Participles

Actions that describe: from familiar English to almost identical Latin

The shortest useful definition

A participle is a **form of a verb** that is used to add information about a noun or pronoun. It keeps the idea of an **action**, but it does the describing work of an **adjective**.

1. You already use participles in English

Stepping out of the house, I got soaked by the rain. *[describes I]*

Bought only the day before, the fish was already stinking. *[describes the fish]*

Looking both ways, I stepped into the road. *[describes I]*

Thinking hard, I looked at the Greek alphabet. *[describes I]*

Smiling, I turned on the Zoom lesson. *[describes I]*

Each red word comes from a verb—step, buy, look, think, smile—but it does not act as the main verb of the sentence. Instead, it attaches an extra action to a person or thing already in the sentence.

Two jobs at once

In "**Looking** both ways, **I** stepped into the road", **stepped** tells us the main event. **Looking** describes what I was doing at the same time.

2. Why use a participle?

A language can manage without participles. Their advantage is that they make sentences shorter, smoother and more varied. They allow a smaller action to be folded into the sentence instead of being stated in a separate clause.

TWO FULL ACTIONS	ONE ACTION COMPRESSED INTO A PARTICIPLE
I looked both ways, and I stepped into the road.	**Looking both ways, I stepped into the road.**
I smiled, and I turned on the Zoom lesson.	**Smiling, I turned on the Zoom lesson.**
The fish had been bought only the day before. It was already stinking.	Bought only the day before, the fish was already stinking.
The boy was carrying a book. He entered the room.	Carrying a book, the boy entered the room.

Name: _____ Date: _____

3. English has two especially useful participles

Type	Typical form	What it usually shows
Present participle	looking, carrying, laughing	An active action going on at the same time as the main verb.
Past participle	bought, caught, broken, praised	An action received by the described noun; often completed before the main verb.

The labels "present" and "past" are convenient, but a participle usually shows **relative time***: whether its action is happening at the same time as the main verb or has happened earlier.*

Walking home yesterday, I saw Marcus.

"Walking" is called a present participle even though the whole sentence is about yesterday. Its action is simultaneous with "saw".

4. A participle still behaves like a verb

Because it comes from a verb, a participle can still have an object or be modified by an adverb:

Carrying a book, the boy entered. *[carrying has the object "a book"]*

Drinking wine, the boy laughed. *[drinking has the object "wine"]*

Walking slowly, the old man fell. *[slowly modifies walking]*

Looking carefully at the road, I crossed. *[carefully and at the road add detail to looking]*

The understood subject must match

In "Looking both ways, I stepped into the road", the person looking must be the same person as the subject "I". Avoid a dangling participle such as "Looking both ways, the road was crossed by me", which makes the road sound as if it were looking.

Latin Does Almost the Same

The chief extra rule is agreement.

The bridge from English to Latin

English: the laughing friends / we heard the friends laughing

Latin: **amīcōs rīdentēs audīvimus**

In both languages, "laughing" or rīdentēs adds an action to "friends". Latin simply makes the participle agree with the noun it describes.

5. The Latin present active participle

The present participle is **active**: the noun it describes is doing the action. It normally shows an action happening at the same time as the main verb.

ē fenestrā **spectāns**, amīcum vīdī.

Looking out of the window, I saw my friend.

amīcōs **rīdentēs** audīvimus.

We heard our friends laughing.

puellam **rīdentem** vīdimus.

We saw the girl laughing.

puerum vīnum **bibentem** cōnspexī.

I noticed the boy drinking wine.

How it is formed

The nominative singular normally ends in **-ns**. The stem used for the other cases ends in **-nt-**: portāns, portant-. It then takes third-declension endings.

portō → **portāns, portant-**

rīdeō → **rīdēns, rīdent-**

capiō → **capiēns, capient-**

audiō → **audiēns, audient-**

Name: _____ Date: _____

A clear reference: portāns (“carrying”)

Case	Masculine / feminine	Neuter
SINGULAR		
Nominative	portāns	portāns
Accusative	portantem	portāns
Genitive	portantis	portantis
Dative	portantī	portantī
Ablative	portantī / portante	portantī / portante
PLURAL		
Nominative	portantēs	portantia
Accusative	portantēs	portantia
Genitive	portantium	portantium
Dative	portantibus	portantibus
Ablative	portantibus	portantibus

For a beginner, learn the pattern above. In some uses—especially the ablative absolute—the ablative singular commonly appears in **-e** rather than -ī.

