



## SENTENCE DIAGRAMMING 101

Instructor: Denise Loock

### LESSON #4

#### More Angled Lines and Stair-Step Lines

In Lesson 3, we introduced phrases—groups of words that function as adjectives, adverbs, or nouns. Prepositional phrases consist of a relational word (preposition), its object, and the object's modifiers. Lesson 4 concentrates on verbals and verbal phrases.

Verbals are forms of verbs that are used as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs. Like nouns used as subjects, verbals can have objects (complements). They can also have modifiers, including prepositional phrases. There are three kinds of verbals: participles, gerunds, and infinitives. **Participles**, which usually end in *-ed* or *-ing*, act as adjectives. **Gerunds** act as nouns. **Infinitives**, which are usually preceded by the preposition *to*, can act as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs.

Sentence containing a participial phrase:

**Removing her ring**, Joanne burst into tears.

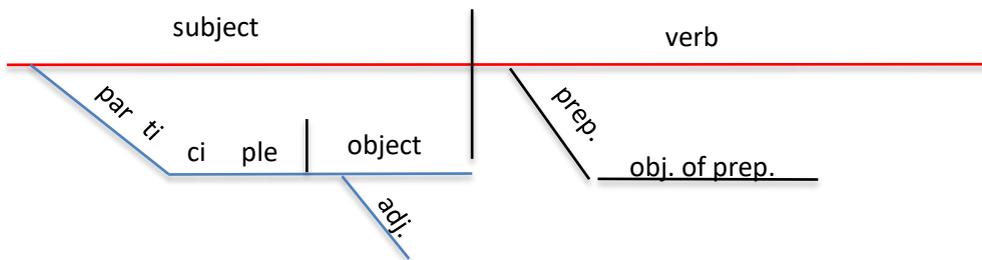
Sentence containing a gerund phrase:

**Bursting into tears** seemed appropriate.

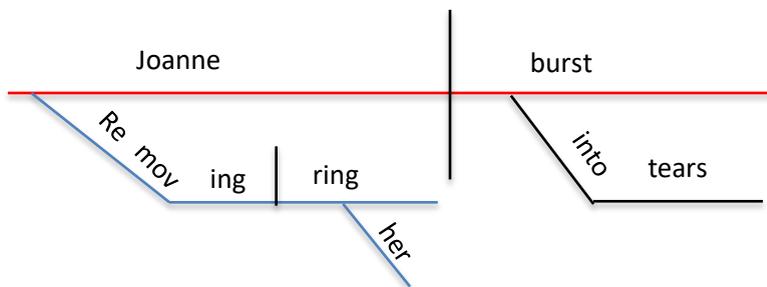
Sentence containing an infinitive phrase:

**To emphasize her point**, Joanne threw her ring at Tom.

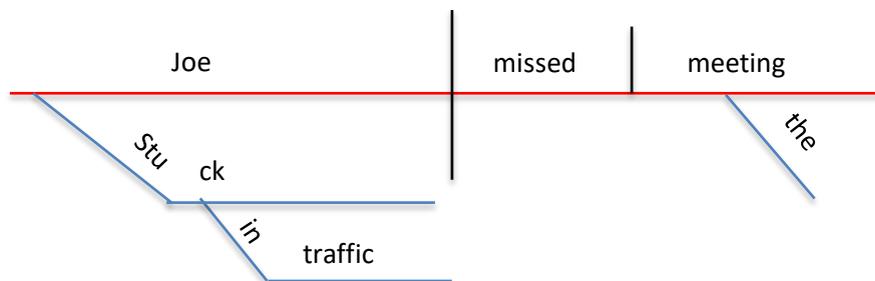
Diagramming a **participial phrase** is similar to diagramming a prepositional phrase. The verbal cradles the angled line to suggest its action. Like an adjective, the participle or the participial phrase is placed under the word it modifies.



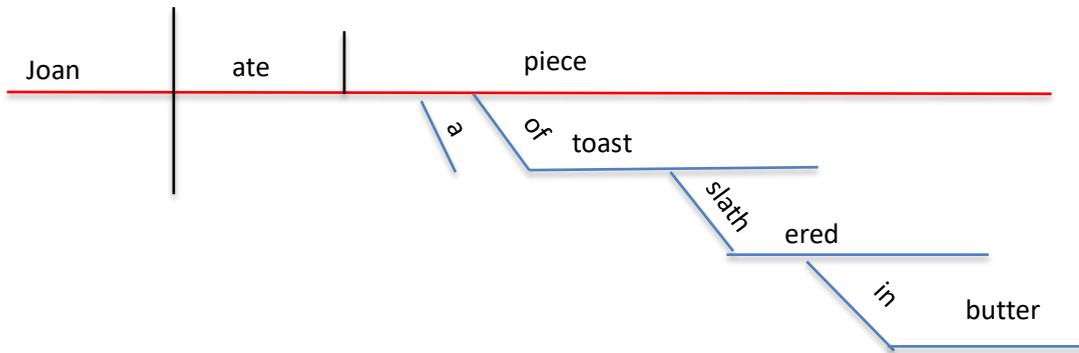
Here's the sample sentence from the previous page: Removing her ring, Joanne burst into tears.



