

Participle clauses

Introduction



Realising he was late for work, he decided to run.

Definition

Participle clauses are a type of adverbial clause which allow us to say something with fewer words.

Construction

	Affirmative	Negative
Present participle - the subject in each clause is the same.	Watching TV, Jack fell asleep. [Jack was watching TV] Watching TV, Jack's wife came home. ✗	Not knowing what to do, he asked for help.
Past participle - the meaning is passive.	Watched so closely, the presenter felt nervous. [The audience was watching him.]	Not known for his punctuality, he arrived late as usual.

Perfect participle - one action is before another.	Having watched a film, Jack went to bed. [active]	Not having known him for long, she hesitated to ask him for help.
	Having been watched all day, the presenter felt more used to it. [passive]	Not having been known for his generosity, his colleagues were surprised when he invited them to dinner.

Note that:

With present and perfect participle clauses, the sentences can be inverted:

Seeing the train arrive, she started to hurry.
She started to hurry, **seeing** the train arrive.

Not having seen the cable, she tripped over it.
She tripped over the cable, **not having seen** it.

The participle clause sometimes has a subject:

This company has a lot of longstanding employees, some **having worked** here for more than 40 years.
The weather **being** good, they decided to have lunch outdoors.
The report **written**, he turned to his next task.

Note that this structure is formal, and rare in conversation.

Uses

Use	Examples
To explain why	Hoping to find a solution, we called an emergency meeting. I didn't take a pen and paper to the workshop, knowing that they'd be provided. Having written down the wrong time, I turned up an hour early!

<p>To talk about a time - an alternative to using words such as 'while' and 'as soon as'</p>	<p>Chatting with my colleagues at lunch, I suddenly remembered I had a meeting.</p> <p>Hearing that Julia had got the manager's job, I decided to resign.</p> <p>Walking past the church on my left, I followed a narrow street to the main square.</p> <p>Seen from a distance, he looked/looks like his brother.</p>
<p>In conditional sentences, particularly when giving recommendations or advice</p>	<p>Heated gently, the soup retains its flavour.</p> <p>Serviced regularly, this car will go on for years.</p> <p>Better paid, they'd probably work harder.</p> <p>Dealt with sooner, it wouldn't have got as bad as this.</p>
<p>To talk about something happening at the same time as the activity in the main clause or to give further information about the main clause Note: Mainly seen in formal literature</p>	<p>The people in this team are quite young, most being under twenty-five.</p> <p>Her voice getting louder, she continued to tell him how she felt.</p>

Participle clauses after conjunctions and prepositions

Present and perfect participle clauses are often used after certain conjunctions and prepositions. Here are some examples:

Before **telling** everyone the date, could you make sure there's a room available?

After **having read** all my emails, I didn't have much time for anything else.

On **seeing** there was no one in the room, he realised he'd got the time wrong.

Mind the gap **when** **boarding** the train.

While/whilst **accepting** the need for new desks, the management didn't want to pay for them.

Participle clauses after a noun

Also known as 'reduced relative clauses', these give information about a noun. They use present or past participles, including 'being'.

Present participles are used for a variety of tenses, not just the present continuous:

The man **organising** the conference is my colleague. [the man who is organising..]

Passengers **arriving** from the EU need to queue here. [who arrive, or who are arriving]

She was the one **talking** to Harry. [who was talking]

Past participles are used with a passive meaning:

Did you read the report **written** by the HR department? [which was written]

He likes shoes **made** in Italy. [which are made]

'Being' + past participle is used with a continuous passive meaning:

The room **being decorated** at the moment is the manager's office. [which is...]

The subject **being discussed** when he arrived was the delayed delivery. [which was...]

Examples



She broke her arm **playing** tennis.



Noticing the time, she decided to head back to the office.



Watered regularly, these plants will produce flowers all summer.



The dinner all **prepared**, she decided to relax for an hour or so.



He decided to get a new car after **breaking** down yet again.



The couple **living** next door last year were really friendly.



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