THE 99% PRINCIPLE

Basically the stem of a participle tells aspect—ongoing (or repeated) vs. completed. In fact, what is ongoing is usually (let us say, 99%) contemporary with the time of the main verb, while what is complete is almost always past.

For this reason, the usual translation of a continuous participle is *Xing*, of an aorist participle *having X'd*.

\[
\text{ζητών τὸ δακτύλιον ἔπεσεν.} \\
\text{Seeking the ring, he fell.} \\
\text{(The seeking and the falling happened together.)}
\]

\[
\text{ζητήσας τὸ δακτύλιον ἔπεσεν.} \\
\text{Having sought the ring, he fell.} \\
\text{(The seeking happened prior to the falling.)}
\]

However, it is possible (a small percent of the time) that what is ongoing will not be contemporaneous with the main verb and therefore is not to be translated *Xing*.

For example, here is a line from a poem attributed to Plato, in which Lais, an older woman who has lost her looks, dedicates her mirror to Aphrodite. She describes herself this way:

\[
\text{ἡ τῶν ἐραστῶν ἔμοι ἐπὶ προθύροις Λαίας ἔχουσα νέων} \\
\text{*Lais, the one who used to have a crowd of young lovers at her door*} \\
\text{(Obviously she does not currently have a crowd of lovers.)}
\]

Likewise, it is possible that an aorist participle will be about what is momentary but not prior to the main verb and therefore is not to be translated *having X'd*:

\[
\text{ἀναβλέψας ἐπεσεν.} \\
\text{*With an upward glance, he spoke.*} \\
\text{(It is not that he looked up first and then spoke. Rather as he spoke, he gave a completed upward glance.)}
\]

This is relevant to Plato’s description of Socrates’ last hour. Socrates, who had been condemned to death for not having the proper regard for the gods asks whether he may pour out a drop of his poison as an offering to the gods before drinking it. He asks the man who brought the hemlock ταυρηδόν ὑποβλέψας —*with a bull-like up-from-under glance*. It is impossible to translate this gracefully. One pictures Socrates giving a fierce, upwards glance, as a bull might. It is not likely that he gave the glance and then spoke. Rather he must have spoken *with* (a completed) glance.

The 99% principle is a subtlety of Greek. Be aware of it.