

20. Present participles

1 Formation

The **present participle** is formed by taking the stem of the first person plural of the present indicative and adding *-ant*.

nous *aimons* → aimant - *liking*

nous *finissons* → finissant - *finishing*

nous *rendons* → rendant - *giving back*

Exceptions include:

être → étant - *being*

avoir → ayant - *having*

savoir → sachant - *knowing*

2 Use

2.1 The present participle describes an action that happens at the same time as or just before another. It is **invariable**, i.e. it does not take an agreement:

J'ai vu Marie **sortant** du bureau de poste

I saw Marie coming out of the post office

Arrivant au cinéma une demi-heure en avance, Pierre est allé prendre un café

Arriving at the cinema half an hour early, Pierre went and had a coffee

2.2 It is often used with the sense of a relative clause involving *qui*:

Les enfants, **dormant dans la chambre d'en face**, ne se sont pas réveillés

(=qui dormaient dans la chambre d'en face)

The children, sleeping in the room opposite, didn't wake up

And a clause beginning with *comme*:

Etant fatigué, j'ai décidé d'aller me coucher

(=Comme j'étais fatigué)

As I was feeling tired, I decided to go to bed

2.3 Where it is used with *en* (e.g. *en travaillant*), this form is known as a **gerund**. The gerund can be used to express the manner in which something happens:

Il entra dans la salle **en souriant**

He came into the room smiling

The reason why something happens:

Il s'est cassé la jambe **en jouant** au football

He broke his leg playing football

The idea of *when*:

Veuillez vous adresser à l'accueil **en arrivant**

Please go to reception on arriving

And the idea of *through doing something*:

En utilisant cette méthode de paiement vous ferez d'importantes économies

In using this method of payment you will make considerable savings

- 2.4** Many adjectives and some nouns derive from the present participle form. Note that adjectives take an agreement where appropriate:

C'est une ville **intéressante**

It's an interesting town

Les petits **commerçants** sont contre les mesures

Small shopkeepers are against the measures