

Chapter 23

RULE 1: Latin has only four participles: the present active, future active, perfect passive and future passive. It lacks a present passive participle (“being X-ed”) and a perfect active participle (“having X-ed”). [NOTE: The deficiency in the perfect active is compensated in some way by the perfect participle of deponent verbs which functions as a sort of perfect active participle, e.g. *secutus* “having followed”; see [Chapter 34](#).]

RULE 2: The perfect passive, future active and future passive participles belong to first/second declension. The present active participle belongs to third declension.

RULE 3: The verb *esse* has only a future active participle (*futurus*). It lacks both the present active and all passive participles.

RULE 4: Participles show relative time.

I. Grammar

A. What is a Participle?

Participles bridge the world of verbs and the world of adjectives. As adjectives, Latin participles have case endings and thus agree with a noun in number, gender and case. They can also form substantives and indeed often serve as nouns. As verbs, Latin participles are built on verb bases and expect objects, adverbs or any construction the base verb can take after it (e.g. direct object, indirect object, complementary infinitive, agent, ablative of separation, etc.). In sum, their first half (the verb base) looks ahead in the sentence to what follows (object, predicate, agent, etc.); their second half (adjective ending) looks back in the sentence to the noun with which the participle agrees.

B. The Formation of Latin Participles

Latin has only four participles (present active, perfect passive, future active, future passive). It lacks the two others which would fill out the system (present passive, perfect active). Here is how each are formed:

1. **Present Active Participle:** present stem (*ama-*) + *-nt-* + third-declension endings = *amans*, *amantis*, . . .
2. **Perfect Passive Participle:** fourth principal part stem (*amat-*) + first/second-declension endings = *amatus*, *-a*, *-um*
3. **Future Active Participle:** fourth principal part stem (*amat-*) + *-ur-* + first/second-declension endings = *amaturus*, *-a*, *-um*, etc.
4. **Future Passive Participle:** present stem (*ama-*) + *-nd-* + first/second-declension endings = *amandus*, *-a*, *-um*, etc.

Stems. Two of the participles use the present stem (e.g. *am[a-]*): present active (*amans*), future passive (*amandus*). The other two use the fourth principal part stem which must be memorized for each verb (e.g. *amat-*): perfect passive (*amatus*), future active (*amaturus*).

Endings. Three of the participles use first/second-declension endings (*-us*, *-a*, *-um*): perfect passive (*amatus*), future active (*amaturus*), and future passive (*amandus*). One uses third-declension endings (*-ns*, *-ntis*): present active (*amans*). Note that, like third-declension adjectives in general, present active participles are *i*-stem, with *-ia* (neuter nominative/accusative plural) and *-ium* (genitive plural). But there is one exception: in the ablative singular they may end with either *-i* (most often when used as an adjective) or *-e* (when used as a substantive).

C. The Translation of Participles

Literal Translation. Each of the participle has a distinctive translation based on its tense and voice:

1. **Present Active Participle:** “X-ing”; or as a substantive “the one X-ing, the one who is X-ing, the X-er”
2. **Perfect Passive Participle:** “having been X-ed” (not just “X-ed”!); or as a substantive “the one having been X-ed, the one who has been (or was) X-ed” [NOTE: Wheelock gives the simple translation, “X-ed”, which, though a viable translation, in my experience misleads students to translate the form as a *present* passive participle. It’s best to tell students at least at first that the only acceptable translation of the perfect passive participle is “*having been*X-ed” in order to reinforce the past-tense nature of the participle. After that point has been driven home, you can relax the rules and let students translate the participle as, for instance, “a thing done” (versus “a thing having been done”).]
3. **Future Active Participle:** “about to X, going to X, likely to X, intending to X”; or as a substantive “the one about to X, the one who will X”
4. **Future Passive Participle:** “to be X-ed, deserving to be X-ed, fit to be X-ed, “worth X-ing”; or as a substantive “the one who must/should be X-ed” [NOTE: A very common use of this participle, the passive periphrastic construction, is introduced in Chapter 24. You might tell students that in the next chapter they will learn a widespread use of this participle in Latin, and for that reason, Chapter 23 will focus on the other participles.]

