

## Common Types of Phrases

There are several types of phrases used in English that are named after the most important words used in that phrase. By learning what these phrases look like and how they are used, the writer can construct stronger sentences.

### 1. Verb phrase

Verb phrases are easy to recognize. They consist of a verb and all the related helping words. Verb phrases function as single-word verbs, to express action or to link subject and complement.

- 1.1 I have been asking for a raise for ten years. (Verb phrases may consist of adjacent words)
- 1.2 Despite being an actor, he has never actually succeeded in learning many lines. (Verb phrases may have other words that interrupt them)
- 1.3 I've just been working on this, and the problem is in the cable. (Verb phrases may contain a contraction)

### 2. Prepositional phrase

Prepositional phrases start with a preposition (such as *in, at, by, for, to, over*, etc.), have a noun or pronoun object of the preposition, and may also have other modifiers. Prepositional phrases function as adjectives, adverbs, or nouns.

- 2.1 The announcement for the play arrived after it was over. (As adjective)
- 2.2 He walked into the meeting just as the president arrived. (As adverb)
- 2.3 For you to pass your test is the reason for having a tutor. (As noun; in this case, the subject)
- 2.4 She gave the information to me. (As indirect object)

### 3. Participial phrase

Participial phrases are formed from participles and all the related words. Participles are formed from verbs and end in "ing" or "ed." Participles function as adjectives; therefore, participial phrases also function as adjectives. They often describe the subject of the sentence.

- 3.1 Laughing wildly, she ran down the path. (Describes "she")
- 3.2 The actor, pausing for a moment, looked at the crowd. (Describes "actor")
- 3.3 He showed us the cabinet, painted a brilliant green. (Describes the object "cabinet")

### 4. Infinitive phrase

An infinitive phrase is formed from an infinitive and other related words. An infinitive is the word "to" followed by a verb. This type of phrase functions as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb.

- 4.1 To get an appointment with him requires a great amount of patience. (As a noun subject)
- 4.2 He wanted to see the Eiffel Tower, but he didn't know where it was. (As a noun direct object)
- 4.3 He wrote a letter to raise funds for the foundation. (As an adverb)
- 4.4 The decision to eliminate vacations was very unpopular. (As an adjective)

### 5. Gerund phrase

A gerund phrase is formed from a gerund plus its related words. A gerund is a verb with an "ing" ending that functions as a noun. Gerund phrases look like some participial phrases. The difference is that participial phrases function as adjectives; gerund phrases function as nouns.

- 5.1 Geraldine's singing always entralls the audience. (As subject)
- 5.2 Sam hates getting a headache when he works late. (As direct object)
- 5.3 His favorite activity is sailing down the Nahanni River. (As subject complement)

### 6. Absolute phrase

An absolute phrase, also called a "nominative absolute," contains a noun phrase subject and a "partial" predicate. Absolute phrases resemble clauses, but the predicate is incomplete, with forms of the word "be" being deleted from the phrase. Absolute phrases function as a type of modifier that explains more about the general circumstances occurring in the main clause. They may be placed at almost any position in the sentence.

- 6.1 The plumber disappeared into the hole, a pipe wrench in his hand.
- 6.2 Its lights off and its doors locked, the mansion looked spooky in the moonlight.
- 6.3 Many boats—their anchors buried in the sand—lay on the salty bed of the dried-up sea.