NON-FINITE VERB PHRASES

GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICE SENTENCES

1. Print this file and place the answer pages to the side.
2. Cover the answer pages with a sheet of paper, and slide the paper down as you complete each practice sentence.
3. Use colored markers and a highlighter to work on each practice sentence.

Feel free to write to me (dr_ron@grammar-once-and-for-all.com) if you have any questions or problems.

Directions:

Mark the structural backbones of all clauses, both main clauses and subordinate clauses:

- Color just the main word of subjects of finite verbs blue.
- Color auxiliary verbs main verbs red.
- Color just the main word of completers of finite verbs green.
- Enclose prepositional phrases in parentheses ( ).
- Enclose subordinating-connective clauses and WH-word clauses in curly brackets { }.
- Enclose non-finite verb phrases in square brackets: [ ]. Do not mark the functions within non-finite verb phrases.

3. If the subject or completer of a main clause is a dependent clause or a non-finite verb phrase, color the brackets appropriately

completer: I love [eating cookies]

subject: [Teasing grizzly bears] is not a good recreation option.

completer: We think {that this time she'll be comin' (through the mountain) }.

4. If a non-finite verb phrase or dependent clause is a modifier, indicate what word it modifies.

I've researched the problem (of {why toads envy salamanders}) [The prepositional phrase of why toads envy salamanders modifies problem. The completer of the preposition is the "why" clause. Why modifies envy.]
I warned you (about [scratching your cobra bites]) [The prepositional phrase about scratching your cobra bites modifies warned. Scratching your cobra bites is the completer of the preposition about.]

4. Nested Constructions: I've bracketed nested constructions in the examples above and in the answers, but you may find it easier not to do so (it can get complicated). The important things are to see where each syntactical unit begins and ends and how it functions.
Non-Finite Verb Phrases: Practice Sentences 1 - 6

1. Reciting migration mantras keeps your honking in good form.

2. By whistling, you learn to pucker; through puckering, you learn to osculate.

3. We would like you to quit tying Fang into knots.

4. Cracking walnuts with your armpits keeps students alert.

5. After he was forced to deliver pizza in Bermuda shorts, Fang finally began to regret having goosed the goddess.

6. Stooping to tie your shoelace while fleeing from an enraged bull could make you wish you hadn't worn red Jeans.
Non-Finite Verb Phrases: Practice Sentences 7 - 12

7. What toads like best is not being stepped on.

8. Stuffing popcorn in your ears doesn't necessarily guarantee dreaming of movies.

9. Is it OK for a teacher to lecture in polar-bear tights?

10. The process of creating literature is natural.

11. It isn't dependent on a pen and paper.

12. It's a person using their voice and the making of words to come to consciousness of what they know.
Non-Finite Verb Phrases: Practice Sentences 13 - 15

13. Nine-month-old Zoe, waving excitedly at the figure in the mirror, hasn't the ghost of an idea that she sees herself.

14. She has no such concept, no notion of herself as a separate entity.

15. In fact she is, for her age and weight, the perfect Taoist sage or enlightened Bodhisattva, living in a miraculous world of oneness, unseamed by concepts and in particular by the concept that, it can be fairly said, dominates our lives.
Non-Finite Verb Phrases: Answers to Sentences 1 - 6

1. [Reciting migration mantras] keeps your honking (in good form).[In good form modifies honking.]

2. (By whistling), you learn [to pucker]; (through puckering), you learn [to osculate]. [A compound sentence: two main clauses separated by a semicolon. The structure of both clauses is the same: the -ing participles, whistling and puckering, are the completers of prepositions; the prepositional phrases modify the finite verbs. The infinitives, to pucker and to osculate are the completers of the finite verbs.]

3. We would like you [to quit [tying Fang (into knots) ] ] [Into knots modifies tying. Tying Fang into knots is the completer of the infinitive to quit. You and to quit tying Fang into knots are the double completers of would like.]

4. [Cracking walnuts (with your armpits)] keeps students alert. [Cracking walnuts with your armpits is the subject of keeps, a linking verb. With your armpits modifies cracking. Students and alert are the double completers of keeps.]

5. {After he was forced [to deliver pizza (in Bermuda shorts) ] }, Fang finally began [to regret [having goosed the goddess] ]. [After he was forced to deliver pizza in Bermuda shorts is an adverb clause modifying began the main verb of the sentence. In Bermuda shorts modifies to deliver. To deliver pizza in Bermuda shorts modifies was forced. Having goosed the goddess is the completer of to regret. To regret having goosed the goddess is the completer of began.]

