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Transcript

Adept English PODCAST 94 TRANSCRIPT English Grammar What Are Gerunds

Hi there, I’m Hilary and this is the latest podcast from Adept English.

You may have noticed on Facebook or via email, that we’re trying get more people involved in our way of learning to speak English. We currently have 40,000 listeners every month and we think that we can push this up to 50,000, with your help. As you know, we offer almost all of our content for free, so there’s no risk in persuading people to try out Adept English. If you like what we’re doing and you know people who might like it as well, can we ask a huge favour? Can you please share this easy-to-remember link 7rules.adeptenglish.com? That would be great, if you would do that for us?

Right, let’s get on with this week’s podcast.
So in the spirit of Rule Six of the Seven Rules of Adept English, let’s make today’s podcast the type that gives you a ‘Helping Hand’ with the English language. Now I know that many of you have studied English in a school or college and therefore you’ll probably have studied English grammar. So today I’m going to use the proper grammar terms, the proper words for the grammar I’m going to teach you. But hopefully I’ll make it simple, easy to understand – and you can do ‘learn through listening’, so that’s much easier.

So the part of grammar which I’m going to teach you today – is called the Gerund, G-E-R-U-N-D. By using its proper name, I’m hoping to link it to any English language lessons that you’ve had on this subject. Also by giving it its name, gerund, it helps you remember the idea and hopefully helps you understand it. But let me say that probably, many people who have spoken English all their lives would not know what a gerund is! They may not know the word gerund, but they would understand them and use them automatically. In English we use gerunds all the time. But if you’re new to the language, it can be very confusing when you hear them.

So what is a gerund?

Well, if you know your basic English grammar, a noun N-O-U-N is a person, place or thing word. So a word that you can put ‘the’ or ‘a’ in front of – ‘the teacher’, ‘a house’, ‘the cat’. And a verb V-E-R-B is a doing word, an action word – so ‘to speak’, ‘to run’, ‘to drink’. So far, so good. And when you take a word which is normally a verb and you add on the end of it ‘-ing’, you make it into a noun. And that is a gerund. So if I take the verb examples that I gave you - ‘to speak’ or ‘to run’ or ‘to drink’ - I can make nouns out of them. So ‘speaking’, ‘running’ and ‘drinking’ can all be used as nouns. Let’s use some example sentences:-
Speaking all the time, means that you are not listening very much.
Running every morning makes me feel tired.
Drinking lots of orange juice is bad for your teeth.

So can you see, in each of those sentences, I’ve taken a verb, added -ing to make a noun. Now you would be unlikely to hear someone say ‘a drinking’ or ‘a running’, but if someone was taking about their exercise routine, you might hear them say ‘The running and the cycling are good for my heart and the swimming is good for my arms’. But usually these nouns don’t have ‘the’ or ‘a’ in front of them. So you’ll hear things like these sentences:-

I don’t like running, but I do like walking
Drawing and painting are much more fun than maths
My playing on the piano is really improved.

So the confusion sometimes comes from the fact that the gerund looks like what we call ‘the present participle’. So the present participle is a form of the present tense – and it sounds like this:-

I am walking to the shop right now to buy some eggs.

So here ‘walking’, ‘I am walking’ is the verb, the present tense.

You could have

‘I saw him driving his car’.

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Here again ‘driving’ is a present participle – it’s part of the verb. ‘I saw him driving his car’ is the same meaning as ‘I saw him and he was driving his car’. So these are not gerunds, they’re verbs and they’re not being used as nouns. [Whereas ‘His driving is terrible!’ would be a gerund.]

Let me give you some examples of gerunds with these same sentences

‘I love walking to the shop to get eggs’ - that would be the gerund because you’re using ‘walking’ as a noun. ‘I love it, I love walking’.

Often it is used instead of the infinitive. If you used the infinitive instead it would be ‘I love to walk to the shop to get eggs’, whereas the gerund ‘I love walking to the shop to get eggs’

So gerund ‘I love walking to the shop’. Infinitive ‘I love to walk to the shop’.

So here are some more examples of gerunds in sentences – so all of them are verbs, made into nouns by adding -ing.

‘Thinking hurts my head, but having a bath makes me relax’
‘Smoking is bad for your health’
‘Eating lots of vegetables is good for you’
‘She enjoys reading and playing the violin’
‘Whatever your age, learning a foreign language is good for your brain’

OK, so you get the idea of gerunds – verbs made into nouns. Just a little bit more on this. Sometimes you’ll come across these words, these gerunds also being used as an adjective A-D-J-E-C-T-I-V-E. An adjective is a describing word,
like ‘blue’ or ‘small’ or ‘fast’ or ‘slow’. So here, we’ve taken a word which is a verb like ‘to run’ and then we’ve added -ing to make it a gerund so a noun, so ‘running’ – and then we’re making it into an adjective, by saying ‘My running shoes’. So here clearly, we don’t mean that the shoes go running on their own – we mean that these are the shoes which I wear when I go running. But you can see here, the word ‘running’ in ‘my running shoes’ is a gerund which is being used as an adjective, to describe the shoes. What it actually means is ‘they’re shoes for running’.

So here are some more examples of gerunds being used as adjectives, to describe something. Remember they all end in -ing.

‘The old lady was very slow and sometimes she used a walking stick’
‘Where are my hair cutting scissors?’
‘Sometimes I sew by hand, but usually I use a sewing machine’
‘I like going to the swimming pool and I wear my swimming costume’
‘I cook sausages in my frying pan’
‘It was feeding time at the zoo’

If you look at the transcript, if you look at the words for this podcast – it’s on the website at adeptenglish.com – I’ve highlighted in bold all the gerunds in the sentences, just to make it easier for you. Hopefully that’s enough examples to give a helping hand on gerunds and you understand now what a gerund is, whether it’s being used as a noun or an adjective. If you know anyone who’s an English speaker, ask them whether they know what a gerund is? They may not know. Unless it’s your English teacher that is – they should know. So listen to this podcast a number of times – firstly to understand the English, but also so that you remember what a gerund is, once you’ve understood it. You may find you have to explain it to other people!
Enough for now. Have a lovely day. Speak to you again soon. Goodbye.