

Read the following poem "Tides" by Mary Oliver and underline each participle (-ing & -ed). Then, to the right of the line write out the verb phrase that it was reduced from. The first stanza has been completed as an example.

Every day the sea

blue gray green lavender

pulls away leaving the harbor's

dark-cobbled undercoat

Example of Unreduced Wording

and leaves the harbor's

undercoat which is cobbled dark

slick and rutted and worm-riddled, the gulls

walk there among old whalebones, the white

spines of fish blink from the strandy stew

as the hours tick over; and then

far out the faint, sheer

line turns, rustling over the slack,

the outer bars, over the green-furred flats, over

the clam beds, slippery logs,

barnacle-studded stones, dragging

the shining sheets forward, deepening,

pushing, wreathing together

wave and seaweed, their piled curvatures

spilling over themselves, lapping

blue gray green lavender, never

resting, not ever but fashioning shore,

continent, everything.

And here you may find me

on almost any morning

walking along the shore so

light-footed so casual.

Every day the sea blue gray green lavender pulls away leaving the harbor's dark-cobbled undercoat slick and rutted and worm-riddled,

the gulls walk there among old whalebones,

the white spines of fish blink from the strandy stew as the hours tick over;

and then far out the faint, sheer line turns, rustling over the slack, the outer bars, over the green-furred flats, over the clam beds, slippery logs, barnacle-studded stones, dragging the shining sheets forward, deepening, pushing, wreathing together wave and seaweed, their piled curvatures spilling over themselves, lapping blue gray green lavender, never resting, not ever but fashioning shore, continent, everything.

And here you may find me on almost any morning walking along the shore so light-footed so casual.

EXERCISE GUIDE

The exercise should be challenging even for advanced students, but it should help students develop a better sense of how participial phrases work in poetry and literature. While students will most certainly struggle with the vocabulary, they will be able to familiarize themselves with new words at their own pace if the poem is given as a take home reading assignment.

Students should be asked first to determine the number of sentences (2) versus the number of clauses (6). Then, they can be tasked with un-reducing each participle and finding its subject. The ultimate goal is for them to determine if the participle is working as an adverbial or adjectival phrase or if it has been further reduced to a true adjective.

The third and fourth stanza will likely prove particularly difficult and it might be advisable to have students focus on the other stanzas first and use the “line pulls away” clause as an additional example to deconstruct with the class by asking them to determine each participial one by one.

Note that “the line” refers to the water line and not the wrack line. The verbs that follow should clarify this as they depict movement and causal effects.

SOURCE:

Oliver, Mary. “Tides.” *A Thousand Mornings*, New York: Penguin, Press 2012, 57-58.

ANSWER SHEETS

Every day the sea

blue gray green lavender
pulls away leaving the harbor's
dark-cobbled undercoat

slick and rutted and worm-riddled, the gulls
walk there among old whalebones, the white
spines of fish blink from the strandy stew
as the hours tick over; and then

far out the faint, sheer

line turns, rustling over the slack,
the outer bars, over the green-furred flats, over
the clam beds, slippery logs,

barnacle-studded stones, dragging
the shining sheets forward, deepening,
pushing, wreathing together
wave and seaweed, their piled curvatures

spilling over themselves, lapping
blue gray green lavender, never
resting, not ever but fashioning shore,
continent, everything.

And here you may find me
on almost any morning
walking along the shore so
light-footed so casual.

*and leaves the harbor's
undercoat which is cobbled dark*

*and which is rutted
and riddled by worms.*

*(note that the worms are
not doing the rutting)*

*the line rustles over the slack
flats*

*that are covered in green fur
and stones*

*that are studded with barnacles
and drags sheets that are shining
and deepens, pushes, and wreathes together
their curvatures that are piled*

spill and lap

and never rest but fashion the shore

*while I am walking along the shore
with my light footing.*

subject

verb

reduced adverbial participle

adjective

Every day the sea blue gray green **lavender** **pulls** away **leaving** the harbor's dark-cobbled undercoat slick and rutted and worm-riddled,
the **gulls** **walk** there among old whalebones,
the white spines of **fish** **blink** from the strandy stew as the **hours** **tick** over;
and then far out the faint, sheer **line** **turns**, **rustling** over the slack, the outer bars, over the green-furred flats, over the clam beds, slippery logs,
barnacle-studded stones, **dragging** the shining sheets forward, **deepening**, **pushing**, **wreathing** together wave and seaweed, their **piled**
curvatures **spilling** over themselves, **lapping** blue gray green lavender, never **resting**, not ever but **fashioning** shore, continent, everything.
And here **you** **may find** me on almost any morning **walking** along the shore so light-footed so casual.

Reduced Adverbial Phrases: note that all these are showing simultaneous action and Adverbial Participles are not limited to only this relation. Their adverbial nature is shown with the paraphrase that places the phrase before the independent clause as in line one.

(the) **lavender** pulls away *and* leaves ... i.e. Leaving the harbor, the lavender pulls away.

the **line** turns *and* rustles *and* drags *and* deepens *and* pushes *and* wreaths

the **curvatures** spill *and* lap *and* never rest *but* fashion ...

you **may** find me *while* I am walking ...

Adjectives derived from Reduced Adjectival Phrases: when adjective clauses are reduced, they can flip to the front of the noun.

undercoat that is cobbled darkly and is rutted and is riddled by worms

flats that are covered with green fur

stones that are studded with barnacles

curvatures that are piled

I am walking and am having feet that are light (adj from verb "to foot")