

Handout 5_Past Participle
Tuesday, 20th October and Thursday, 22nd October 2026

Study programs : 1HB1, 1HB2, 1HB3 & 1TP1
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Welcome to the next step of your TOEFL Lite preparation! Following our look at present participles, this guide focuses on past participles. On the TOEFL Structure and Written Expression section, past participles frequently appear in passive voice constructions, reduced relative clauses, and as adjectives. Recognizing these patterns will help you spot traps and secure more points.

Part 1: The Core Concept

A past participle is typically formed by adding **-ed** or **-d** to regular verbs (e.g., *designed*, *completed*, *established*), or through irregular verb forms (e.g., *written*, *spoken*, *done*, *taken*).

On the TOEFL, a past participle generally plays two major roles:

1. **Part of a Perfect Tense or Passive Voice:** Accompanied by a helping verb (have/has/had or is/are/was/were).
 - Example: The research paper **was written** by a team of scientists. (Passive voice)
2. **An Adjective (Participial Phrase) with a Passive Meaning:** Modifying a noun without a helping verb. This is where TOEFL tests your understanding of voice!
 - Example: The document **submitted** yesterday contains an error. (Meaning: The document that was submitted yesterday...)

Part 2: High-Yield TOEFL Patterns

To master past participles for TOEFL Lite, you must recognize these three critical structures:

1. Pattern A: Reduced Relative Clauses (Passive Voice)

Just like active clauses can be reduced using present participles, passive relative clauses containing *who*, *which*, or *that* + *be* verb + past participle can be shortened by dropping the relative pronoun and the *be* verb, leaving only the past participle.

- Full Clause: The building **that was constructed** last year won an award.
- Reduced (TOEFL Style): The building **constructed** last year won an award.

- The TOEFL Trap: Test-makers might change it to an active present participle (constructing) or leave an incorrect verb form. Always remember: Passive meaning = past participle (-ed/-en).

2. Pattern B: Past Participles as Adjectives

Past participles can function as adjectives modifying nouns, carrying a passive or completed sense.

- Before the noun: The **broken** window needs immediate repair.
- After the noun (as a phrase): Books **borrowed** from the library must be returned by Friday.

3. Pattern C: Participial Phrases at the Beginning of a Sentence (Passive)

When a past participle phrase starts a sentence, it carries a passive meaning and must modify the subject immediately following the comma.

- **Correct:**
***Disappointed** by the score, John decided to retake the TOEFL.*
(John was disappointed)
- **Incorrect (The Dangling Modifier Trap):**
***Disappointed** by the score, the test was rescheduled.*
(The test didn't feel disappointed; John did!)

Part 3: Quick Strategy Guide for TOEFL

1. **Active vs. Passive Check:** Always check whether the modified noun does the action or receives it.
 - Active (doing the action): The professor **teaching** the class...
 - Passive (receiving the action): The class **taught** by the professor...
2. **Distinguishing Past Participle vs. Simple Past:** In complex sentences, a past participle alone is not a main verb.
 - Incorrect: The report **submitted** yesterday.
(Fragment: missing a main verb)
 - Correct: The report **submitted** yesterday **was** comprehensive.
(Subject + Participle modifier + Main verb)

Part 4: Practice Quiz

Test your skills with these TOEFL-style practice items. Identify whether the underlined portion is correct or if it contains an error.

1. The results **obtaining** from the experiment surprised the researchers.
A) Correct
b) Incorrect (Should be obtained)
2. **Written** in clear language, the manual helps users install the software easily.
A) Correct
b) Incorrect (Dangling modifier error)
3. Several candidates **interviewed** for the position will be notified tomorrow.
A) Correct
b) Incorrect (Should be interviewing)