

Chapter 39: Gerunds and Gerundives

Chapter 39 covers the following: the formation and use of gerunds and gerundives; and the two different forms of gerundive purpose constructions. At the end of the lesson we'll review the vocabulary which you should memorize in this chapter.

There are four important rules to remember in this chapter: (1) Gerunds are verbal nouns; gerundives are verbal adjectives. (2) Gerunds and gerundives are formed like future passive participles. (3) Where English will use a gerund followed by an object, Latin will use a gerundive modifying a noun. (4) There are two types of gerundive purpose constructions: 1) *ad*, plus an accusative noun, plus an accusative gerundive; 2) a genitive noun, plus a genitive gerundive, plus *causā*.

Gerunds are verbal nouns, that is, nouns built on a verb base. They're the noun equivalent of participles, verbal adjectives. English forms gerunds by adding “-ing” to a verb base, for instance, “seeing” or “believing,” as in “seeing is believing.” The underlying sense of “seeing” and “believing” in that sentence is “the act of seeing” and “the act of believing.” Note that “-ing” can turn an English verb base into a gerund (a noun) or a participle (an adjective). Only in context is it possible to distinguish between these “-ing” forms. So, for instance, “The only thing that matters is thinking [that is, the act of thinking, a gerund, a noun],” says the thinking man [this ‘thinking’ is a participle, an adjective].” The difference between gerunds and participles is not hard to determine. If the “-ing” word modifies a noun, it's a participle. But if you can put the words “the act of” in front of the “-ing” word, it's a gerund. It would be so nice if English didn't form gerunds and participles the same way, but it does. Latin, like the logical language it is, doesn't.

Latin gerunds are formed by taking the present base plus the thematic vowel, adding *-nd-* and first/second-declension neuter singular endings, for example, *videndum*, meaning “(the act of) seeing,” or *credendum*, meaning “(the act of) believing.” Gerunds have no masculine or feminine forms, and no plural — how many “seeing's” do you need to make a believing? — having only one gender and one number means gerunds can only change form through the five cases. But they don't even do that much. Gerunds have only four forms. There's no nominative *nd-*based gerund. When Romans needed a nominative gerund — as the subject of a sentence, for instance — they used the infinitive instead. English can do the same. For instance, “To live well is the best revenge.” There, the infinitive “to live” is the subject of the sentence. But English can also say “Living well [the nominative gerund] is the best revenge.” Thus, we have two nominative gerunds, two ways of saying or to say the same thing. The infinitive variant, “to live well,” is the only way the Romans had of expressing this sentiment in the nominative, because there was no nominative gerund in Latin, no counterpart of the English “living well.”

Here's a chart showing how the Latin gerund is formed. The nominative uses the infinitive. The genitive ends *-ndi*, the dative *-ndo*, the accusative *-ndum*, and the ablative *-ndo*, the translations of which are obvious: “to [verb] (which is used in place of the missing nominative “[verb]-ing”), of [verb]-ing, to [verb]-ing,” and so on. Here's an example of a Latin gerund declined (in the oblique cases, i.e. from genitive to ablative): *amandi*, *amando*, *amandum*, *amando*, meaning “of loving, to/for loving, loving (DO or OP), by/with/from loving.” These are used in contexts like

“the science of loving, the need for loving, we all need loving, and by loving we make the world a better place.” As we just noted, those are all the forms of the *nd*-based gerund Latin has. Four forms total, and only three different endings total: *-i*, *-um*, and *-o*! So there’s actually a big difference between the way the gerund and the gerundive look. The gerundive, you will remember, is the form used in passive periphrastics. If the *-nd-* is followed by any first/second-declension ending other than *-i*, *-um*, or *-o* — *-nda*, *-ndae*, *-ndam*, *-ndos*, *-ndas* — the form is a gerundive, not the gerund. Thus, the potential for confusing gerunds and gerundives is in practice really quite small.

