How to properly use those ‘-Ing’ words

Grade school grammar lessons may be far in the rearview mirror, but it's always good to brush up on the basics. "Gerunds," also known as "action verbs," also recognizable as "-ing" words, are a powerful tool in anyone's grammar arsenal. While they may come naturally to native English speakers, there are rules that guide their use, of course.

Gerunds After a Preposition

A preposition explains a relationship with space or time and modifies the words that come after it. Prepositions include "to," "in," "at," "on," "since," "up," "down," "under," and many others*.*In order to use a verb properly after a preposition, it must be used as a gerund. (Unless using the preposition "but." Sorry, English is tricky.)

In these examples, the preposition is in *italics* and the gerund is in bold.

* Study hard *before* taking your exams.
* She delivered the joke *without* laughing.
* *After* riding the bus to work, I stopped for coffee.

Gerunds can also be used after a noun plus a preposition.

* TV shows *about* cooking are becoming more popular.

And after an adjective plus a preposition.

* I’m tired *of* waking up at 5 a.m. every day.
* She’s sad *about* having to cancel her show.

Gerunds in the Present Simple Tense

The present simple tense is used in English to talk about things that are true at the moment. For example, gerunds could be used to discuss things that someone likes or dislikes.

* She doesn’t like driving.
* They love hiking!

Gerunds could also be used to talk about things you remember.

* I remember watching that show when I was a kid.
* Do you recall using a rotary phone?

Gerunds can be used to talk about things being attempted in the present.

* I’m trying to learn how to skateboard.
* She’s trying to knit a scarf.

It’s common to use gerunds when discussing feelings of remorse or regret.

* He regrets not studying abroad while in college.
* They regret wearing flip-flops today — it was so cold!

Gerunds as the Subject in a Sentence

When using a gerund as the subject in a sentence, you’ll spot it at the beginning.

* Having breakfast in the morning is an important part of a healthy lifestyle.
* Staying up too late can cause you to be sleepy the next day.
* Traveling can expose you to different ideas and experiences.