All About Gerunds, Participles, and Infinitives

The words of the world want to make sentences.

—Gaston Bachelard

Gerunds, participles, and infinitives are formed from verbs, but each performs a different function in a sentence. This mini-lesson focuses on the following:

- **gerunds**: nouns
- **participles**: adjectives
- **infinitives**: nouns, adjectives, and adverbs

**Introduction**

Begin a mini-lesson by reading aloud the Bachelard quote at the top of the page. Explain that some of those “words of the world” are gerunds, participles, and infinitives. Write a short definition of each and an example, such as the following, on the board:

- A gerund is formed by adding -ing to a verb. It always acts as a noun:
  - Dancing to music makes me happy.
- A participle is formed by adding -ing or -ed to a verb. It always acts as an adjective:
  - The dancing girl turned up the volume on her overloaded iPod.
- An infinitive is formed by adding to in front of the verb. It can act as a noun, adjective, or adverb:
  - To dance is my dream. (noun: subject)
  - I have a date to dance on Saturday. (adjective modifying date)
  - I went to the gym to dance. (adverb modifying went)

(Also see the lesson on phrases and clauses, pages 47–52.)

**Teach**

Distribute copies of the passage “Wrong Side of the Bed” on page 43 to students. Allow time for them to read the passage on their own, or ask them to follow along as you read it aloud. Use the teaching chart on page 42 to discuss how the writer uses gerunds, participles, and infinitives in the passage.

**Apply**

Distribute a copy of the Who We Are reproducible on page 52 to each student. Use it with students to document all the gerunds, participles, and infinitives in the model passage. Encourage them to record the gerunds, participles, and infinitives they see in other print sources. You also may want to refer them back to this reproducible in the next lesson, on phrases and clauses, pages 47–52.
Gerunds
To create a gerund, add –ing to the end of a verb.

**KEY POINTS**
- A gerund is used as a noun.
- Students may find it difficult to tell the difference between a gerund and a present participle. Emphasize that to identify a gerund correctly they will have to understand which part of speech the word is.

**TEACHING WITH THE MODEL PASSAGE**
1. To find the subject of this sentence, ask yourself, “What sent the writer swimming in space?” The complete subject is Waking up on the wrong side of the bed. Since Waking is used as a noun, it’s a gerund.
7. Notice that there is no punctuation setting off the gerund from the rest of the sentence. Gerunds don’t require any punctuation.

Particless
To create a present participle, add –ing to the end of a verb. To create a past participle, add –ed to the end of a verb.

**KEY POINTS**
- A participle is used as an adjective.
- Some past participles have irregular forms: the bent or broken branch.

**TEACHING WITH THE MODEL PASSAGE**
2. Swimming is a present participle because it acts as an adjective modifying me.
4. Both uses of treading are verbs; they go with the verb was. Looking is a present participle.
6. Burned by the sun and bitten by the cold are adjectives describing the writer. Both are past participles, and bitten is an irregular participle.

Infinitives
To create an infinitive, add to before a verb.

**KEY POINTS**
- An infinitive can be used as a noun, adjective, or adverb.
- Students may confuse infinitives with prepositional phrases. Remind them that an infinitive consists of to plus a verb, while a prepositional phrase consists of to plus a noun or a pronoun.
- It’s really okay to split an infinitive. This myth got started because a lot of our language comes from Latin words. You can’t split infinitives in Latin because in Latin the infinitive is simply the verb without to before it.

**TEACHING WITH THE MODEL PASSAGE**
3. Some verbs, such as begin, decide, agree, and want, are followed by infinitives.
5. This sentence contains a split infinitive—the adverb quickly splits the infinitive to get.
Wrong Side of the Bed

Waking up on the wrong side of the bed sent me swimming in space—literally. Really! You see, my bed sits tight in a corner of my bedroom. The head of the bed butts up against a wall and so does the right side. I woke up on the right side of the bed, which means I went right through my bedroom wall and into an alternate universe. Suddenly, I felt as weightless as a two-ounce guppy in a huge fish tank. My arms and feet began to move involuntarily as I began to sink. Looking down, I realized that I wasn’t treading water—I was treading air!

Then I realized that I was drifting past the hazy rings of Saturn. I grabbed one of the rings and held on until I could figure out how to quickly get home. A comet shot past me, but I was able to reach out and grab its tail. The speeding comet dropped me off 500,000,000 miles from home. That left only 2,569,838,008 miles to go!

