

# Unit Twelve Modifying Sentences with Verbal Phrases

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Whereas verbs in sentences tell the time, or tense, verbals do not; they have other functions in sentences. Three verbal forms—the -ing form, or present participle; the -ed form, or past participle; and the to form, or infinitive—can be used to form verbal phrases. (See Unit One for a review of present and past participle verb forms.) In the following examples, you can see how the verbal phrases come from verbs:

EXAMPLE 1: Jamari was hoping to attract Jeff's attention.  
Jamari honked her horn loudly.

SOLUTION: Hoping to attract Jeff's attention, Jamari honked her horn loudly.  
or Jamari honked her horn loudly, hoping to attract Jeff's attention.

EXAMPLE 2: Jeff was frightened by the frantic honking.  
He got off the freeway at the first exit.

SOLUTION: Frightened by the frantic honking, Jeff got off the freeway.  
or Jeff got off the freeway, frightened by the frantic honking.

EXAMPLE 3: Jamari wanted to find Jeff.  
She got off at the next exit and doubled back.

SOLUTION: To find Jeff, Jamari got off at the next exit and doubled back.  
or Jamari got off at the next exit and doubled back to find Jeff.

Verbal phrases are good ways to show that two actions happened at the same time:

1. *hoping + honked*
2. *frustrated + got off*
3. *to find + got off*

But often verbal phrases also show the purpose for an action in the sentence:

1. *Jamari honked her horn. Why? because she was hoping to attract Jeff's attention.*
2. *Jeff got off the freeway. Why? because he was frustrated by the heavy traffic.*
3. *Jamari got off at the next exit. Why? because she wanted to find Jeff.*

So verbal phrases have two functions:

1. To show a time relationship between the action in the verbal phrase and the action in the main clause of the sentence
2. To show the purpose of the action in the main clause

## Dangling Modifiers

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When you use verbal phrases, you have to follow one important rule: The doer of the action in the verbal phrase has to be a noun or pronoun in the main clause of the sentence, usually the sentence subject.

In sentence 1, who was hoping to attract Jeff's attention? \_\_\_\_\_

Who honked her horn? \_\_\_\_\_

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Notice that the following sentence does not make sense:

incorrect: Reaching out her right arm, the ball was dunked into the basket.

The verbal phrase does not make sense with the subject of the sentence because the noun *ball* cannot do the action *reaching*. To correct this sentence, make the sentence subject be a noun that can do the action in the verbal phrase:

correct: Reaching out her right arm, the player dunked the ball into the basket.

## *Exercise One* Going Out to Eat

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Join the sets of sentences below, making the second sentence into a verbal phrase. You may place the verbal phrase before or after the main sentence; you will have to decide whether or not the verbal phrase can make sense in either position. (Sometimes the verbal phrase will only make sense in one of these positions.)

EXAMPLE: Rita read the latest restaurant reviews.  
She wanted to find a good restaurant.

SOLUTION: To find a good restaurant, Rita read the latest restaurant reviews.  
or Rita read the latest restaurant reviews to find a good restaurant.

1. Jamal and Rita studied the "Yellow Pages" all Saturday afternoon.  
They were looking for a good restaurant that would please Rita's parents.
2. Jamal offered to help pay for the dinner.  
He was hoping Rita would go for a steak house.
3. Rita refused her offer.  
She was accustomed to paying her own way.
4. She also vetoed the steak house idea.  
She was concerned that her vegetarian mother would feel left out at a steak house.
5. Jamal suggested a vegetarian diner called "The Lean Bean."  
He wanted to simplify the problem.

6. But Rita rejected this suggestion also.  
She was exclaiming that "The Lean Bean" served tasteless alfalfa hot dogs and rubbery soybean "chicken."
  
  7. She said they should find a restaurant that also served meat.  
She was thinking of her carnivorous dad.
  
  8. Jamal and Rita began to bicker.  
They were frustrated at their failure to find a satisfactory restaurant.
  
  9. Jamal finally noticed the name in tiny print of a Middle Eastern restaurant.  
He was desperately seeking a place that would please everyone.
  
  10. Rita phoned "Ali's Place" for their list of dinner entrees.  
She wanted to be on the safe side.
  
  11. The restaurant served juicy skewered lamb for Rita's father and spicy meatless falafel for her mother.  
It was offering a diverse assortment of entrees.
  
  12. Jamal and Rita left the restaurant smiling that night.  
They were satisfied with their selection.
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# Creating Verbal Phrases

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## Exercise Two Fitness Folly

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Create your own *-ing*, past participle and infinitive verbal phrases to complete the sentences below. Remember that a noun in the main clause must be able to do the action in the verbal phrase. Most likely, you will have an easier time coming up with *-ing* phrases, but try to come up with the two other forms as well.

EXAMPLE: Ethel decided she should get in shape.

SOLUTION: Looking in the mirror, Ethel decided she should get in shape.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Ethel wanted to find an exercise plan she could stick to.
  2. She tried aerobics,\_\_\_\_\_.
  3. But poor Ethel,\_\_\_\_\_, embarrassed herself in front of the whole class.
  4. \_\_\_\_\_, she gave up on aerobics and turned to ballet.
  5. \_\_\_\_\_, she had to give up on ballet too.
  6. \_\_\_\_\_, Ethel began lessons at the local swimming pool,\_\_\_\_\_.
  7. \_\_\_\_\_, Ethel discovered she was allergic to chlorine!
  8. Ethel,\_\_\_\_\_, decided to take up a martial art.
  9. She was a success at this activity and so she's been practicing it ever since,  
\_\_\_\_\_.
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