19

Participle, Absolute, and Reduced Clauses

Participle clauses compress full clauses into elegant phrases — the signature of mature written English. *Because she felt tired, she went home early* → ***Feeling tired**, she went home early.*

19.1 The forms

Present participle	*knowing, walking* — active, same time or reason
Perfect participle	*having known, having walked* — active, earlier time
Past participle	*known, built, exhausted* — passive
Passive perfect	*having been warned* — passive, earlier time
Negative	*not knowing, never having seen*

19.2 Adverbial participle clauses

Participle clauses can express time, reason, result, condition, and concession — the reader infers the connection:

- Time: ***Crossing the bridge**, we saw the whole valley.* ***Having finished** the audit, the team wrote its report.* (perfect participle = clearly earlier action)
- Reason: ***Being a doctor**, she knew the symptoms.* ***Not wanting** to seem rude, I stayed another hour.*
- Result: *The volcano erupted overnight,* ***blanketing** the town in ash.*
- Condition: ***Taken daily**, the supplement is harmless.*
- Concession (with conjunction): ***While admitting** the error, the minister refused to resign.*
- After conjunctions/prepositions: ***Before signing**, read the terms.* ***On hearing** the news, she wept.* ***After being questioned**, he was released.*

Key Point

The implied subject of a participle clause must be the subject of the main clause. When it is not, the participle "dangles": ✗ *Walking to the station, the rain started.* (the rain wasn't walking) → ✓ *Walking to the station,* ***I** got caught in the rain.* / ✓ *As I was walking to the station, the rain started.* Full discussion of danglers in Chapter 28.

19.3 Absolute constructions

An **absolute** clause has its *own* subject and modifies the whole sentence — formal and literary:

- ***The weather being** fine, the ceremony was held outdoors.*
- ***All things considered**, the project succeeded.*
- *She stood in the doorway, **her coat dripping**, waiting for an apology.*
- ***God willing**, we shall meet again.*
- With *with*: ***With inflation rising**, the bank raised rates. He can't work **with the children shouting**.*

19.4 Reduced adverbial clauses

Time and concession clauses reduce when the subjects match:

- *While (she was) waiting for the bus, she read.*
- *When (it is) heated, the metal expands.*
- *Though (he was) exhausted, he finished the race.*
- *If (it is) necessary, call me at home.*

19.5 Participles as modifiers of nouns

Reduced relative clauses (Chapter 12) rely on the active/passive contrast:

- *the man **leading** the project* (= who is leading — active)
- *the project **led** by the man* (= that is led — passive)
- *the road **connecting** the villages; falling prices; a growing concern*
- *a **broken** promise; the **invited** guests; recently **published** findings*

Common Error

Choose the participle by voice, not habit: ✗ *the discussed issues yesterday* → ✓ *the issues discussed yesterday* (participle phrases with their own modifiers follow the noun);
✗ *a boring student* (if you mean the student feels bored) → ✓ *a bored student*;
✗ *The instructions were confused.* (if the instructions cause confusion) → ✓ *The instructions were confusing.*

Style & Register

Participle clauses lighten prose but blur logical connections — the reader must guess whether you mean *because*, *when*, or *although*. In argumentative writing, keep explicit conjunctions for the connections that matter, and reserve participle clauses for background.

Exercises

Exercise 19.1 Compress

Rewrite using a participle or absolute clause.

1. Because he had lost his ticket, he had to buy another.
2. After she had checked the figures twice, she submitted the report.

3. As the hotel was full, we drove to the next town.
4. When the contract had been signed, the partners shook hands.
5. Because I didn't know the area, I used a map.

Exercise 19.2 Expand

Rewrite each participle clause as a full clause with an explicit conjunction.

1. Having been warned twice, the driver lost his licence.
2. Weather permitting, the flight will leave on time.
3. Not having read the manual, she pressed the wrong button.
4. Seen from above, the island resembles a crescent.

Exercise 19.3 Fix the danglers

Rewrite so that each participle has the right subject.

1. Driving through the desert, the temperature reached 45 °C.
2. Having finished the meal, the bill was requested.
3. Opening the cupboard, a mouse jumped out.
4. Written in 1848, readers still find the pamphlet electrifying.