A verbal is a verb that functions as some other part of speech in a sentence. In the English language, there are three basic types of verbals: gerunds, participles and infinitives. Let’s explore each of these verbals in detail.

**Gerunds**

Gerunds are verbals that function as nouns and have an –ing ending. Since gerunds are derived from verbs and have an –ing ending, they do express action. However, because gerunds function as nouns, they occupy slots traditionally held by nouns in sentences such as subjects, direct objects and objects of prepositions. Gerunds may occur as one word, or they may be part of a gerund phrase. Let’s take a look at some examples:

Gerund, functioning as subject

*Reading* is my most beneficial summer activity.

Gerund, functioning as direct object

James enjoys *swimming*.

Gerund, functioning as object of preposition

You will get good grades by *studying*.

Gerund phrase, functioning as subject

*Eating on the run* is one of the most unhealthy American habits.

Gerund phrase, functioning as direct object

The teacher simply cannot excuse *sleeping during class*.

Gerund phrase, functioning as object of preposition

We found the keys by *looking on the ground next to the car*.

**Test**

To determine whether a word in a sentence is a gerund, look at the word(s) ending in –ing in the sentence. If this word can be replaced by the pronoun it, then the word is a gerund. If the word it replaces other words in addition to the gerund, then these make up the gerund phrase (Lester 177). Let’s take a look at an example:

My grandfather loves *getting together at Christmas*.
My grandfather loves *it*. 
Exercise 1

Underline the gerunds or gerund phrases in each sentence. Check your answers by flipping to page 5 of this handout.

1. Raising the funds proved to be a difficult task.
2. Camping at Coleto Creek was the Smith family’s annual summer vacation.
3. Joseph hoped to obtain a job by learning the welding trade.
4. The Moreno family loves cooking for relatives.
5. I am able to earn money by working in the campus library.

Participles

Participles are verbals that usually function as adjectives and occasionally function as adverbs. Participles generally end with an –ed or –ing ending. Since participles are derived from verbs, they do express actions or states of being. When participles function as adjectives, they are usually found preceding the nouns and pronouns in a sentence. When participles function as adverbs, they are typically found following the verb in a sentence. There are two types of participles: present participles and past participles. Present participles have an –ing ending. Past participles may have one of several past tense endings, including –ed, -en, and -d. As with gerunds, participles may occur as one word, or they may be part of a participial phrase. Let’s take a look at some examples:

Present participles
The running water provided a picturesque view. (adjectival)
The clown was able to stop the raging bull from attacking the rider. (adjectival)

Past participles
The crushed bug was an unpleasant sight. (adjectival)
He was able to repair the broken lock. (adjectival)

Present participial phrases
The car stopping at the light was hit by the truck. (adjectival)
The bull came running towards the rodeo clown. (adverbial)

Past participial phrases
James, amused by the crowd’s response, continued to perform magic tricks. (adjectival)
Shaken from his near-death experience, John was unable to speak. (adjectival)

Exercise 2

Underline the participles or participial phrases in each sentence. Check your answers by flipping to page 5 of this handout.

1. Hurriedly fastening his backpack, Joe rushed off to school.
2. The frozen fish was an easy meal for Jim to cook.
3. Staring at the items on the sales rack, Jill could not make a quick decision.
4. The car, damaged by the hailstorm, was taken to the body shop.
5. The woman wearing the blue sweater is Jack’s mother.
Infinitives
Infinitives are verbals that are made up of the word to and a verb. Infinitives may function as nouns, adjectives or adverbs. Since infinitives are derived from verbs, they do express actions or states of being. When infinitives function as adjectives and adverbs, they are usually found preceding nouns and pronouns in sentences, and when they function as nouns, they are used as subjects, direct objects and objects of prepositions. Infinitives (to + verb) should not be confused with prepositional phrases (to + noun or pronoun). Infinitives may occur as to + one verb, or they may be part of an infinitive phrase. Let’s take a look at some examples:

Infinitives functioning as nouns
To love is the greatest achievement.

Infinitives functioning as adjectives
Jason’s group was the last to arrive.

Infinitives functioning as adverbs
The students must pass the TAKS tests to graduate.

Infinitive phrase functioning as noun
Ranee wanted to arrive at her destination.

Infinitive phrase functioning as adjective
The Smiths were the first family in our neighborhood to adopt a child.

Test
Note: This test, explained by Mark Lester in Grammar and Usage in the Classroom, only works for infinitives and infinitive phrases that function as adverbs. It is a good test to determine if an infinitive is functioning as an adverb: “If an infinitive or infinitive phrase can be moved to the beginning of the sentence, then that infinitive or infinitive phrase modifies the verb” (199). Let’s take a look at an example:

You must study hard to get good grades.
To get good grades, you must study hard.

Exercise 3
Underline the infinitives in each sentence. Check your answers by flipping to page 5 of this handout.

1. Clay goes to his grandmother’s house to eat homemade sweets.
2. The purpose of the class was to teach children how to swim.
3. The hostess asked Jill to refill the punch bowl.
4. To clean the house seemed like an impossible task.
5. Doris was asked to host the baby shower.
Exercise 4

Underline the verbal in each sentence and indicate whether it is a gerund (G), a participle (P) or an infinitive (I).

1. Jennifer’s goal was to graduate from the University of Houston-Victoria.

2. John’s favorite outdoor activity is skiing.

3. Going on a cruise and climbing Mt. Rushmore were Rachel’s summer vacation plans.

4. Dancing with the famous instructor, Dillon felt like a star.

5. Animals dumped in the streets often become a menace.

6. The girls love to swim at Julie’s house.

7. Watching the birds is one of Mr. Martin’s hobbies.

8. Janice, baking 10 cakes for the festival, accidentally burned one of them.

9. Working out daily should be an essential part of American life.

10. I have a book to return to the library.

Answer keys for exercises 1-4 appear on the last page of this handout.

References

Answer Key: Exercise 1

1. **Raising the funds** proved to be a difficult task.
2. **Camping at Coleto Creek** was the Smith family’s annual summer vacation.
3. Joseph hoped to obtain a job by **learning the welding trade**.
4. The Moreno family loves **cooking for relatives**.
5. I am able to earn money by **working in the campus library**.

Answer Key: Exercise 2

1. Hurriedly **fastening his backpack**, Joe rushed off to school.
2. The **frozen fish** was an easy meal for Jim to cook.
3. **Staring at the items on the sales rack**, Jill could not make a quick decision.
4. The car, **damaged by the hailstorm**, was taken to the body shop.
5. The woman **wearing the blue sweater** is Jack’s mother.

Answer Key: Exercise 3

1. Clay goes to his grandmother’s house **to eat homemade sweets**.
2. The purpose of the class was **to teach children how to swim**.
   
   Note that this sentence contains two infinitive phrases: to teach children and to swim.
3. The hostess asked Jill **to refill the punch bowl**.
4. **To clean the house** seemed like an impossible task.
5. Doris was asked **to host the baby shower**.

Answer Key: Exercise 4

1. Jennifer’s goal was **to graduate from the University of Houston-Victoria**.
2. John’s favorite outdoor activity is **skiing**.
3. **Going on a cruise and climbing Mt. Rushmore** were Rachel’s summer vacation plans.
4. **Dancing with the famous instructor**, Dillon felt like a star.
5. Animals **dumped in the streets** often become a menace.
6. The girls love **to swim at Julie’s house**.
7. **Watching the birds** is one of Mr. Martin’s hobbies.
8. Janice, **baking 10 cakes for the festival**, accidentally burned one of them.
9. **Working out daily** should be an essential part of American life.
10. I have a book **to return to the library**.