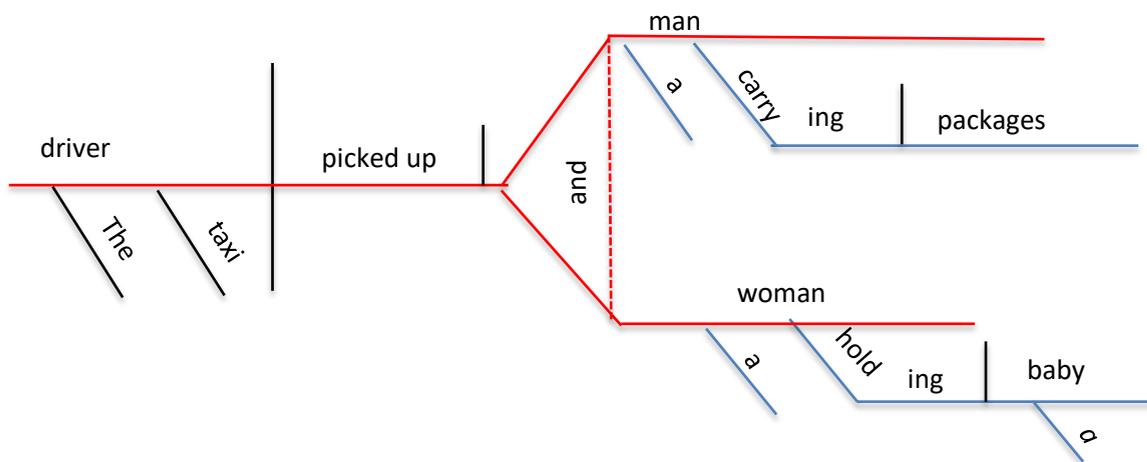
Note: Participles may be hard to detect since some past-tense verbs don't end in *-ed*. Be on the lookout for participial phrases that begin with *stuck*, *kept*, or *mistaken*: Stuck in traffic, Joe missed the meeting.



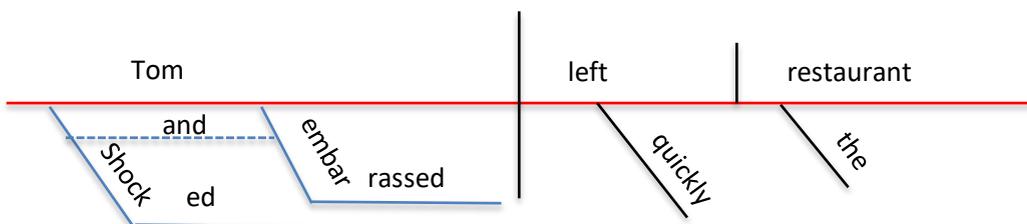
**Participial phrases** can occur anywhere an adjective can occur in a sentence. Below, the participial phrase is part of a prepositional phrase: Joan ate a piece of toast slathered in butter.



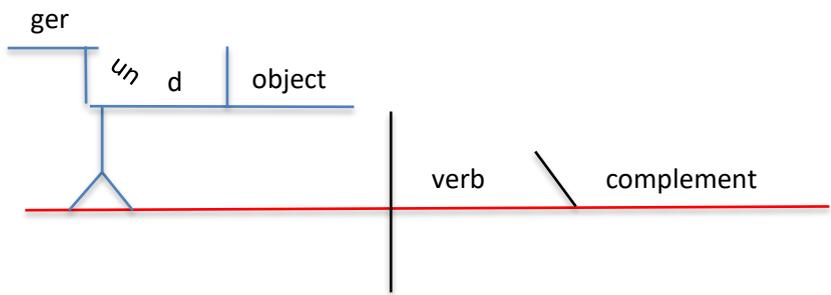
Here's a participial phrase that's part of a compound complement: The taxi driver picked up a man carrying packages and a woman holding a baby.