The Translation of Participles as Subordinate Clauses in English. Where English more often uses extended subordinate clauses, Latin tends to deploy participles alone to cover the same territory, frequently leaving the logical relationship between participle and main sentence implicit in the context of the sentence. Therefore, a Latin participle like *actum* (“[the thing] having been done”) can be used where English would more naturally have “when it was done” (implying a temporal connection between participle and main sentence), “since it was done” (implying a logical or causal connection), “although it was done” (implying a contrary-to-expectation or concessive connection) and “if it was done” (implying a condition). While students should be made aware from the outset of the variety of translations possible, I would initially direct them toward more literal translations and away from clauses in order that they gain a sense of the literal meaning of the Latin first.

There are two worksheets for this chapter:

1. Click [here](#) for a worksheet on the formation and translation of participles. When you go over this worksheet in class, stress four things: (1) the formation of participles, (2) which declension each type belongs to, (3) their simple translation, and (4) what each expects after it (e.g. direct object, indirect object, agent, infinitive, etc.).
2. Click [here](#) for a worksheet summarizing the rules for forming and using participles. Reinforce to students that each type of participle has a specific expectation: present and future active participles expect (accusative) objects and perfect passive participles expect ablative agents. In the next chapter they’ll learn that future passive participles in passive periphrastics expect dative agents.

D. Participles and Relative Time

Even though students deal every day with English participles which, like their Latin counterparts, exhibit relative time (i.e. tense relative to the main verb), the grammatical concept of relative time is hard for many to conceptualize. Therefore, as much as possible, use practical English examples and avoid theory when introducing this principle.

Simply put, a participle shows time relative to the main verb. That is, a present participle happens at the same time as the main verb (+0 in time value), whereas a perfect participle shows action prior in time to the main verb (-1) and a future participle action time subsequent to the main verb (+1). Better names for these participles might be “contemporaneous,” “prior” and “subsequent.” The main difficulty for students comes when they must change Latin participles which use relative time into English clauses which use finite verbs and absolute time. Remember this problem is not peculiar to Latin and you can teach the skill of shifting from relative-time constructions to those with absolute time by working entirely in English.

Begin by giving students examples of participles with relative time versus clauses which employ absolute-time constructions. Concentrate on sentences with past-tense main verbs, since these will prove most difficult:

Past-Tense Main Verb + Present Participle (versus Clauses which use finite verbs):

Present Participle: The student, *ignoring the rules of tense formation in participles*, failed the class.

Finite-Verb Clause: The student, *who ignored the rules of tense formation in participles*, failed the class.

Perfect Participle: The rules, *having been ignored*, came back to haunt the foolish student.

Finite-Verb Clause: The rules, *which had been ignored*, came back to haunt the foolish student.

Students will have further opportunities to practice and absorb the principle of relative time when they learn the ablative absolute and indirect statement in the next two chapters. For now, you will have done your job if you have effectively communicated to your students the formation and the basic translation of Latin participles.

E. Participle of *Esse*

The verb *esse* has only one participle in Latin: the future active *futurus* which, like all forms of the linking verb, expects a predicate. While intransitive verbs like *esse* do not usually exhibit passive forms of any sort so the absence of the passive participles for *esse* comes as no surprise, a present active participle is very much expected. Nevertheless, Classical Latin lacks any equivalent to the English participle “being,” and the absence of this form precipitates difficulties in certain constructions (see [Chapter 24](#), Ablative Absolute). [Although it does not exist independently in Classical Latin, the present active participle of *esse* does exist in compounds of *sum*, such as *absens* and *praesens*. Moreover, pre-Classical Latin had a form *sons*, *sontis* (cf. Classical *insons*), which was a combination of the base *s-* (cf. *sunt*) and the earlier participle ending *-ont-*, later regularized to *-ant-* and *-(i)ent-*.]

