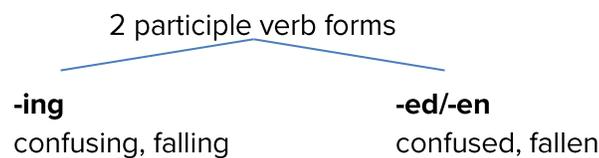## Aggie Grammar Guide: Adjectives That Come from Verbs

One type of adjective derives from and gets its meaning from verbs. It is often called a *participial* adjective because it is formed from a verb's participle form. To learn more about adjectives in general, see the adjective glossary entry.

How to Form Adjectives That Come from Verbs

There are two types of participial adjectives: one comes from the verb's *present participle* (**-ing** form) and the other comes from the *past participle* (**-ed/-en** form, but often irregular). Take the verbs **confuse** and **fall** as an example:

2 participle verb forms

**-ing**                                    **-ed/-en**
confusing, falling                  confused, fallen

While the forms derive from a verb (**to confuse**; **to fall**), they can function as adjectives to describe a noun. Note that not all verbs can do this; you can check whether the verb you want to use can describe a noun by searching for it in online published writing, books, magazines, newspapers, or academic journals.

Using participial adjectives can help reduce wordiness from multiple phrases. In this example, the adjective is bolded and the changed phrase is underlined.

➢ Example: Making friends can help you create connections in case you need to copy notes or ask for information on something you might have missed.
➢ Revision: Making friends can help you create connections in case you need to copy notes or ask for **missed** information.
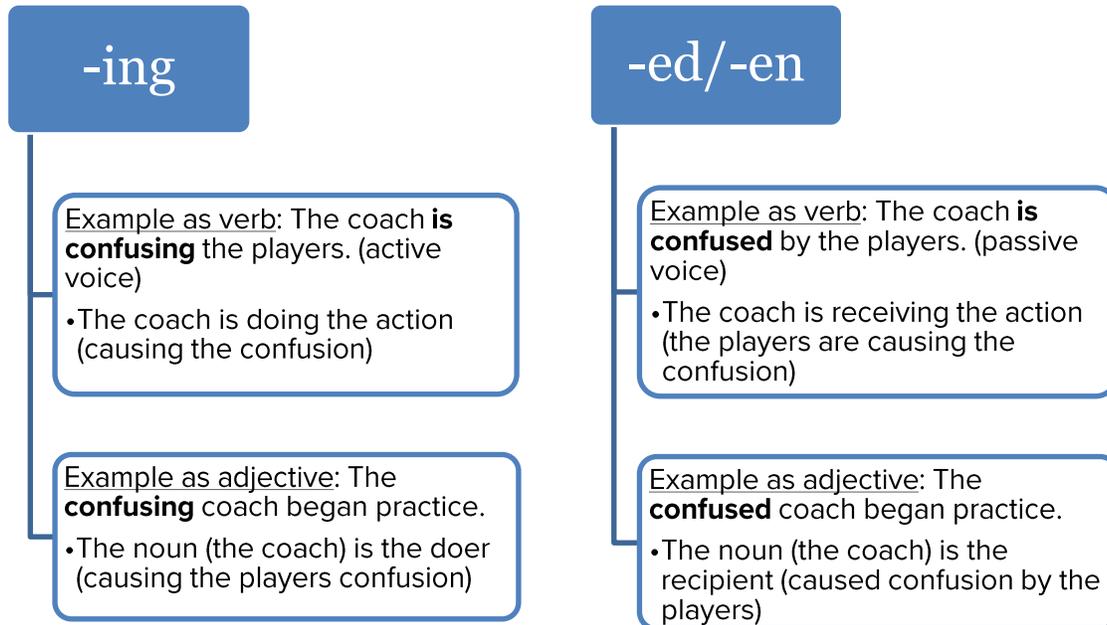
The phrase "on something you might have missed" describes the **information** but is wordy. The only necessary word in this phrase is **missed**, and this single word can be placed in front of the noun **information** as an adjective. The revision "missed information" accurately describes the original sentence and uses fewer words, so it is preferable.

