

# Chapter 3 – The Verb Phrase

The verb phrase consists of something that looks, smells and acts like a verb – present participle, past participle or infinitive – either standing alone or with accompanying modifiers. It can appear in any of the three positions: initial, medial or final.

## Present Participle Phrases:

- 2 In its basin there,
- 1 the perfectly clear spring water eddied ceaselessly,
  - 2 braiding and swelling,
  - 2 swaying the young fronds of fern and the grass which trailed lushly down to the surface,
  - 2 spilling over the lip of stone,
  - 2 and plunging down over the slope to join the creek below.

## Past Participle Phrase:

- 1 There were a pair of drumsticks, /, and a trumpet without a mouthpiece.
  - 2/ blackened where sweating hands had held them
  
- 1 His cheeks, / , puffed out like a chubby baby.
  - 2/ swollen from four pulled teeth

## Infinitive phrases:

- 2 **To roam** the roads of the country or the streets of the city,
- 2 **to feel** there is no road of ground on which the feet can rest,
- 2 **to halt** weary and hungry outside lighted windows and hear laughter and song within —
- 1 these are the hungers and rebellions that drive men to crime and women to shame.

# The Verb Phrase Exercise A

**Directions:** In the following passage, identify the **FREE MODIFIER VERB PHRASES** by highlighting...

- the free modifier present participle verb phrases in \_\_\_\_\_,
- the free modifier past participle verb phrases in \_\_\_\_\_,
- and the free modifier infinitive verb phrases in \_\_\_\_\_.

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## The Jump in Ralph's Backyard

The dirt bike, rusted from the winter elements, couldn't have done the job I needed it to get done. I realize that now. If I had had the KX500 (that's a Kawasaki) instead of a lousy little 100 that my pop bought me used from the kid down the street, I would have done it easily, and with style. But no, I had the little 100. See, what I was trying to do was jump Ralph's broken-down car in his mom's backyard. It was a stupid idea, but I had visions of greatness: flying down the short hill in the backyard, dressed in my new racing suit, pumping with energy and adrenaline, and, in general, stuffed with an ego that told me I could successfully jump the old Chevy. Those visions were short lived, however.

Now, it's true that there was a hill in the backyard. And it's true that I wore my racing suit (as cheesy as that sounds). Moreover, I was pumping with energy and adrenaline, and I did have a big ego. But, what I did not have was the 500 I was telling you about earlier. I would have settled for the 250, but, again, I only had the 100, rusted from leaving it outside last winter.

So, there I was, straddling the bike at the top of that short hill, sweating with nervous energy, dressed in my cheesy racing suit with the number 12 clipped to my back. Despite the smallness of the bike, the engine rumbled, or so I thought, purring loudly with each rev of the throttle, and I could feel my heart pumping, pounding a mile a minute inside my chest.

What was I thinking? Well, I only had thoughts of success: to jump that Chevy, to land both wheels, to hop off to a round of applause, and to tell everybody about it at school (over and over again). That's what I thought. What happened is a different story all together.

## The Verb Phrase Exercise A Continued...

In short, the jump was not steep enough, and my bike didn't get enough momentum going as I headed up the ramp. The tire, upon leaving the edge of the jump, caught the edge of the top of the car, sending me headfirst into the ramp on the other side. I flew like a broken bird, flapping my wings in fear, flailing my legs in hope, and looking all around me like a wanted man. But all I really wanted was a semi-safe landing.



That didn't happen. Sure, my legs landed. They touched the ground first, but I'd be lying if I said they landed gracefully. They more or less bounced, crooked from the flight, onto the dirt ramp on the other side of the car.

I yelled in agony, but my flight was not over. The rest of me still had to land, and when it did, my left arm got the bulk of the blow, snapping like a firecracker, popping like a round of applause from the crowd, and twisting like Regan's head in "The Exorcist." I passed out from the pain.

But I'm here to tell the story. I'm still alive, sitting in a hospital bed, drugged to stifle the pain of moving, writing you this story with the one good arm I have, recalling as much as I can remember before the moment I passed out in Ralph's backyard.

And do you know what? All I can think of is that 500. If I had had that bike, I would have made it. I wouldn't be sitting here, dressed in a patterned hospital gown, bathing with a sponge, stinging from pain in body parts I didn't know I even had. I'd be reveling in my success: dating cute girls, eating celebratory pizza, and telling and retelling the story of "The Jump in Ralph's Backyard" over and over again. But, of course, I'm not doing those things. I'm in the hospital, writing about failure instead of success.

If only I had had the 500.

# The Verb Phrase Exercise B

**Directions:** On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite each sentence in diagram form, supplying a verb phrase that uses the type of verb headword called for — a present participle, past participle or an infinitive.

