

34. Participles Overview

Lesson in a Nutshell

Participles are verbal adjectives, usually translated as “ing” words.

As verbs, they have tense and voice. As adjectives they have case, number and gender.

Participles can behave like adjectives or adverbs.

Ah, the participle,
that wonder of Greek morphology!

The Greek participle will bring together what we have learned about substantives and motion words into one glorious (terrifying?) part of speech.

The good news is that if you have learned the material we have covered so far, there is very little new to learn.

The bad news is that if you have not learned the material we have covered so far, it will come back to haunt you.

The good news is that the participles give us a chance to summarize and review all we have learned so far. Onward!

In this lesson, we will focus on understanding the grammar of the participle — how it behaves in a sentence. I will also introduce you to the basic forms of the Greek participle.

In the three lessons that follow, we will put the participle into play — and play!

What Is A Participle?

A participle is a verbal adjective. It has

- ➔ some things in common with verbs and
- ➔ other things in common with adjectives.

In English, the participles are the “ing” words.¹

flying
running
falling
laughing

Sometimes participles behave like adjectives.
Other times they behave like adverbs.

As adjectives...

Participles can modify nouns — just like adjectives. This is called the adjectival use. Pretty tricky, right?

Here is an example of an adjectival participle.

The **hunting** dog.

See? “Hunting” modifies “dog.”

Participles can also “stand in” for nouns — just like any adjective.

This is called the substantival use.

Hunting is my favorite activity.

In this case “hunting” is behaving like a noun.

As adverbs...

Participles can also modify verbs. In other words, they behave adverbially. This is called the adverbial use of the participle. Who would have guessed?

Here is an example of the adverbial use of the participle.

My dog broke its leg **while hunting**.

In this case “while hunting” modifies “broke.” In other words, the leg “broke while hunting.” When the participle is used this way in Greek, it will often require a key word to complete the meaning.

¹ Actually, “ing” is used to form the active participle in English and “ed” is used to form the passive participle.

To review: There are three ways the participle is used:

Adjectival

The **hunting** dog.

Substantival

Hunting is my favorite activity.

Adverbial

My dog broke its leg **while hunting**.

One more thing...

The participle can stand at the head of a phrase. This is called a participial phrase.

Watch how the participles in our three simple examples can be expanded into participial phrases.

Adjectival

The dog **hunting by my side**.

Substantival

Hunting with my friends on a cool fall morning is my favorite activity.

Adverbial

The dog broke its leg while **hunting in the woods**.

As we begin to translate Greek, you will discover that it is very important to see participial phrases.



It's a participle paradise!

Recognizing Greek Participles

Greek participles have tense and voice, case, number and gender.

Tense	Voice	Participle	Case	Number	Gender
P resent A orist Pe R fect	A ctive M iddle P assive	P articiple	N ominative G enitive D ative A ccusative	S ingular P lural	M asculine F eminine N euter

Tense: The tense of a participle is not focused on time, but aspect. Remember: everything outside of the indicative is not focused on time.

Participles do have something called “relative time.” It means that the action described in the participle takes place relative to the main verb. More about that later.

For now, it is enough to focus on aspect, which is much more important.

It’s the same old story:

Present Participles

describe ongoing aspect.

Aorist Participles

describe undefined aspect.

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Perfect Participles

describe perfected aspect.

• _____

Voice: The voice of the participle tells whether the subject of the participle is giving (active) or receiving (passive) the action of the participle. No surprise there!

Case, Number, Gender: The case, number and gender of the participle will match the noun it modifies. Just as adjectives had to be able to be masculine AND feminine AND neuter, participles must be able to be all three genders. For this reason, there are 24 forms of each participle.

This is not like English, but by now we should be used to it.

There is only one form of the English definite article (“the”) but there are 24 forms in Greek. Why? Because every Greek article matches the noun it modifies in case, number and gender. But this is old news.

Because the participle is a verbal adjective, it has 24 forms. It will follow either the 2-1-2 or 3-1-3 pattern of declension. In English, I use the same word whether I am speaking of...

a believing man
 believing men
 a believing woman
 believing women
 believing crowds

In Greek, the participle will change to match the case, number and gender of the noun it modifies.

πιστευων¹ ἄνθρωπος
 πιστευοντες ἄνθρωποι
 πιστευουσα γυνη
 πιστευουσαι γυναικες
 πιστευοντες ὄχλοι

One more time: Participles have tense and voice, case, number and gender.

Tense	Voice	Participle	Case	Number	Gender
Present Aorist PeRfect	Active Middle Passive	Participle	Nominative Genitive Dative Accusative	Singular Plural	Masculine Feminine Neuter

¹ The nominative, masculine, singular form of the participle is odd. We have seen this pattern. Nominative forms tend to do their own thing.

We will study the forms in the next three lessons, but the good news is that there is almost nothing new to learn.

- * **The present tense** will be built on the present tense stem.
(It will look like the lexical form.)
- * **The Aorist tense** will reveal itself by a **σα**, **θε**¹ or a **stem change**.
There will be no augment.
- * **The perfect tense** will use a **reduplication**, **κ**, or **no connecting vowel**.
- * **The voice** of the participle will be easy to see by the participle morpheme.
(More on that to come.)

Active	Middle or Passive
ντ, ουσα/η ντ, σασα/η κοτ, κυια	μεν, θε

- * **The case, number and gender** will be shown by noun endings we have already learned.

¹ Instead of a θη the participle uses θε.