Meaning Difference between the Two Forms

As verbs, the **-ing** ending indicates *progressive* form (also known as the *continuous* form) and can only be used in the *active voice*. The **-ed/-en** verb ending indicates *perfect* form and is the form used for *passive voice* sentences. When verbs become adjectives, they no longer function as verbs but still have a verb-like meaning. As a general pattern, the **-ing** adjective has an active or continuous meaning, and the **-ed/-en** adjective has a passive or completed meaning.
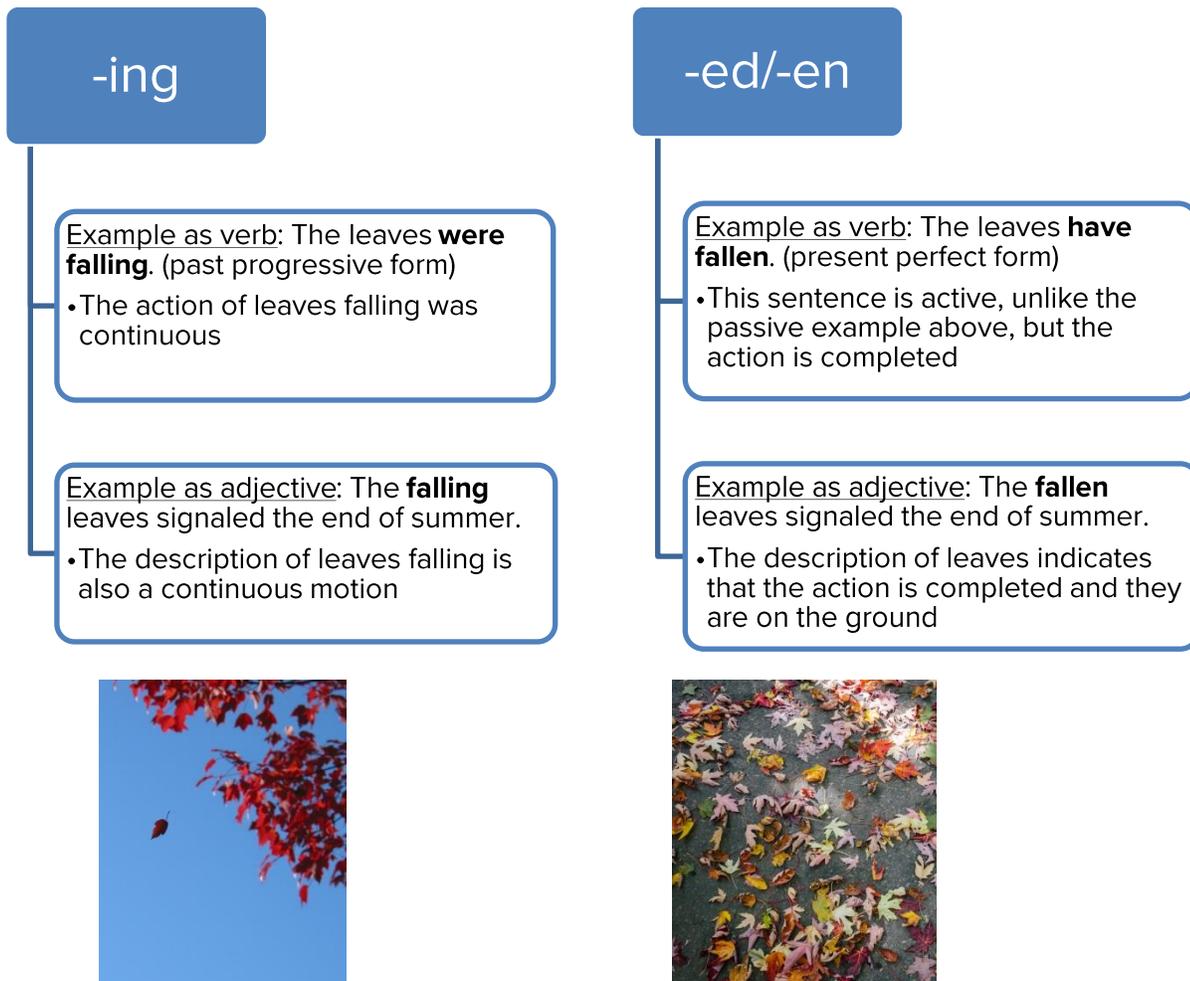
When choosing which adjective form to use, ask yourself if you are (1) describing an active or passive meaning (only true for transitive verbs that can be made passive) and (2) describing a continuous or completed state.

Let's start with the difference between **confusing** and **confused**, starting with their use as verbs. Ask yourself whether you want the active or passive meaning of **confuse**.

