

A GUIDE TO THE FUNCTIONS OF MOODS, PARTICIPLES, AND INFINITIVES¹

The mood of a verb tells you the relationship between the action described and the real world as *it is perceived by the speaker*. There are four “proper” moods in Greek: the indicative, imperative, subjunctive, and optative. In addition, this guide will include descriptions of the infinitive and the participle, which are not technically moods but rather verbs behaving badly.

THE INDICATIVE

The Indicative is the one “factual” mood (as opposed to “non-factual”) (Young 1994, 136). It expresses a “real” action—that is, the action described by an indicative verb is viewed as an action that either (1) is/was actually taking place (progressive), (2) has actually taken place (aorist/undefined), or (3) will actually take place (future). The “normal” use of the indicative is therefore comprised of asserting propositions and asking questions (the first two functions listed below). Having said this, do not be surprised to find “strange” uses of the indicative, particularly in the New Testament. The aspect of the indicative verb will often (though not always) indicate the time in which the action takes place (but this is true *only* of the indicative).

Function	Description and Syntactical clues	Additional Helper words to look for	Translation
I. DECLARATIVE	(a) “Simple” indicative. (b) No helper words around and no reason to translate it otherwise.		Translate as a propositional statement.
II. INTERROGATIVE	The standard interrogative expects a declarative indicative as its response. Indicated by (a) the possible presence of interrogative words, (b) semantically difficult to translate as a declarative, (c) context demands the interrogative.	(a) Interrogatives: τίς, τί. (b) Semicolon at the end of the sentence. ²	(a) With interrogative words: translate the word with an English interrogative verb (“Who is the Christ?”). (b) Without interrogative words: translate as an English interrogative sentence (“Are you the Christ?”).
III. RHETORICAL INTERROGATIVE	Rhetorical interrogatives expect an implied affirmation or negation. Context will constrain you to translate this as a question.	οὐ μή	Translate as a rhetorical question expecting a positive answer. “Is [x] not the case?” Translate as a rhetorical question expecting a negative answer

¹ Much of the terminology used in this guide is either adopted or adapted from R. A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994).

² Though it should be noted that the presence of a semicolon is the decision of the editor of the Greek New Testament. There is no punctuation provided in the “original.”

THE SUBJUNCTIVE

The action of the verb in the subjunctive is viewed by the author as a *possibility* rather than a reality. It is therefore used to express wishes, conditionals, goals, suppositions, and the like. In Greek the subjunctive will most often be the main verb of a *dependent* clause, which means you will often be able to spot it alongside various helper words such as ἵνα, ἐάν, and the like. It may, however, form an independent clause, in which case spotting and translating the subjunctive might be more difficult. The aspect of the subjunctive verb *does not* indicate time but rather *the manner of the action*, i.e. either progressive or undefined (aorist), but this will be difficult to bring out in your translation (so when translation gets cumbersome, stick with the English undefined). The negation for subjunctive verbs is μή.

Function	Description and Syntactical clues	Additional Helper words to look for	Translation
I. IN DEPENDENT CLAUSES			
A. PURPOSE	ἵνα + subjunctive verb	ἵνα, ὅπως (rarely)	“in order to” “so that”
B. RESULT	ἵνα + subjunctive verb	ἵνα, ὅπως (rarely)	“with the result that” “so that”
C. 3RD CLASS CONDITIONAL	ἐάν + subjunctive verb (main clause will have either a progressive or future indicative)	ἐάν	“if... then...”
D. CONDITIONAL RELATIVE CLAUSE	Relative pronoun with subjunctive verb.	ὅς or ἐάν	“whoever + verb”
II. IN INDEPENDENT CLAUSES			
A. HORTATORY SUBJUNCTIVE	1 st person plural subjunctive.		“Let us....” Similar to a 1 st person plural imperative.
B. DELIBERATIVE QUESTION			“Should I/we/he ... ?”

THE PARTICIPLE

The participle is a verbal adjective, which means that it has some characteristics in common with verbs and others in common with adjectives. Like adjectives participles will modify a noun/pronoun with which it will agree in gender, case, and number. Like verbs, participles denote an underlying *action* that has both tense (present/progressive, aorist, or perfect) and voice (active, middle, or passive). The tense of the participle denotes its *aspect*, that is, the type of action being performed: progressive, undefined, or perfective. The voice of the participle determines the relationship between the action being described and the Hn that the participle is modifying. Additionally, the verbal component of a participle also means that it forms its own phrase (which may have a “subject,” object, indirect object, etc.). That *phrase* will, in turn, either be *adverbial*, *adjectival*, or *substantival (nominal)*.³ So when determining the function of a participle first find the noun it modifies (if no Hn can be found, then it is substantival). Next, determine how the clause as a whole functions in the sentence.