- (1) 1 She dried the dishes carefully,  
2 singing cheerfully all the while. (present participle verb phrase)
- (2) 1 The lawnmower, / , wasn't worth repairing.  
2/ \_\_\_\_\_ (past participle verb phrase)
- (3) 2 Since this was his first day in the new school,  
1 his attempts \_\_\_\_\_ (embedded infinitive verb phrase) irritated his classmates.
- (4) 1 People crowded the benches in the park,  
2 \_\_\_\_\_. (present participle verb phrase)
- (5) 1 He walked off hurriedly down the road,  
2 \_\_\_\_\_ (present participle verb phrase) over his shoulder.
- (6) 2 On Saturday morning,  
1 she, / , walked seven miles to her grandmother's house,  
2/ \_\_\_\_\_, (past participle verb phrase)  
2 \_\_\_\_\_, (present participle verb phrase)  
2 \_\_\_\_\_, (present participle verb phrase)  
2 \_\_\_\_\_. (present participle verb phrase)
- (7) 1 The priceless fabric, / , was \_\_\_\_\_. (past participle verb phrase)  
2/ \_\_\_\_\_ (past participle verb phrase)
- (9) 1 This was a perfect day to indulge one's fancies:  
2 \_\_\_\_\_, (infinitive verb phrase)  
2 \_\_\_\_\_, (infinitive verb phrase)  
2 \_\_\_\_\_. (infinitive verb phrase)
- (10) 1 They worked on the school yearbook enthusiastically,  
2 \_\_\_\_\_, ( present participle verb phrase)  
2 \_\_\_\_\_. ( present participle verb phrase)
- (11) 1 The car, / , was \_\_\_\_\_. ( present participle verb phrase)  
2/ \_\_\_\_\_ (past participle verb phrase)

# The Verb Phrase Exercise C

**Directions:** The following exercise will give you more practice in the use of **verb phrases** in slightly more complicated sentences. Notice that these sentences require both free modifier and embedded phrases, including prepositional phrases. **Completely rewrite these sentences on a separate sheet of paper.**

- (1) 2 \_\_\_\_\_ (FM present participle phrase) \_\_\_\_\_,  
(embedded prepositional phrase)  
1 he was anxious \_\_\_\_\_ (embedded infinitive phrase) \_\_\_\_\_.  
(embedded prepositional phrase)
- (2) 1 John, / , sped down the street in his convertible Mustang.  
2/ a man too busy \_\_\_\_\_. (embedded infinitive phrase)
- (3) 1 The cat, / , was \_\_\_\_\_. (embedded present participle phrase)  
2/ \_\_\_\_\_ (FM past participle phrase) \_\_\_\_\_  
(embedded prepositional phrase)
- (4) 1 The computer, / , buzzed \_\_\_\_\_. (embedded prepositional phrase).  
2/ \_\_\_\_\_ (FM present participle phrase) \_\_\_\_\_  
(2 embedded prepositional phrases)
- (5) 2 \_\_\_\_\_, (FM past participle phrase)  
1 The lion tamer settled the ferocious lion,  
2 \_\_\_\_\_ (FM present participle phrase) \_\_\_\_\_.  
(embedded prepositional phrase)
- (6) 1 The small boy, / , stood alone on the corner,  
2/ \_\_\_\_\_ (FM past participle verb phrase) \_\_\_\_\_  
(2 embedded prepositional phrases)  
2 waiting \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_. (2 embedded prepositional phrases)
- (7) 1 The old woman, / , sat \_\_\_\_\_, (embedded prepositional phrase)  
2/ \_\_\_\_\_, (FM past participle phrase)  
2 \_\_\_\_\_, (FM past participle phrase)  
2 \_\_\_\_\_. (FM past participle phrase)

## Verb Phrase Exercise C Continued...

- (8)** 1 Kacie, / , walked the dark street alone,  
2/ \_\_\_\_\_ (FM past participle phrase)  
2 \_\_\_\_\_, (FM present participle phrase) \_\_\_\_\_.  
(embedded prepositional phrases)
- (9)** 1 The mints, / , tasted like natural sweetness on her lips.  
2/ \_\_\_\_\_ (FM present participle phrase) \_\_\_\_\_  
(embedded prepositional phrase)
- (10)** 2 \_\_\_\_\_ (FM past participle phrase) \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
(2 embedded prepositional phrases)  
1 The ATV slid down the hill,  
2 \_\_\_\_\_ (FM present participle phrase) \_\_\_\_\_.  
(embedded prepositional phrase)
- (11)** 1 Jackson always dreamed up two wishes in English class:  
2 \_\_\_\_\_ (FM infinitive verb phrase) \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_,  
(2 embedded prepositional phrases)  
2 and \_\_\_\_\_ (FM infinitive verb phrase) \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_.  
(2 embedded prepositional phrases)
- (12)** 2 \_\_\_\_\_ (FM past participle phrase) \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
(2 embedded prepositional phrases)  
2 \_\_\_\_\_ (FM present participle phrase) \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
(2 embedded prepositional phrases)  
1 Johnson drew his thumbnail across the smoothly sanded wood,  
2 \_\_\_\_\_ (FM present participle phrase) \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
(2 embedded prepositional phrases)  
2 \_\_\_\_\_ (FM present participle phrase) \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(2 embedded prepositional phrases)
- (13)** 2 \_\_\_\_\_ (FM past participle phrase) \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
(2 embedded prepositional phrases)  
1 Audrey, / , danced around the room in joy,  
2 \_\_\_\_\_ (FM present participle phrase) \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
(2 embedded prepositional phrases)  
2 \_\_\_\_\_ (FM present participle phrase) \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(2 embedded prepositional phrases)