6. Agreement tells you whom the participle describes

senex ad forum ambulāns fīlium in viā vīdit.

The old man, walking to the forum, saw his son in the street.

ambulāns: nominative singular; describes senex

senex fīlium ad forum ambulantem vīdit.

The old man saw his son walking to the forum.

ambulantem: accusative singular; describes fīlium

cibum mīlitī labōrantī dedī.

I gave food to the working soldier.

labōrantī: dative singular; describes mīlitī

vidēsne illōs senēs in hortō sedentēs?

Do you see those old men sitting in the garden?

sedentēs: accusative plural; describes senēs

Meaning can change with one ending

senex ad forum **ambulāns** fīlium vīdit = the **old man** is walking.

senex fīlium ad forum **ambulantem** vīdit = the **son** is walking.

7. The Latin perfect passive participle

The perfect passive participle is **passive**: the noun it describes receives the action. It normally shows an action completed before the main verb.

ā magistrō **captus**, puer flēbat.

Caught by his teacher, the boy was crying.

epistulam ā puellā **scrīptam** lēgī.

I read the letter written by the girl.

mīlitēs **vulnerātōs** vīdimus.

We saw the wounded soldiers.

puella ā rēgīnā **laudāta** laeta erat.

Praised by the queen, the girl was happy.

How it is formed

Use the fourth principal part, often printed in **-um**, and replace -um with the ordinary 2–1–2 adjective endings: **portātum → portātus, portāta, portātum**. Irregular forms such as captus, scrīptus, missus must be learnt with the verb.

Name: _____ Date: _____

A clear reference: portātus (“having been carried”)

Case	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
SINGULAR			
Nominative	portātus	portāta	portātum
Accusative	portātum	portātam	portātum
Genitive	portātī	portātae	portātī
Dative	portātō	portātae	portātō
Ablative	portātō	portātā	portātō
PLURAL			
Nominative	portātī	portātae	portāta
Accusative	portātōs	portātās	portāta
Genitive	portātōrum	portātārum	portātōrum
Dative	portātīs	portātīs	portātīs
Ablative	portātīs	portātīs	portātīs

8. One important extra use

Latin also uses the perfect passive participle with a form of **sum** to make the perfect passive verb:

puer **pūnītus** est.

The boy was punished / has been punished.

puellae **laudātae** sunt.

The girls were praised / have been praised.

The participle still agrees with the subject: puer–pūnītus *and* puellae–laudātae.

9. A reliable translation method

1. Find the participle: Look for an -ing idea in English, or a Latin form such as -ns/-nt- or -tus/-sus.

2. Find the noun it describes: Use sense in English; use case, gender and number in Latin.

3. Decide the voice: Present participle: the noun does the action. Perfect passive participle: the noun receives it.

4. Decide the relative time: Present: usually simultaneous. Perfect: usually earlier.

Name: _____ Date: _____

5. Translate naturally: Use a participle, a relative clause, or a when/while/after clause—whichever makes the best English.

Do not translate mechanically

amīcōs rīdentēs audīvimus may become “We heard our friends laughing” or “We heard our friends, who were laughing.”

ā magistrō captus, puer flēbat may become “Caught by his teacher, the boy was crying” or “After he had been caught by his teacher, the boy was crying.”

Name: _____ Date: _____

Translation Practice

Begin with English, then carry the same ideas into Latin.

A. Find the English participle

Underline the participle. Draw an arrow to the noun or pronoun it describes. Then write PRESENT or PAST.

1. _____ Smiling, the girl opened the letter.
2. _____ The broken window lay on the floor.
3. _____ Carrying a spear, the soldier entered the town.
4. _____ Bought yesterday, the fish was already unpleasant.
5. _____ The shouting sailors ran towards the ship.
6. _____ Looking through the window, I saw the messenger.
7. _____ Frightened by the noise, the horse ran away.
8. _____ The woman, singing happily, prepared dinner.
9. _____ The letter written by the boy was long.
10. _____ Thinking carefully, Marcus answered the question.