One major use of gerunds in Latin is in the ablative case, where they often serve as ablatives of means, that is, “by [verb]-ing”: “by trying, by helping, by hurting, by healing.” In fact, when you see a verb form ending *-ndo* — with no preposition in front of it! — the first translation you should try is “by whatevertheverbis-ing.” By doing that you will most often succeed. Every chapter in Wheelock has a catch, doesn’t it? Surely, you’ve caught onto that by now. Well, here’s the curve ball in Chapter 39. I’m going to say this first in simple terms, and then we’ll talk about the bizarre and far-reaching consequences of this “Catch 39.” Here it is in a nutshell: Latin gerunds don’t take objects. [Well, not in the classical age! In earlier Latin they did, but since this course is addressing the way Cicero and Vergil spoke and those authors don’t ever attach objects to gerunds, this is a rule as far as we’re concerned.] Let’s start by looking at this catch from the English perspective. When we use “love” as a noun, it can’t take an object. “Love each other is all that matters”? That makes no sense. The noun “love” can’t take an object like “each other.” [You can, of course, put an “of” after “love” — love of each other — but then you don’t have an object. You have an objective genitive. That’s a totally different thing.] But watch this! Turn “love” into a gerund, “loving,” and now you can have an object: “Loving each other is all that matters.” English gerunds *can* take objects. Latin gerunds can’t. Why? Hard to say. Apparently, the Romans didn’t see the gerund as having enough verb in it to be able to take an object. They saw it as a noun, so in the same way we can’t put “each other” directly after the noun “love,” the Romans didn’t hear enough verb sense in *amandum*, for example, to give it an object. To them it didn’t sound like “loving” but “lovingness,” and you can’t attach an accusative direct object to “lovingness.” So what did the Romans do when they wanted to express the object of the verbal quality in the gerund? [Are you sitting down? This is really odd, and it’ll take you a moment to wrap your head around this, but it’s not hard, just weird. Really weird.] When Romans wanted to add an object to a gerund, they turned the gerund into a gerundive.

Gerundives, you remember, are participles, verbal adjectives, not nouns. Quick review: gerundives use the same base as gerunds — *-nd-* plus first/second-declension endings — and have the sense “(about/going) to be whatevertheverbis-ed.” English has nothing corresponding to Latin gerundives. The closest thing we have is “to be whatever-ed” which, like gerundives, can convey a sense of necessity or obligation, “it is to be, it must be.” Combine that with a form of *esse* and you get the passive periphrastic, e.g. *agendum est*, “it must be done.” Now, back to gerunds vs. gerundives. Unlike gerunds, gerundives aren’t nouns. They’re adjectives. They modify nouns, and technically that’s all they ever do in Latin. Even in a passive periphrastic, they’re not actually the verb. The form of *esse* attached to them is. Instead, gerundives being adjectives modify something, in a passive periphrastic, the subject. In the example I just cited (*agendum est*), *agendum* is neuter singular because the subject is “it.” That’s the heart of this problem here, the adjectival nature of gerundives.

So far, the only way we've seen gerundives used in Latin is in passive periphrastics, but — here comes some bad news — that's not their only use. Sometimes they aren't connected with the verb "to be." Sometimes they're just used as adjectives modifying nouns, and when that happens, they lose their sense of necessity and aren't translated as "must be." And now here's the crux of the issue. The Romans used gerundives where we would use a gerund plus an object. In other words, where we say "He saved us all by averting those dangers" — "averting" is a gerund and "those dangers" is its object — but since Latin can't attach an object to a gerund, the Romans rephrased the thought as "He saved us all by/through those dangers to be (which were) averted." "To be averted" is a gerundive. I can hear the screaming from here. Give me a second and I'll show you how easy it is to handle this construction, even if understanding it is next to impossible. Okay, are you sitting down again? Good, let's move on. Let's start by looking at how this construction would sound in English, if English were so foolish as to have it.

Here's an example of a noun and a gerundive, acting like a gerund with an object. Where the literal English would be "in the deed to be done" — "to be done," which is the closest thing English has to the Latin gerundive, is an adjective modifying the noun "deed" — in Latin that would be *in facto* ("in the deed") *agendo* ("to be done"). The gerundive *agendo* modifies the noun *facto*. But if you look at the sense, the "deed" is receiving the action of "doing," — the participle is passive so its "subject" (the noun it modifies) receives its action — thus, "in the deed to be done" is the equivalent of saying "in doing the deed." There, "doing" is a gerund (a verbal noun) with an object "deed." English can say it that way — gerund plus object — because we English speakers hear enough verbal quality in our gerunds to allow them to take objects. Apparently, Latin gerunds didn't sound "verb-y" enough to the Romans for their gerunds to do the same, which necessitated the bizarre gerundive work-around we just looked at. I'm guessing this is making less and less sense as I keep talking, so I'm going to stop trying to explain this perverse grammatical concoction and instead just show you how to deal with it. When it all comes down to passing this class, all you have to do here is know how to handle this idiom. You don't have to understand it.