I was too close to an undiscovered planet and got pulled into its orbit. Burned by the sun and then bitten by the cold, I spun around that hot and cold planet for hours and hours. Fortunately, a shuttle ship from another galaxy stopped and plucked me out of the planet’s orbit. Watching Earth from the shuttle’s window was fun, but then the sight made me homesick. I made a whispered wish: I wish I were home in bed. Then I was! Don’t ask me to tell you how. I wonder how much money I owe for that shuttle ride? . . .

In this passage, you’ll explore the following:

- gerunds
- participles
- infinitives
Don’t Make Me Do That!

Write! What is your least favorite chore or job to do around the house? Explain why you dislike doing this chore so much. Make readers really feel how much you dislike it.

With the Rest of the Class: Exchange your writing with a partner. After reading each other’s work, compare and contrast the chores and your response to them. Then talk about how you used gerunds, participles, and/or infinitives in your writing.

The Three Faces of . . .

Write! Read the passage “Wrong Side of the Bed” again. Think about the elements that go into writing a fantasy. Then write your own fantasy passage. Before you begin writing, think of a verb. In your passage include three forms of that verb—gerund, participle, and infinitive. Read over your work to make sure you’ve used all three forms of the verb, and that you’ve used each one correctly.

With the Rest of the Class: Exchange passages with a partner. See if you can identify which verb he or she included and find all its forms.
Activities: Gerunds, Participles, And Infinitives

What Did Shakespeare Mean?

The title character in *Hamlet*, by William Shakespeare, says the following:

To be or not to be, that is the question:
Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to—’tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish’d. To die, to sleep;
To sleep, perchance to dream. . . .

Write Hamlet’s soliloquy on the board or make copies for the group. Have members take turns reading it aloud. What do they think Hamlet means? Guide them in a rewrite of his speech using modern-day language.

**With the Class:** As a class, talk about Shakespeare’s use of infinitives. How do the infinitives help the rhythm and flow of the speech? How did groups incorporate infinitives into their revision?

Participle Poetry

Have students think about a noun to write a poem about. It could be something as concrete as *leaf* or as abstract as *freedom*. The title of the poem is the noun selected. Challenge pairs to write the poem using only participles to describe the noun.

**With the Class:** After pairs practice, ask them to perform a choral reading of their poem for the class and then discuss how they created their poem.

Is “to” Your BFF? Does “–ing” Follow You Around?

Play a grammar game featuring gerunds, participles, and infinitives. Here are the rules: Three people are contestants and the rest of the class is the audience.

The teacher assigns the gerund, participle, or infinitive form of the same verb to each contestant, for example: Contestant 1—irritating (gerund), Contestant 2—irritating (present participle), Contestant 3—to irritate. Then the teacher challenges the audience to ask questions to identify one of the forms, for example: “Which contestant is a participle that means ‘annoying’”? The audience takes turns asking each contestant a question to find the answer—without asking obvious questions such as “Are you a participle?”

**With the Class:** Discuss the following questions: Which was the easiest form to identify—gerunds, participles, or infinitives? What made it difficult to identify irregular forms of participles? Which questions helped you tell the difference between a gerund and a present participle?
Gerunds, Participles, and Infinitives

Who We Are

Add examples of gerunds, participles, and infinitives you come across in the passage.

Gerunds

verb + –ing: smiling, going

Gerunds are used as nouns.

**EXAMPLES:**

- Smiling for too long makes my face hurt.
- He was sent to the principal’s office for going to the gym without permission.
- Terrence was upset by our leaving the party early.

Participles

verb + –ing or –ed: grinning, grinned; tearing, torn

Present participles are formed by adding –ing to the end of the verb.
Past participles are formed by adding –ed to the end of the verb. However, some past participles have irregular forms: bringing, brought; seeing, saw.

Participles are used as adjectives.

**EXAMPLES:**

- The grinning boy made me smile, too. (present participle)
- A dusty lace curtain, tattered and torn, swung in the lazy breeze. (past participle)

Infinitives

to + verb: to smile, to break, to be

Infinitives are used as nouns, adjectives, and adverbs.

**EXAMPLES:**

- My goal is to smile for a total of three hours every day. (noun)
- Displaying all your teeth is the best way to smile widely. (adjective)
- To smile genuinely, a person must be truly happy. (adverb)