

Gerunds

WHAT IS A GERUND?

A gerund is the *-ing* form of a verb when it functions as a noun. Therefore, a gerund can do whatever a noun does. For example:

Walking is excellent for overall health.

In this sentence, the gerund “walking” is functioning as the subject of the sentence.

WHAT IS A GERUND PHRASE? A gerund phrase is a phrase that begins with a gerund (the *-ing* form of a verb) and includes objects or modifiers. It also functions as a noun.

Walking around the block is her daily exercise.

In this sentence, “walking around the block” is the gerund phrase functioning as the subject of the sentence.

Gerund Usage

Because gerunds take the place of nouns, they serve the same functions in a sentence: subject, direct object, subject complement, or object of a preposition. The following are examples of each type of gerund usage:

Smoking is terribly unhealthy for you.

- Here the gerund “smoking” is acting as a **subject**.

I enjoy **being on the swim team**.

- Here the gerund phrase “being on the swim team” is a **direct object**.

That hike through the woods was **tiring**.

- Here the gerund “tiring” is acting as a **subject complement**.

I’m not interested in **taking that course**.

- Here the gerund phrase “taking that course” is an **object of the preposition**.

⇒ Note: As a general rule, gerunds and gerund phrases do not require punctuation.

Gerunds and Other Verbals

It is important not to confuse gerunds with other verbals such as *participles* and *infinitives*.

- Unlike a **gerund**, which always functions as a noun, a **participle** is the form of a verb when it functions as an adjective.

Participle: Driving home, Kate saw an accident.

Here the phrase “driving home” modifies Kate and is acting as an adjective, not a noun, thus making it a participle and not a gerund.

Gerund: Driving is fun.

Here “driving” is acting as the subject (noun) of the sentence, thus making it a gerund and not a participle.

- An **infinitive** is the “to” form of a verb and can function as a noun, adjective, or adverb.

To drive two hours to work every day is exhausting.

Here the infinitive phrase “to drive two hours to work every day” is acting as a noun and is the subject of this sentence. However, unlike gerunds, infinitives never end in *-ing*.