Here's how to tame this beast: think of the Latin as backwards English. In Latin, the gerundive is grammatically dependent on the noun, just as all adjectives are dependent on nouns. The noun will have a case (and number and gender) to which the adjective must conform, for instance, "of this to be done." There, "of" is the case, "this" is the noun, and "to be done" is the gerundive, the adjective. English has none of this nonsense. We say "of doing this." No passive gerundive work-around. So extract the passive verb-sense "done" from "to be done," make it active ("do") and turn the noun the gerundive agrees with into that verb's object. In other words, take "of this to be done," put "do" in front of "this," and add "-ing"! It's that simple. You basically flip the verb and noun around, add "-ing" and move on.

Let's practice that, this time turning the process around and looking at it in Latin first and how you translate this construction into reasonable English. *Cupidus amandi*, means "desirous of (the act of) loving." *Cupidus* ("desirous") is in the vocabulary for this chapter which we'll discuss later. This adjective takes a genitive after it, like *amandi*, a gerund in the genitive case. It has no object, so there's no problem. But add an object and Latin can't use the gerund anymore. Say you want to say "desirous of loving girls"? Now "loving" can't be a gerund in Latin. It has to be

a gerundive modifying what in English is the object of the gerund. In other words, “loving” has to modify “girls,” and “girls” has to take the case the Latin gerund had, the genitive. It becomes *cupidus puellarum amandarum*, literally “of the girls (who are) to be loved.” But forget the literal meaning. It makes no sense in English. Just look at what you did. You took the “love” out of *amandarum* and turned it into a gerund (“[the act of] loving”), then made “girls” its object and put the “of” (the case of *puellarum*) on the front of the English gerund. So to create the English translation, you inverted the grammatical relationship of the words in Latin, turning “of girls (to be) loved” into “of loving girls.”

Let’s look at another example. *Propter metuendum* means “because of fearing.” *Metuendum* is an accusative gerund, accusative because it’s the object of the preposition *propter*. No problem, until you add an object, like *hostes*. Then things get ugly. Latin can’t *metuendum hostes*. *Metuendum* needs to be turned into a gerundive, an adjective modifying *hostes*: *propter hostes metuendos*. *Metuendos* is now accusative plural masculine to agree with *hostes*. The literal translation (“because of the enemy to be feared”) is really no help in figuring out what this means. What this phrase really means in English is “because of fearing the enemy.” So instead of reading the construction in the order noun and verb (“enemy + fear”) — that’s the way Latin does it — flip the noun and verb around and say “fear + enemy.” Add “-ing” to the verb and you get “because of fearing the enemy.” Got it? Don’t overthink it. Here’s all you need to do. You see an *-nd-* form. There’s no *esse*, so this isn’t a passive periphrastic. Find the noun the *-nd-* form agrees with, and make that noun its object. What you’ve done grammatically is convert the *-nd-* form (the equivalent of “-ing” in English) from a gerundive attached to a noun into a gerund plus an object. But you don’t have to understand all that grammar to manage this construction.

All you have to know is how to do these four steps: (1) take the English verb sense out of the *-nd-* form, (2) add “-ing,” (3) put that “-ing” thing into the same case and construction as the Latin noun to which the gerundive’s attached, and (4) make the noun the “-ing” thing’s object. That’s it. You’re done. Think you can do it? Let’s see.

In bello gerendo. *Bello* means ... “war.” *Gerendo* comes from the verb *gero* which means ... “wage.” So literally, this monstrosity says “in the war to be waged,” but that’s not even half-decent English. Forget it. Instead, take “wage,” add “in” to the front of it and “-ing” to the back of it, make “war” the object, and it becomes ... “in waging the war.” “Waging” is now a gerund with an object (“war”). How about *de urbibus delendis*? What’s the noun? *Urbs*, meaning “city.” What’s the verb? *Deleo*. What is its basic English sense? “Destroy.” What does *de* mean? “About, on the subject of.” So take the verb sense “destroy,” put “about” in front of it, “-ing” after it, attach “cities” as the object, and you get ... “about destroying the cities.” We’ll practice gerundives more at the end of the lesson, but first we need to look at one of their most important applications, the gerundive purpose construction. I should say “constructions,” because Latin has two gerundive purpose constructions, very different-looking but closely related grammatically. One uses the preposition *ad*, plus an accusative noun, plus an accusative gerundive, meaning literally (and nonsensically) “to(ward) the noun to be gerundive-ed,” for instance, “to(ward) this goal to be achieved.” Use the reverse-the-noun-and-verb rule we just discussed above and you will get the much better English “toward achieving this goal,” the equivalent of a purpose construction, “to achieve this goal.”