6. [Stooping [to tie your shoelace] {while fleeing (from an enraged bull) } ] could make you [wish {you hadn't worn red Jeans} ]. [Stooping, an -ing participle, is modified by the infinitive phrase to tie your shoelace and by the “while” clause: while [you are] fleeing from an enraged bull. The entire non-finite verb phrase: Stooping to tie your shoelace while fleeing from an enraged bull is the subject of could make—the main word is stooping. Could make takes double completers: the first you and [to] wish you hadn’t worn red jeans. You hadn’t worn red jeans is the completer of wish, an infinitive without the “to.”]
Non-Finite Verb Phrases: Answers to Sentences 7 - 12

7. \{What toads like best\} is [not being stepped on]. [The WH-word clause what toads like best is the subject of the main verb, is. What is the completer of like—we discover what it stands for when we reach the completer: the non-finite verb phrase not being stepped on. Subject and completer could be reversed: “Not being stepped on is what toads like best.”]

8. [Stuffing popcorn (in your ears)] doesn't necessarily guarantee [dreaming (of movies)]. [In your ears modifies stuffing. Stuffing popcorn in your ears is the subject of doesn’t guarantee. Dreaming is an -ing participle; it's the completer of doesn’t guarantee. Of movies modifies dreaming.]

9. Is it OK (for a teacher [to lecture (in polar-bear tights)])? [It is a “dummy” subject: it’s needed to make a “yes-no” question. The actual subject is the prepositional phrase for a teacher to lecture in polar-bear tights (it’s rare for a prepositional phrase to be a subject). OK is the completer of is. In polar-bear tights modifies to lecture. To lecture in polar-bear tights modifies teacher.]

[Sentences 10-12 are by Anna Deavere Smith, quoted by John Lahr in "Under the Skin," The New Yorker, Vol. LXIX, No. 19 (June 28, 1993), page 90.]

10. The process (of [creating literature]) is natural. [Creating literature, a non-finite verb phrase, is the completer of the preposition of. Of creating literature modifies process.]

11. It isn't dependent (on a pen and paper). [Dependent is an adjective derived from a verb, to depend. On a pen and paper modifies dependent.]

12. It's a person [using their voice and the making (of words)] to come (to consciousness (of [what they know])). [In sentences 11 and 12, the antecedent of it is the process of creating literature (in sentence 10). The entire non-finite verb phrase using their voice and the making of words to come to consciousness of what they know modifies person. To come to consciousness of what they know modifies using. The non-finite verb using takes coordinate completers: voice and the making of words. Of words modifies making.

Saying that “the process of creating literature is a person…” would be thought to be an error by many readers (this kind of error is treated on the Correctness page under Shifted, Mixed, or Jumbled Constructions). I can only say that Anna Deavere Smith is a mature author who presumably knows what she’s doing.]
Non-Finite Verb Phrases: Answers to Sentences 13 - 15

[Sentences 13-15 are by John V. Canfield, The Looking-Glass Self (Praeger, 1990), page 1.]

13. Nine-month-old Zoe, [waving excitedly (at the figure (in the mirror))], hasn’t the ghost (of an idea) {that she sees herself}. [Waving is an -ing participle modifying Zoe. At the figure in the mirror modifies waving. In the mirror modifies figure. Of an idea modifies ghost. That she sees herself is a noun clause in apposition with idea.]

14. She has no such concept, no notion (of herself (as a separate entity)). [There isn’t a non-finite verb phrase in this sentence. Of herself as a separate entity modifies both concept and notion. The two nouns are in apposition. As a separate entity modifies herself.]

15. (In fact) she is, (for her age and weight), the perfect Taoist sage or enlightened Bodhisattva, [living (in a miraculous world (of oneness))], [unseamed (by concepts)] and (in particular) by the concept {that, it can be fairly said, dominates our lives}. [Working backwards from the end of the sentence: It can fairly be said is a parenthetical clause (treated on the Punctuation page): it doesn’t have a function in the clause in which it’s embedded. That dominates our lives, a WH-word clause, modifies concept. Both by concepts and by the concept that dominates our lives modify unseamed. In particular modifies the second by. Living and unseamed are the main words of non-finite verb phrases that both modify she. Of oneness modifies world. In a miraculous world of oneness modifies living. Living in a miraculous world of oneness modifies she, the subject of the sentence. In fact and for her age and weight both modify is. (Note: “The concept that...dominates our lives” is the concept of the ego/self, which Zoe is too young to have developed.)