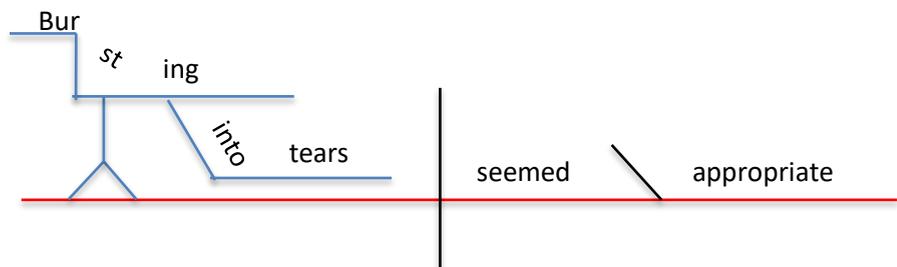
When you have a compound participle, treat it like a compound adjective: Shocked and embarrassed, Tom quickly left the restaurant.



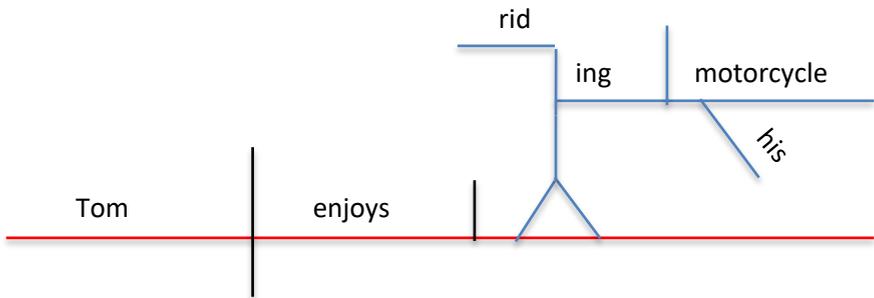
**Gerunds, or gerund phrases,** act as nouns. They can be subjects, complements, or objects of a preposition. A stair-step stilt is used for diagramming gerund phrases used as subjects.



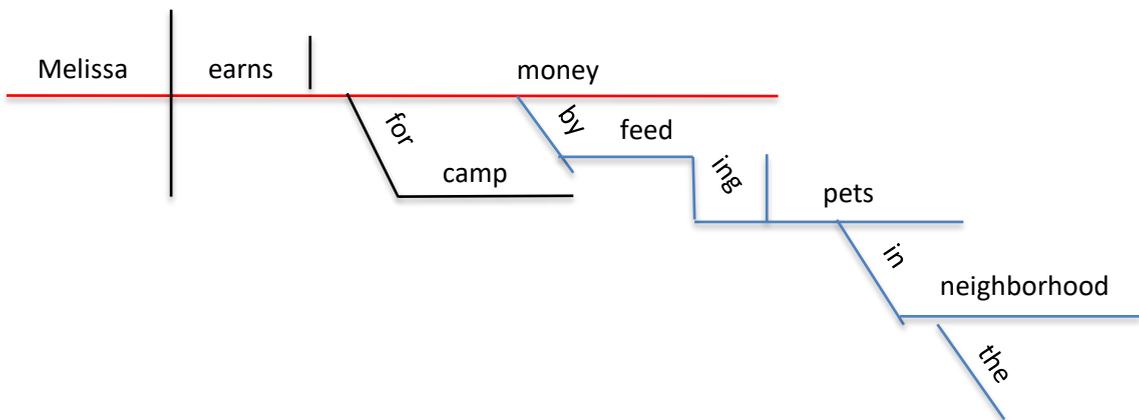
Bursting into tears seemed appropriate.



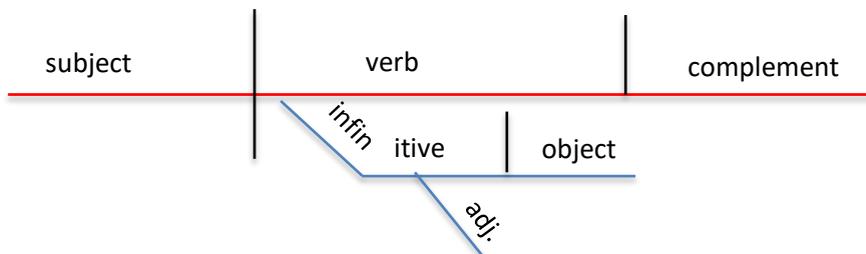
When a gerund phrase is used as a complement, use the same stair-step structure: Tom enjoys riding his motorcycle.



