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## Participles

Grammatica 

### The Ablative Absolute

An **Ablative Absolute** phrase is used when a thought, condition or action is **grammatically separate** but **modifies the meaning of the rest of the sentence**. The ablative absolute is sometimes called an adverbial phrase because it modifies the whole sentence as an adverb modifies the action of a verb. We use absolute adverbial phrases in English too: 'They had a pleasant trip, *all things considered*.'

Here's a description from Arnold's *Latin Prose Composition* of the Latin ablative absolute:

"...the words in the ablative seem to stand apart, as if set free (*absolutus*) from the main section of the sentence.... The construction is widely used by Roman authors to indicate ideas of cause or time. The absence [in Latin] of a perfect active participle also determines the frequent use of this construction."

How to recognize an ablative absolute? Look for these features.

1. Often -- but not always -- the phrase is set off from the rest of the sentence with commas.
2. A grouping of two or more words in the ablative case, in these combinations.
  - o Noun or pronoun plus participle.
  - o Two or more nouns or pronouns with some form of 'esse' implied, since Latin has no present or perfect participle for 'esse'.
  - o Noun or pronoun plus adjective with some form of 'esse' implied.
3. The phrase cannot be grammatically linked to other elements of the sentence. For instance, there is no preposition introducing the phrase.
4. The phrase reflects upon the action of the main clause with regard to
  - o Time;
  - o Condition or Causation;
  - o Opposition.

## Study these examples:

**Nuntio misso** dux dormivit per nocte ('A messenger having been sent, the general slept through the night'). The noun-participle phrase tells us the sequence of events. It also suggests causation -- that the general was able to sleep soundly because a messenger had been sent.

**Duce nuntium mittente** milites sua arma preparavunt ('While the general was sending a messenger, the soldiers readied their weapons').

Nuntium, although not in the ablative case, is considered part of the AA phrase because it is direct object of the active participle.

**Eo discessuro** tabulae geographicae sunt paratae ('As he was about to depart, maps were prepared'). A pronoun, taking the place of a noun, combined with a future participle.

**Caesare ipso legiones ducente** tamen bellum in Gallia longum erat ('Although Caesar himself was leading the legions, the war in Gaul was lengthy'). With tamen in the main clause, the AA phrase becomes a precondition opposing or contrasting with the main clause.

**Hannibale mortuo** res publica salva est ('With Hannibal dead the republic is safe'). A noun-adjective combination with 'being' implied.

**Nuntiis gravibus** Caesar misit Labienum ad Galliam ('The news being serious, Caesar sent Labienus to Gaul). A noun-adjective combination, with 'esse' implied. Serious news is the pre-condition; Caesar sends Labienus because of this news.

**Omnibus paratis** familia discessit ad urbem ('Since everything was prepared, the family departed for the city'). Latin has no perfect participle for the verb 'esse' so we must supply 'was.'

**Caesare Bibulo consulibus** flumen Tiberis urbem inundavit ('When Caesar and Bibulus were the co-consuls, the river Tiber flooded the city'). This noun-noun-noun combination requires us to supply the English 'were.' This is a common way to date a year. Since two men served together as joint consuls for a one-year term, 'consul' takes plural form.