

Chapter 26: Introduction to Participles

Things that go “ing” in the Night:

English

- English forms present participles by adding “-ing” to form the present participle and “-ed” to form the past participle.

Present participle: “The man, *eating* by the window, is my Greek teacher.” “After *eating*, I will go to bed.”

Past participle: “Moved by the sermon, they all began to cry.”

- In English, when the -ing form is functioning adjectivally (“The *rocking* chair is red) or adverbially (“The man ran *swinging* his arms wildly.”), it is considered a participle. If it is functioning as a noun (“*Running* is fun.” “The man is *sleeping*.”) it is considered a gerund. The two are identical in form.
- Greek has no gerund, so we will use the term *participle* to describe what in English are gerunds and participles. Actually, Greek uses an infinitive (chapter 32) when English uses a gerund. For example, the sentence “Seeing is believing” in Greek would be “To see is to believe.”
- When a participle has modifiers such as a direct object or an adverb, the participle and modifiers form a *participial phrase* (“singing his arms wildly” in the above example is a participial phrase)

Greek

Everything said above applies to Greek participles. Keep in mind that a participle is a verbal adjective. It shares the characteristics of both verbs and adjectives. As a verb participles have tense (present, aorist, perfect) and voice (active, middle, passive). As an adjective they agree with the word they are modifying in case, number and gender.

The key to understanding Greek participles is that they indicate aspect, i.e., type of action. They do not necessarily indicate when an action occurs (“time”: past, present). Because there are three aspects, there are three participles:

Present: describes a *continuous* action and is formed from the present stem of a verb.

Aorist: describes an action without commenting on the nature of the action (*undefined*) and is formed from the aorist stem of a verb.

Perfect: describes a *completed action with present effects*, and is formed from the perfect stem of a verb.

Adverbial Side of the Participle: The action described by adverbial participles is directed towards the verb. This kind of participle is usually translated with an adverbial phrase. “While *studying* for his Greek final, Ian fell asleep.”

Participles are negated by μή (οὐ is only used in the indicative). μή has the same meaning as οὐ (not).

Adjectival Side of the Participle: The action described by an adjectival participle modifies a noun or pronoun. This kind of participle is usually translated as an adjectival phrase. “Ian saw Kathy *sitting* by the window.” (If you inserted “while” before “sitting,” it would be adverbial.)

As an adjective, the participle must agree with the noun it modifies in case, number, and gender.