## -ing

Example as verb: The coach **is confusing** the players. (active voice)

• The coach is doing the action (causing the confusion)

Example as adjective: The **confusing** coach began practice.

• The noun (the coach) is the doer (causing the players confusion)

## -ed/-en

Example as verb: The coach **is confused** by the players. (passive voice)

• The coach is receiving the action (the players are causing the confusion)

Example as adjective: The **confused** coach began practice.

• The noun (the coach) is the recipient (caused confusion by the players)

Thus, the choice between **confusing** and **confused** as an adjective is a similar decision for choosing active or passive voice for the verb form.

Now let's look at the difference between **falling** and **fallen**, starting with their use as verbs. Ask yourself whether you want the continuous or completed meaning of **fall.**

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Aggie Grammar Guide: Adjectives That Come from Verbs 2

## -ing

**Example as verb**: The leaves **were falling**. (past progressive form)
- The action of leaves falling was continuous

**Example as adjective**: The **falling** leaves signaled the end of summer.
- The description of leaves falling is also a continuous motion

## -ed/-en

**Example as verb**: The leaves **have fallen**. (present perfect form)
- This sentence is active, unlike the passive example above, but the action is completed

**Example as adjective**: The **fallen** leaves signaled the end of summer.
- The description of leaves indicates that the action is completed and they are on the ground





Thus, the choice between **falling** (image on the left) and **fallen** (image on the right) as an adjective is a similar decision for choosing the progressive or perfect form for the verb.

This same decision applies to more abstract and academic concepts although the meaning differences may be more subtle. Take **increasing** and **increased** for example.

➢ Example: Nature provides climbers with this **increasing** opportunity.
➢ Example: Nature provides climbers with this **increased** opportunity.

The first example means that the opportunity still has the potential to go up (continuous meaning). The second example means that the opportunity is higher compared to something else (completed meaning).

Which pattern applies to which adjectives? For intransitive verbs, the active/passive meaning (**confusing/confused**) will never apply; you can understand their adjective meanings as continuous/completed (**falling/fallen**). Unfortunately, for all other verbs there is no clear reason why some adjectives are explained like **confusing/confused** (active/passive meaning) while others are

explained like **falling/fallen** (continuous/completed meaning). Try both explanations to see which makes more sense in your context.

Missing Endings on Adjectives (Hard to Hear "d" Sound/Letter)
One common difficulty with the participial adjective ending in **-ed** is that it is hard to hear this ending pronounced in spoken conversations, especially for words ending in a vowel. This can lead speakers to leave off the ending of the word in writing, which makes the word look like a verb, not an adjective (e.g. *The **confuse** coach began practice.).

To avoid this type of mistake, make sure you double-check that any word functioning as an adjective has the correct ending. If one word is describing another word (e.g. **advanced** placement; **relaxed** requirement; professor who is **retired**), it is likely an adjective.

Adjective Tests
If you're not sure when a word is acting as an adjective, try either the *substitution test*, ***very*** *test*, or ***seem*** *test*. These tests can also be found in the Adjective glossary entry.

Substitution Test: Can you substitute the word with another adjective like **happy**, **weird**, or **old**?
➢ Example: There will always be people who have doubted themselves while there are others who are motivated and have a deep inspiration.
  ✗ The word **doubted** is not an adjective because this sentence is illogical: "*There will always be people who have **happy** themselves…"
  ✓ The word **motivated** is an adjective because this sentence is logical: "…there are others who are **happy** and have a deep inspiration."

**Very** Test (also found in online Adjectives glossary entry): Can you modify the word with **very**?
➢ Example: The sentences in the articles are not complex or long.
  ✗ The word **in** is not an adjective because this sentence is illogical: "*The sentences **very** in the articles…"
  ✓ The words **complex** and **long** are adjectives because this sentence is logical: "…are not **very** complex or **very** long."

**Seem** Test (also found in online Adjectives glossary entry): Can you logically fit the word into the sentence frame "[Noun/pronoun] seems _____."?
➢ Example: Perhaps they leave this small yet meaningful detail aside because attending school for several years seems tedious.
  ✓ The word **meaningful** is an adjective because this sentence is logical: "It seems meaningful."
  ✗ The word **detail** is not an adjective because this sentence is illogical: "*It seems detail."
  ✗ The word **school** is not an adjective because this sentence is illogical: "*It seems school."
  ✓ The word **tedious** is an adjective because this sentence is logical: "It seems tedious."