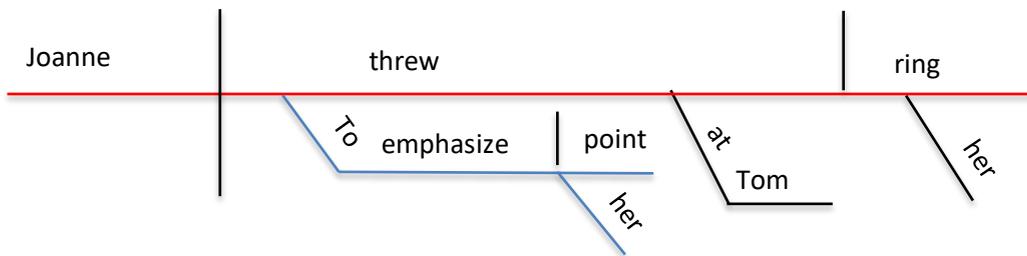
When it is used as the object of a preposition, use the stair-step but not the stilt: Melissa earns money for camp by feeding pets in the neighborhood.



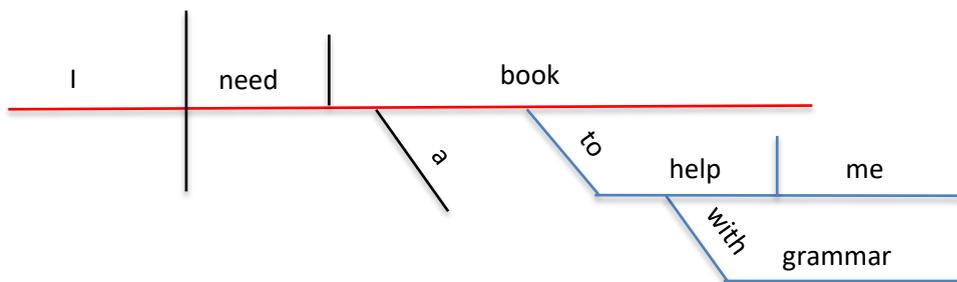
**Infinitives** are the trickiest verbals. They can appear almost anywhere in a sentence because they can function as adverbs, adjectives, or nouns. Use the diagram format that correlates with their part of speech. When the infinitive is used as an adverb, diagram it like a prepositional phrase.



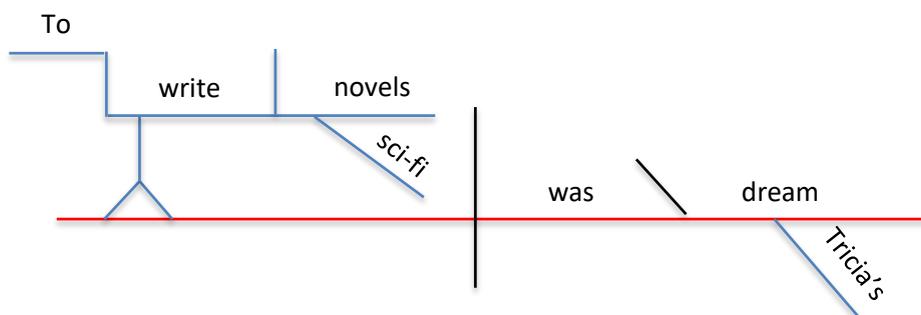
To emphasize her point, Joanne threw her ring at Tom (infinitive as adverb, answering *why*).



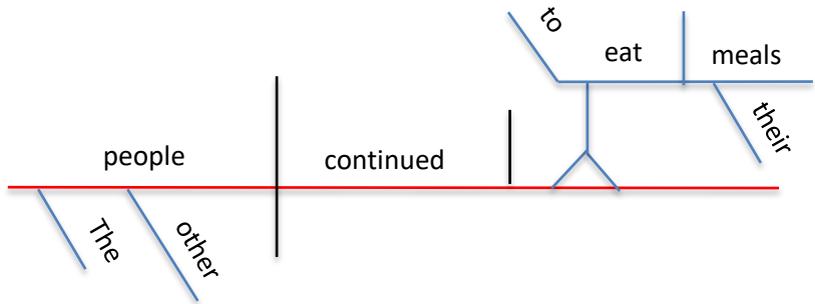
When an infinitive is used as an adjective, you use a format similar to a participial phrase: I need a book *to help me with grammar* (describes what kind of book is needed).



When used as a noun, the infinitive phrase is diagrammed with a stilt, similar to a gerund phrase: To write sci-fi novels was Tricia's dream.



