Participle Clauses

Turn a whole clause into a few words: shorter, smoother sentences for stories, reports and formal writing.

B1–C2 · Philo & Sophia, Lesson 17

Opening the gate, she saw the fox.

TWO CLAUSES

When she opened the gate, (TIME CLAUSE) | she (SUBJECT) | saw the fox. (MAIN CLAUSE)

PARTICIPLE

Opening the gate, (PARTICIPLE CLAUSE) | she (SUBJECT) | saw the fox. (MAIN CLAUSE)

1 Both clauses must have the **same subject**.
2 Drop the conjunction, the subject and any auxiliary.
3 Choose the participle: **-ing**, **having + p.p.** or **p.p.**
4 Put a comma after a clause at the front.

The forms and what they mean

same subject in both parts

FORM	MEANING	EXAMPLE	FULL CLAUSE
-ing	same time, active	**Walking home**, Philo met a shepherd.	As he was walking home…
-ing	reason	**Feeling tired**, Sophia went to bed early.	Because she felt tired…
…, -ing	result, after the main clause	The river flooded, **ruining the crops**.	…and it ruined the crops.
having + p.p.	one action, then another	**Having milked the cows**, she had breakfast.	After she had milked…
having + p.p.	reason, from before	**Having grown up on a farm**, he knew sheep.	Because he had grown up…
past participle	passive	**Built in 1820**, the barn still stands.	The barn, which was built…
not + participle	negative	**Not knowing the way**, we asked a farmer.	Because we didn't know…
conjunction + -ing	clearer time or contrast	**After feeding** the hens, she… · **While crossing** the field…	after she fed · while she was crossing
when / if + p.p.	shortened passive	**When asked**, he said nothing. · **If kept** cool, it lasts a week.	when he was asked · if it is kept

-ing for active, the past participle for passive, having for something that happened first

Danger: dangling!

who is doing it?

~~Walking into the barn, the smell hit me.~~
(The smell was walking?)

Walking into the barn, I noticed the smell.

Covered in mud, Sophia washed the dog: **Sophia** was muddy!

The subject of the main clause does the action of the participle

Shorter relative clauses

after a noun

*The man **standing** at the gate* = who is standing

*Eggs **laid** this morning* = that were laid

*A road **leading** to the river* = that leads

See Grammar Guide 19.

No commas when it tells us which one

See, hear, find + -ing

part or whole

*I saw the fox **crossing** the field.*
in progress, part of the action

*I saw the fox **cross** the field.*
the whole action

*We found him **sleeping** in the hay.*

Also: hear, watch, notice, feel, keep (kept us waiting)

Fixed expressions

these may dangle

Generally speaking, sheep are calm.

Judging by the clouds, it will rain.

Weather permitting, we'll cut the hay on Monday.

Also: all things considered, given that, talking of

Where they go

- **Front**, with a comma: *Hearing the dog, she ran out.*
- **After**, often a result: *It rained all week, flooding the lane.*
- In speech, full clauses are more usual.

Absolute clauses (C1–C2)

- Their own subject: ***The work done**, they went home.*
- ***Her hands shaking**, she opened the letter.*
- With **with**: ***With the rain falling**, we stayed inside.*

Spanish speakers, watch out

- *Al abrir la puerta* = **On opening** / When I opened the door, not ~~At opening~~.
- *Terminado el trabajo* = **Having finished** the work / **The work done**.

Want more?

Sophia explains **Dangling by a Participle** (Philo & Sophia, Lesson 17).
See also Grammar Guides 14 and 19.

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