Verbals

A **verbal** is a <u>noun</u> or <u>adjective</u> formed from a <u>verb</u>. Writers sometimes make mistakes by using a verbal in place of a verb, and in very formal writing, by confusing different types of verbals. This section covers three different verbals: the participle (which acts as an adjective), the gerund (which acts as a noun), and the <u>infinitive</u> (which also acts as a noun).

The fundamental difference between verbals and other nouns and adjectives is that verbals can take their own <u>objects</u>, even though they are no longer verbs:

Gerund

    Building a house is complicated.

In this example, the <u>noun phrase</u> "a house" is the direct object of the verbal "building", even though "building" is a noun rather than a verb.

The Participle

A **participle** is an adjective formed from a verb. To make a **present participle**, you add "-ing" to the verb, sometimes <u>doubling the final consonant</u>:

    "think" becomes "thinking"
    "fall" becomes "falling"
    "run" becomes "running"

The second type of participle, the **past participle**, is a little more complicated, since not all verbs form the <u>past tense</u> regularly. The following are all past participles:

    the **sunken** ship
    a **ruined** city
    a **misspelled** word

Note that only <u>transitive verbs</u> can use their past participles as adjectives, and that unlike other verbals, past participles do not take objects (unless they are part of a <u>compound verb</u>).

The Gerund

A **gerund** is a noun formed from a verb. To make a gerund, you add "-ing" to the verb, just as with a present participle. The fundamental difference is that a gerund is a noun, while a participle is an adjective:

gerund

I enjoy **running**. ("Running" is a noun acting as the <u>direct object</u> of the verb "enjoy.")

participle

Stay away from **running** water. ("Running" is an adjective modifying the noun "water.")

Using Verbals

There are two common problems that come up when writers use verbals. The first is that since verbals look like verbs, they sometimes cause students to write fragmentary <u>sentences</u>:

[WRONG] Oh, to find true love!
[WRONG] Jimmy, swimming the most important race of his life.

The second problem is a very fine point, which most editors and some teachers no longer enforce. Although they look the same, gerunds and present participles are different <u>parts of speech</u>, and need to be treated differently. For example, consider the following two sentences:

I admire the woman finishing the report.
I admire the woman's finishing the report.

In the first example, "finishing" is a participle modifying the noun "woman": in other words, the writer admires the *woman*, not what she is doing; in the second example, "finishing" is a gerund, modified by the <u>possessive noun</u> "woman's": in other words, the writer admires not the woman herself but the fact that she is finishing the report.

Written by Heather MacFadyen

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