The other gerundive purpose construction uses a genitive noun, plus a genitive gerundive, plus *causā* (“for the sake of”), literally “for the sake of this goal to be achieved.” What would that be in real English? Apply the reverse-the-noun-and-verb rule and you get ... “for the sake of achieving this goal,” really just another way of saying “to achieve this goal.” Let’s look at examples of both constructions in Latin. I’ll give you the Latin in its gerundive form. You give me the normal way of saying this in English. First, *ad urbem oppugnandam*. [*Oppugno* means “attack.” I’ll introduce it in the vocabulary below.] Take the sense “attack” out of *oppugnandam*, put “(in order) to” on the front — you don’t need “-ing” here because in English an infinitive shows purpose — and make the noun *urbem* the object of *oppugno*, and you get ... “(in order) to attack the city.” See the pattern? Let’s try another ger. purp. — I’m tired of saying “gerundive purpose construction”; “ger. purp.” will be our abbreviation — *ad veritatem loquendam*, meaning “(in order) to do what verb to what noun”? That’s right! “To speak (*loqu-*) the truth (*veritatem*).” One more: *ad civitatem defendendam*. “To protect (*defend-*) the state (*civitatem*).” Okay, one more: *ad consules interficiendos*. “To kill the consuls.” One more, just one more: *ad vocem oratoris audiendam*. “To hear the voice of the speaker (the speaker’s voice).” Notice the ending on *audiendam* (accusative singular feminine). That’s because the gerundive is an adjective agreeing with *vocem*. Literally, it’s the “voice,” not the speaker, that’s being heard here.

In the top example on this page, *interficiendos* does the same. It’s accusative plural masculine to go with *consules*. Note that in this variation of the ger. purp. the ending on the gerundive will always be accusative because the whole construction is being governed by *ad*. The lesson here is: when you’re composing this type of ger. purp. in Latin, remember to make the gerundive accusative, and whatever case and number the noun is! Now let’s look at some examples of the other type of ger. purp., the one that uses *causā* and will always have nouns and gerundives with genitive endings, like *militum hortandorum causā*. How would you translate that into semi-reasonable English? That’s right! “For the sake of encouraging the soldiers,” meaning “to encourage the soldiers.” How about *vini ferendi causā*? Yeah! “For the sake of bringing the wine, to bring the wine.” And *exsilio vitandi causā*? “For the sake of avoiding exile, to avoid exile.” *Navium capiendarum causā*? “To capture the ships.” And finally, *solis videndi causā*? “To see the sun.” And I think you see the light, even if it doesn’t make completely perfect sense. This is all you need to know: in Latin “a noun to-be-verbed” equals English “verbing a noun.” And now it’s time for us to be moved along — that is, to move us along — to the vocabulary.

The first word is *aedificium*, *aedificii*, n., meaning “building, structure.” It’s a second-declension noun, a combination of two bases: *aith-* (“hearth”) and *-fic-* (“make”), so to the Romans an *aedificium* was at heart a place that had a hearth. Heating and cooking systems are still considered essential in housing. The *aith-* base derives from an Indo-European root that meant “burn” which is seen in other classical derivatives like *Aethiopia*, literally “the land of the burnt (*aith-*)-faced (*-op-*) people,” which is how ancient Greeks saw Africans. Also from the *aith-* base is (*a*)*ether* which to the ancient Greeks meant “the upper atmosphere,” literally “the burn,” probably a reference to the brightness of light at high altitudes. The thin air up there, no doubt, also gave rise to the theory that there was an element called “ether” which permeated space. In the modern era, when a volatile compound was discovered that fit the imagined properties of that element, it was called ether. Later, ether was discovered to have anesthetic properties and used to put people to sleep during surgery. The idea that ether is a high-atmosphere gas can still be heard

in our adjective “ethereal,” meaning “light, airy,” and in the phrase “in the ether” an early reference to radio, and from there to computing and the Ethernet.

The next word is *iniuria*, -ae, f., meaning “injustice, injury, wrong,” a first-declension feminine noun. It’s a compound of the prefix *in-* (“not”) and the base *iur-* (“law, right”), making it literally “lawlessness.”