F. History of Latin Participles

Formation. The present active participle is the only true participle which Latin inherited from Indo-European. The perfect passive participle was, in origin, a verbal adjective ending in *-to-* and neutral in voice (see [Chapter 19](#)). The future active participle is little more than the verb base to which are added the verbal noun stem *-tû-* (cf. supines [e.g. *dictû*]) and words such as *natûra* and *cultûra*) and the adjectival suffix *-r-* (cf. *maturus*). The origin of the future passive participle ending in *-ndus* is peculiar to Italic languages. Its origin is uncertain, although other Latin verbal adjectives end in *-d-* (cf. *timidus*), as well as other verbal forms frozen as adjectives, e.g. *oriundus* (“rising”), *volvendus* (“rolling”), *secundus* (“second,” originally “following”) and *iucundus* (“joking,” originally from *iocoliocor*). These show that the future passive participle did not originally carry any sense of tense or voice but implied only that the antecedent of the adjective was somehow “involved in the action of the verb.”

Usage. The present active participle was originally used mainly as an adjective (e.g. *sapiens*, “wise”) or a substantive (*amans*, “lover”) and appears in earlier Latin almost exclusively in the nominative case. Rarely in early Latin does this form take an object of any sort or behave otherwise as a verb, even in ablative absolutes. However, by Terence’s day (ca. 160 BCE) the nominative form could take a direct object, though the oblique cases still rarely did. Over the course of the next century, the usage of the *-nt-* form as an extension of the verb gradually increased, until in the time of Cicero it could take every case, all exhibiting the full range of verbal expectation. In Old Latin, the future active participle is found only with *esse*. Its liberation from this construction was long in coming, accomplished only in the classical period and only seen fully first in authors like Vergil, Ovid and Livy.

II. Vocabulary

- **aliquis**: = *ali + quis/quid*.
- **iucundus**: Here is an *-ndus* formation adjective which resembles a future passive participle but is not! [See above, “History of Participles”]
- **liber**: Does *not* contract!
- **numquam**: see [Chapter 13](#).

- **audio:** It's important not to confuse this verb with *audeo* (second declension, see [Chapter 7](#))! [Variant forms of this verb are attested: *audibam*, *audibo*, *audieram*. It's best, however, not to confuse your students with these non-standard forms. This verb derives from a base **awiz-*, also seen in Greek *aisthanomai*. Conversely, the *aud-* base seen in *audeo* is a contraction of the base *avid-* (cf. *avidus*, "eager, greedy"), which in turn comes from *avere* ("crave, long for," imperative *ave!*).]
- **cupio:** Takes a complementary infinitive.
- **ostendo:** = *ob-/*obs-* ("against") + *tendo* ("stretch"). Underlying this word is an important phonological principle of Latin. In clusters of three or more consonants, a stop (*b/p/t/k*) + *s* = *s*: **subs-* > *sus-* (*suspendo*, *suscipio*, *sustineo*), **abs-* > *as-* (*asporto*) and **obs-* > *os-* (*ostendo*). But if the cluster includes a voiced consonant (e.g., *d* or *v*), the *s* is lost: **trans-duco* > *traduco*, **ex-duco* > *educo*, **subs-emo* > *sumo*.
- **peto:** Although *peto* belongs to third conjugation, it forms its perfect active base (*petiv-*) as if it were a member of fourth (cf. *scivi*).
- **premo:** In compound, this verb becomes *-primo* through vowel gradation, cf. *opprimo* (*ob-* + *premo*).
- **verto:** The perfect active form of this verb, *verti*, lost its reduplication early in Latin (the reduplicated form is not attested), leaving the present and perfect active bases identical. Thus, *vertit* and *vertimus* may be construed as present or perfect. It is cognate with English *-ward*, as in **homeward**. [*Verto* was spelled and possibly pronounced *vorto* until ca. 150 BCE when, according to Quintilian (1.7.25), Scipio Africanus established the more conventional spelling seen in Classical Latin.]
- **donum:** = the verb base *do-* (cf. Gk. *didomi*) + the adjective- or noun-forming suffix *-n(o)-*, cf. *magnus*, *dignus*, *regnum*.

III. Sentences

Practice and Review

Focus on those sentences with participles (1, 2, 5, 7). In particular, the participial clauses in 2, 5 and 7 may cause students some problem. Be sure to allot sufficient time to explicate the participles and their clauses fully.