



Figure 1 The Writing Center and Academic Resource Center logo

GERUNDS AND INFINITIVES

Gerunds

A gerund is a form of verb ending in *-ing*. The way we use a gerund is what makes it different from a verb. Gerunds can act as nouns or as the names of behaviors, actions, or states of mind.

Gerunds can give an explanation of something, which adds additional details. For example:

- It is expensive.

What is *it*? We know that *it* is expensive, but we don't know anything else about *it*.

- *Living* in Manhattan is expensive.

The verb *living* is the gerund in the above sentence. That is the *it* that is expensive. *Living in Manhattan* is considered a gerund phrase because it adds more information to the sentence.

Let's look at another example.

- I enjoy it.

Again, the question we have to ask is, what is *it*?

- I enjoy *going* to the beach.
- I enjoy *eating* cookies.

The following sentences give different examples of how to use gerunds:

1. *Dancing* is good exercise. (Gerund as a *subject*)
2. Josh enjoys *dancing*. (Gerund as an *object of a verb*)

3. He knows a lot about *dancing*. (Gerund as an *object of a preposition*)
4. It is interesting to watch good *dancing*. (A modifier preceding a gerund is usually an adjective)
5. *Dancing* well requires practice. (A modifier following a gerund is usually an adverb)
6. We enjoyed the girl's *dancing*.
7. My *dancing* made my boyfriend laugh. (When a gerund has a subject it is possessive)



Figure 2 Clip art of people dancing

These are some common verbs that are often followed by gerunds:

Enjoy	Postpone	Think about	Finish
Mind	Put off	Consider	Stop
Keep (on)	Wait	Talk about	Quit

Infinitives

An infinitive is the simple form of a verb preceded by the word “to.” Infinitives can also act as the names of behaviors, actions, or states of mind, like gerunds do. The following is an example of an infinitive as the subject of the sentence.

- It is one of my ambitions.

What is *it*?

- *To fly* is one of my ambitions.

Infinitives following certain verbs, such as *let* or *make*, appear without the “to.”

- The coach *let* the team *choose* it's own captain.
Not...
- The coach *let* the team *to choose* it's own captain.
- The editors *made* the reporters *check* their facts thoroughly.

Not...

- The editors *made* the reports *to check* their facts thoroughly.

Infinitives can also be the direct object of a sentence, for example:

- Since ancient times, people have attempted *it*.
- Since ancient times, people have attempted *to fly*.

Using infinitives with negatives can be tricky, since the placement of the negative can change the meaning of the sentence. For example:

1. You are not wrong *to tell* me about that.
2. You are wrong not *to tell* me about that.

In sentence #1, the subject has told something and was right in doing so, whereas in sentence #2, the subject has not told anything and was wrong in doing so.

These are some common verbs that are often followed by infinitives:

Want	Hope	Decide	Seem
Need	Expect	Promise	Appear
Would like	Plan	Offer	Pretend
Would love	Intend	Agree	Forget
Try	Mean	Refuse	Learn
Afford	Wait		



Figure 3 Clip art of a man holding up a large book

Exercises:

Complete the sentences with the gerund or the infinitive form of the word in parenthesis and identify which form you are using.

1. I need (study) _____ tonight. Gerund / Infinitive
2. I enjoy (cook) _____ gourmet meals. Gerund / Infinitive
3. Ellen started (talk) _____ about her problem. Gerund / Infinitive

4. Bud and Sally have decided (get) _____ married Gerund / Infinitive
5. We finished (eat) _____ around seven. Gerund / Infinitive
6. Are you planning (take) _____ a vacation this year? Gerund /
Infinitive
7. I like (meet) _____ new friends. Gerund / Infinitive
8. We discussed (visit) _____ the park. Gerund / Infinitive
9. I've decided (rent) _____ the house. Gerund / Infinitive
10. My friend offered (loan) _____ the money to me. Gerund / Infinitive
11. I try (look) _____ neat and clean every day. Gerund / Infinitive
12. I forgot (buy) _____ milk at the store. Gerund / Infinitive
13. I started (like) _____ Jim. Gerund / Infinitive
14. Let's keep (work) _____ on the homework. Gerund / Infinitive
15. I went (fish) _____ early in the morning. Gerund / Infinitive

This handout is based on the following texts:

Azar, Betty Schramper. Chartbook: A Reference Grammar, Fundamentals of English Grammar. Englewood Heights: Prentice Hall Regents, 1995.

Furey, Patricia R. and Lionel Menasche. Making Progress in English: Grammar and Composition. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990.

Holschuh, Louis W. The Functions of English Grammar. New York: St. Martins Press, 1991.

Kolln, Martha. Understanding English Grammar. New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1982.

For further reference, see the following books:

Foot, Ronald C., Cedric Gale, and Vincent F. Hopper. Essentials of English. 4th ed. Hauppauge: Barron's, 1990.

Harris, Muriel. Prentice Hall Reference Guide to Grammar and Usage. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1992.

All of the above texts are available in The Writing Center.