General Function	Syntactical clues / Other Information	Specific Functions	Key Words / Formulas
I. ADVERBIAL	Predicate position (adverbial participles will never be preceded by the article). They will, in conjunction with the word they modify, form an adverbial phrase.	1. <i>Temporal</i>	“while” (prog.) “after” (aorist)
		2. <i>Causal</i>	“because”
		3. Attendant Circumstance	
		4. Pleonastic	
		5. Manner	
		6. Means	
		7. Reason	
		8. Grounds	
		9. Condition	
		10. Concession	
		11. Purpose	
		12. Result	
II. ADJECTIVAL	Attributive position (adjectival participles will <i>usually</i> be preceded by the article). They form an adjectival phrase that further describes the word being modified.	(While adjectival phrases can have a variety of functions, for simplicity we will stick with the generic “ <i>descriptive</i> ” function).	“the [noun] who/that is [verb]ing” “the [noun] [verb]ing”
III. SUBSTANTIVAL (OR NOMINAL)	While substantival participles are <i>usually</i> preceded by the article, they do not modify a Hn. They thus form a nominal phrase that functions in the same way a noun would.	The function of the substantival participle is determined by the case of the participle, just as with nouns. Follow the noun chart.	“the one who...” “the thing that...”

THE IMPERATIVE

Function	Description and Syntactical clues	Additional Helper words to look for	Translation
I. COMMAND	Most frequent use. Describes an action that the addressee ought to do. The difference between tenses is a matter of some debate, but see Young, 141-43.	The addressee will sometimes be in the vocative.	Translate as a command.
II. PROHIBITION	Describes an action that the addressee is prohibited from doing.	μη. Vocatives.	“Do not...” Translate as a prohibition.

³It is debated whether or not the substantival participle should be treated as a separate function or included as a subset within the adjectival use. I have opted for the former (following Young, 148) because the functions of the phrases that are formed by each are different and will therefore be diagrammed differently.

THE INFINITIVE

Like the participle, the infinitive is not a finite verb (it cannot form its own independent clause) and is therefore not a true mood. It is included here because it has verbal qualities, which in turn can create a (subordinate) verbal clause. If the participle is a “verbal adjective,” then the infinitive is a “verbal noun,” that is it describes an *action* as if it were a *thing* and, grammatically, has a nominal function in its sentence (direct object, indirect object, etc.). As a verb it will have aspect (which does not indicate time) and voice (but is otherwise indeclinable). It will often form a dependent clause (the “subject” of which will be in the accusative).⁴ As a noun it can receive the article (it is always treated as a neuter singular) and function in all the same ways a noun can function (the case of the article will indicate function). When the infinitive receives the article it is called an “articular infinitive.” The key word “to + verb” can be used as a rough translation. The negation for infinitives is μή.

Function	Description and Syntactical clues	Additional Helper words	Translation
I. SUBSTANTIVAL: INFINITIVES FUNCTIONING IN NOUN PHRASES⁵			
A. SUBJECT	Often has the article. Will always be the “impersonal” subject of a verb. ex.: “To study is good.”	(a) impersonal verbs: δεῖ, to + verb. You might want to ἔξεστιν. (b) εἰμί (c) verbs supply a dummy impersonal subject: “it.” Ex.: “It is good to δοκέω, γίνομαι, etc.	subject: “it.” Ex.: “It is good to study.”
B. DIRECT OBJECT	Usually has the article and will follow the ordinary rules of a noun. There are some “special” uses of the infinitive direct object, listed below.	The article.	to + verb.
i) Compliment	Some verbs take an infinitive compliment. The infinitive will usually not have the article, but you will be expecting an infinitive because of the finite verb.	Certain verbs regularly take the infinitive: δύναμαι, βούλομαι, θέλω, ζητέω, ποιέω, ἀφίημι, ἄρχομαι, etc.	to + verb
ii) Indirect Discourse	Verbs of speaking will take an infinitive to report something someone has said. Usually will not have the article	Found with αἰτέω, εἶπον, ἐρωτάω, λέγω, etc.	... that + English indirect discourse (note that a shift in tense and mood will often occur).
II. VERBAL: INFINITIVES FUNCTIONING IN ADVERBIAL PHRASES⁶			
A. REASON/PURPOSE	a) διὰ + accusative		because + verb (reason)
	b) εἰς + accusative	Always articular	in order that + verb (purpose)
	c) πρός + accusative		in order that + verb (purpose)
	d) Genitive articular infinitive	Always articular	in order that + verb (purpose)
	e) Simple infinitive	No article	in order that + verb (purpose)
B. TEMPORAL	a) προ + genitive		before + verb
	b) ἐν + dative		when/while + verb
	c) μετά + accusative		after + verb
C. RESULT	a) ὥστε + non-articular infinitive		with the result that + verb

⁴ Though the infinitive does not have a “true” subject (because it is not a finite verb), a nominal in the accusative will often *function* as the subject in the phrase. However, be careful—infinitive verbs can also take objects, which will also be in the accusative.

⁵The phrase formed by the infinitive functions grammatically as a noun.

⁶The phrase formed by the infinitive functions grammatically as an adverb. These will often be formed using prepositions, and when such is the case they will often have the article.