified word should be added to the sentence.

**Dangling:** Having sent the letter overnight, it will probably arrive on time.
  - Who has sent the letter? The subject of the sentence is *it* (the letter), but *having sent the letter overnight* cannot modify the letter. The sender is not in the sentence.

**Clear:** Having sent the letter overnight, we think it will arrive on time.
  - The subject of the verbal, *we*, is included in the sentence.