B. Make the English shorter

Combine each pair by turning the smaller action into a participle.

1. I looked both ways. I crossed the road.

_____

2. The boy was carrying a book. He entered the room.

_____

3. The fish had been bought yesterday. It was already stinking.

_____

4. The girl smiled. She opened the letter.

_____

5. The soldier had been wounded. He could not walk.

_____

6. The old man was sitting in the garden. He saw his friend.

_____

7. The sailors shouted. They ran towards the ship.

_____

8. The horse had been frightened by the noise. It ran away.

_____

Name: _____ Date: _____

C. Translate the Latin present participles

1. amīcōs rīdentēs audīvimus.

2. puellam rīdentem vīdimus.

3. puerum vīnum bibentem cōnspexī.

4. senex ad forum ambulāns fīlium vīdit.

5. senex fīlium ad forum ambulantem vīdit.

6. vidēsne illōs senēs in hortō sedentēs?

7. cibum mīlitī labōrantī dedī.

8. nautae clāmantēs ad nāvem cucurrērunt.

9. puella epistulam legēns laeta erat.

10. mīlitēs oppidum oppugnantēs fortiter pugnāvērunt.

11. ē fenestrā spectantēs, nūntium vīdimus.

12. agricola equum currentem laudāvit.

D. Translate the Latin perfect passive participles

1. ā magistrō captus, puer flēbat.

2. epistulam ā puellā scrīptam lēgī.

3. mīlitēs vulnerātōs vīdimus.

4. puella ā rēgīnā laudāta laeta erat.

5. equus subitō territus fūgit.

6. servī ā dominō līberātī discessērunt.

Name: _____ Date: _____

7. cibus ā puellā parātus bonus erat.

8. oppidum ā mīlitibus captum arsit.

9. puerī a magistrō moniti tacuērunt.

10. nāvis tempestāte mōta ad īnsulam vēnit.

E. Choose the form that agrees

1. amīcōs (rīdentēs / rīdentem) audīvimus. *[participle describes amīcōs]*

2. puellam (rīdentem / rīdentēs) vīdimus. *[participle describes puellam]*

3. mīlitī (labōrantī / labōrantem) cibum dedī. *[participle describes mīlitī]*

4. senex (ambulāns / ambulantem) fīlium vīdit. *[participle describes senex]*

5. epistulam (scrīptam / scrīptus) lēgī. *[participle describes epistulam]*

6. puella (laudāta / laudātus) laeta erat. *[participle describes puella]*

7. mīlitēs (vulnerātī / vulnerātōs) discessērunt. *[participle describes mīlitēs]*

8. mīlitēs (vulnerātī / vulnerātōs) vīdimus. *[participle describes mīlitēs]*

F. Translate into Latin

1. We heard our friends laughing.

2. We saw the laughing girl.

3. I noticed the boy drinking wine.

4. The old man, walking to the forum, saw his son.

5. I gave food to the working soldier.

6. The shouting sailors ran towards the ship.

7. Caught by his teacher, the boy was crying.

8. I read the letter written by the girl.

9. We saw the wounded soldiers.

Name: _____ Date: _____

10. Praised by the queen, the girl was happy.

11. The frightened horse ran away.

12. The girls were praised.

G. Final mixed challenge

For each sentence: (1) underline the participle; (2) circle the noun it describes; (3) write ACTIVE + SAME TIME or PASSIVE + EARLIER; (4) translate.

1. rēx mīlitēs clāmantēs audīvit. _____

2. mīlitēs ā rēge laudātī laetī erant. _____

3. puella epistulam scrībēns amīcum vīdit. _____

4. epistula ā puellā scrīpta longa erat. _____

5. senex puerīs in viā lūdentibus pecūniam dedit. _____

6. equus ā puerō mōtus ad mūrum cucurrit. _____

7. nautae nāvem ad īnsulam appropinquantem vīdērunt. _____

8. oppidum ab hostibus oppugnātum dēfendimus. _____

Final check

What noun does the participle describe? Does the Latin participle agree with it in **case, gender and number**? Is the action active and simultaneous, or passive and earlier?

Name: _____ Date: _____