

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.)