The next word is *vox*, *vocis*, f., meaning “voice, word,” a third-declension feminine noun, which is not *i*-stem. Only one consonant at the end of the base! What is its ablative singular? Good, *voce*. And how would Latin say “in a great voice”? [What use of the ablative is that? What does it show? The manner in which someone was speaking. Does the ablative of manner require a preposition? Yes, *cum*, but it’s optional if there’s an adjective attached to the noun. So ...] *magnā (cum) voce*.

The next word is an adjective: *cupidus*, -a, -um, meaning “desirous, eager, fond.” It’s first/second-declension. It expects a genitive after it, just like its English counterpart “fond.”

Next is *necesse*, an indeclinable adjective, used only in places where the nominative or accusative is called for, and only ever with the verbs *esse* and *habere* (*habere* in its mental sense “consider”). In other words, *necesse* can only be used to say “be necessary” or “consider necessary.” This limited application does not, however, equate to limited use. It’s actually seen quite often in Latin, especially in the expression *necesse est*, “it is necessary,” or some tense variation thereof. *Necesse est* expects a dative and an infinitive (“It is necessary for someone to do something”), or a subjunctive verb, with or without an *ut*, basically the same expectations that *licet* and *opus est* have.

The next word is another third-declension adjective: *vetus*, *veteris*, meaning “old.” It belongs to the one-termination variety, like *potens*, *potentis* or any present participle, where the base becomes visible only after the nominative. What then is the base of *vetus*? Yes, *veter-*. And there’s an annoying feature of this adjective: it’s not *i*-stem, as you’d expect since it’s third-declension. So, what’s its ablative singular then? Good, *vetere*. And its neuter nominative or accusative plural? *Vetera* (“old things”). How about “of old things”? How would you say that in Latin? Uh huh, *veterum*.

Next up is *etsi*, a subordinating conjunction that means “even if.” Remember that *et* doesn’t just mean “and.” It can also mean “even”: *Et tu, Brute?* (“Even you, Brutus?”).

After that is *quasi*, “as if,” another subordinating conjunction (or adverb), and I’ll answer your question before you ask it. Yes, this is where Quasimodo, the character from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, gets his name. According to Hugo’s story, he was abandoned as a deformed baby on the steps of the famous cathedral in Paris, where a priest found and raised him, naming him after the first word of the prayer for that day (the Sunday after Easter), a prayer that begins “*Quasi modo geniti infantes*, ...,” meaning “Just like (new-)born babies, ...” Hugo’s imagination was as deformed as his protagonist.

The next word is *experior, experiri, expertus (sum)*, a fourth-conjugation deponent verb, meaning “try, test, experience.” The *-per-* in this verb is not the Latin prefix (“through”) but a base that means “trial, test,” literally “pass across a boundary.” You’ve seen it before in *periculum* (“danger”), literally “a little test or trial” — of one’s fortitude, I suppose. It’s also seen in the Greek word *emporos* (“merchant”) which gives us the word “emporium,” a store that sells imported goods. So originally in Greek, traders were merchants, *emporoi*, who bought and sold goods “across international boundaries.”

And finally, the last word on this vocabulary list is *oppugno* (1), meaning “attack, assail.” Literally, it’s *ob-* (“face-to-face”) plus *pugno* (“fight”), that is, “fight in close quarters.” From that it gets one of its most common uses in Latin, “to besiege.” After all, at some point during a siege, the fighting has to happen face-to-face.

Do the rules that were cited at the beginning of this chapter now make sense to you? If not, please review this presentation. If so, please proceed to the next slide. For the next class meeting, please bring in a copy of the P&R sentences for Chapter 39 on page 189 of Wheelock’s text.

As promised, here are some Latin sentences with gerunds and gerundives for you to practice translating these constructions. I’ve set this exercise to the accompaniment of some lovely music with Latin lyrics, another selection from Carl Orff’s *Carmina Burana*. As you go through these, I’ll give you time to work out the translation of each sentence, starting with this one: *Dubitando amisit occasionem*. “By (the act of) hesitating he lost the opportunity.” *Dubitando*: abl. of means *Petendo conatus est vitare mortem*. “By begging he tried to avoid death.”

Further Examples of Gerundives. *Iniuriis vitandis facimus beneficia*. “By avoiding wrongs we do kindnesses.” lit., “By means of wrongs to be avoided ...” *iniuriis*: abl. of means *vitandis*: abl., modifying *iniuriis*. *Tyranno interficiendo se liberabunt*. “By killing the tyrant they will free themselves.” *Veritate loquendā amicos veros habebitis*. “By speaking the truth you will have true friends.”