

Lesson 2.4 Past and Present Participles

The past and present participles of the verb typically occur with an auxiliary verb *have* or *be* (which we'll return to).

The present participle form is the *-ing* form of the verb. In fact, you can call it that, if you want. These occur with a form of *be*: *am, is, are, was, were*.

The koala is eating the eucalyptus.

The kangaroos were hopping over the fence.

The past participle occurs with a form of *have*: *has, have, or had*:

A fox has spotted a rabbit.

The hawk had eaten a rabbit.

The present participle is easy to identify; it always has the *-ing*. The past participial form is a little trickier to identify since it sometimes looks exactly like the past tense. The difference, though, is that the past tense always occurs alone and the past participle has to occur with *has, have, or had*.

past tense: talk

past participle: had talked

past tense: understood

past participle: have understood

past tense: brought

past participle: had brought

Activity: Have students put verbs into frames such as these:

present participle: They are/were _____ at noon.

past participle: We have/had already _____ before they arrived.

Activity – Past and present participle: Come up with at least eight verbs and write their past tense and past participial forms. Compare with others and discuss.

Activity – present vs. present participle/progressive. Find examples of the present tense in a book or other text. Write them down and discuss your findings.

Is the present ever used to describe something not happening right now? If so, why do you think that is? Are there other ways besides using the present tense verb form to convey that something is happening now? It may be tempting to want to say that examples like the following are in present tense.

She is running a race today.

We are sitting at a café.

However, so far we have only discussed the forms of individual verbs. So in this first example above, *is* is present tense and *running* is the present participle. The two words together express what is called the progressive aspect - we'll get to that – but they don't express the present tense.

Dialectal Variation in Past Participial Forms: There has always been some overlap in past tense and past participle forms in English, and probably because of this overlap in forms, there has long been variation. For example, what would you say in these examples?

I have already _____ (insert past participle of verb *swim*) across the lake.

You should have _____ (insert past participle of verb *mow*) the lawn.

He should have _____ (insert past participle of verb *prove*) he could do it.

More than one form is possible in all of these. As you know, language is always changing, and which form of any of these words is considered more standard is determined only by what the majority of speakers end up using.