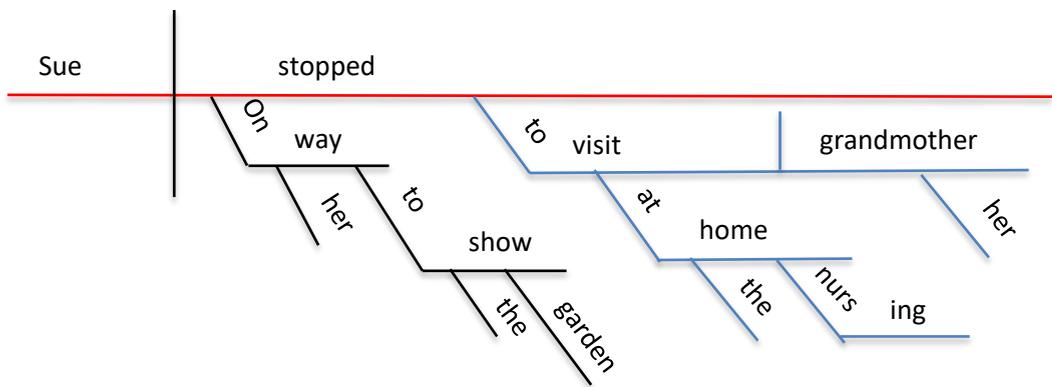
Here's an example of an infinitive phrase used as a direct object: The other people continued to eat their meals.



**Question:** How can you tell if *to* is the first word in a prepositional phrase or the first word in an infinitive?

**Answer:** Look for a verb. A prepositional phrase never contains a verb. But be careful. Prepositional phrases can contain a verbal.

On her way to the garden show, Sue stopped to visit her grandmother at the nursing home.



Note: The infinitive phrase is acting as an adverb, telling *where*. The participle *nursing* is an adjective.

Help your clients avoid the overuse of infinitive phrases. They can clutter a sentence quickly with unnecessary words. How would you revise the sentence below?

I want *to help* you *to understand* what you need *to do* *to make* your sentences more concise.

Many authors of writing-craft books advise against using participial phrases and gerund phrases. Sometimes a precise adjective or noun is more effective. Which of the sentences below seem better to you, the ones with the verbals or the ones without them?

Sentence with participial phrase:

Trudging across the rocky terrain, Melissa sprained her ankle.

Sentence without the verbal:

Melissa sprained her ankle on the trek across the rocky terrain.

Sentence with a gerund phrase:

Trudging across the rocky terrain was difficult for Melissa.

Sentence without the verbal:

Melissa rested often as she trudged across the rocky terrain.

## Lesson Review

- There are three kinds of verbals: participles, gerunds, and infinitives.
- Verbals can be used as adjectives, adverbs, or nouns. In a sentence, a verbal can be a single word, or it can be combined with other words to create a phrase. The “curve” of a gerund or participle on the angled line symbolizes its action.
- Gerunds always end in *-ing* and always function as nouns.
- Participles can end in *-ing* or *-ed*. They always function as adjectives. Some participles may be hard to detect because some past-tense verbs don’t end in *-ed*. Be on the lookout for participial phrases that begin with words such as *stuck*, *kept*, or *mistaken*.
- Infinitives are the most versatile verbal. They can function as adverbs, adjectives, or nouns. Sometimes the *to* is missing from an infinitive or an infinitive phrase, so look for the main verb of the sentence first, then see if extra “verbs” are present.

## **Lesson #4 Assignments**

*To receive a Certificate of Completion you must successfully complete all assignments.*

### **Assignment #1**

Diagram these sentences.

- A. To surprise Marissa, John cooked dinner for her.
- B. Tom's mother wants to stay in Miami during the winter months.
- C. Telling your mother about the broken lamp is the right thing to do.
- D. Crossing the street, John tripped on the curb and fell into the front seat of a red convertible.
- E. We tried to convince Kate and Joey to go to the beach with us but were unsuccessful.

### **Assignment #2**

Some sentences are more complex than the ones you diagrammed in number one. Study the sentences below. Diagram as many of the words and phrases as you can.

- A. As she drove down the highway, Mary saw many trees covered with Spanish moss.
- B. Saving money for college is more difficult than most people imagine.
- C. Overcoming obstacles and not being overcome by them is a challenge for everyone.
- D. Stuck in the traffic jam, Sid decided to call his girlfriend to cancel their dinner date, even though he knew she would be angry.
- E. When do you plan to give your boss an answer about taking the new position in Alaska?

### **Assignment #3**

Choose one or two sentences that contain verbal phrases from a manuscript you're editing. Are you able to diagram the entire sentence? Reward yourself.

Remember: The diagrams of the sentences in each lesson's assignment are provided in the "Answer Key." Resist the urge to look at the answers before you attempt to diagram the sentences.