

* English. *

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WORDS IN —ING.

No part of English grammar, perhaps, presents such difficulties to elementary pupils as the words ending in *-ing*. It is the most natural thing in the world for a pupil, who remembers that in the sentence, "The man building your house has been injured," the word "building" is an imperfect participle, to have a sense of personal injury when he is not permitted to say that in "The building of your house is impossible," "building" is likewise an imperfect participle. If he is told that "building" is a noun in the latter case, he finds it hard to understand how a noun may have an object like a verb when we say "building your house is impossible." In short, the forms in *-ing* are the *pons asinorum* of elementary English grammar, and require the most careful and the most painstaking treatment the teacher can give.

Let us take the simplest forms first.*

A. "Hunting is a pleasant pastime." Hunting here is the name of a sport, it is the subject of a verb; it is clearly a noun.

[Historically, *-ing* represents in nouns the A.S. *-ung*, as *miltung*, mercy (infinitive *miltian*, to pity); *leornung*, learning (infin. *leornian*, to learn); *granung*, groaning; *gytsung*, avarice. These forms were so numerous that they may be said to have in the later development of the language established the law that a noun form in *-ing* (from *ung*) may be made from any verb. Many nouns not originally ending in *-ung* were remade in imitation of this great class; for instance, the noun *huntoth* in A.S. became the noun "hunting" in later English. Because of their origin from verbs, they are usually styled *verbal nouns*.]

B. "He was hunting in the wood." Here "was hunting" is little different from "hunted;" that is to say, "hunting" is plainly connected with the verb "hunt," and with the help of the verb "to be" is able to make statements. So "He is hunting," "He has been hunting," "He had been hunting." Comparing "was hunting" with "hunted," we notice that the first has a notion of the continuation of the hunt, the latter has not. This notion is not conveyed by "was," since in such a sentence as, "He was struck by his brother," we use "was," though the action is completed. The progressive notion is given by "hunting."

Being part of the verb, and indicating an uncompleted or progressing action, we call "hunting," as here used, an imperfect participle. It will be seen by a short examination that "hunting" really describes the person represented by "he"—He hunting was in the wood, and only its strong verbal force keeps it from being called an adjective pure and simple. It is a *verbal adjective*, with reference to its qualitative relation. We consequently find the imperfect participle used independently of the verb "to be," in adjective relation to some noun or pronoun, as in "I saw him hunting in the wood."

Yet we do not call this imperfect participle a verbal adjective for a reason that may be seen from the following sentence:—

"The men hunting deer in the wood were unsuccessful." Here we see that "hunting" is just as much a verb in respect to its expressing an action (hunting) with immediate relation to an object (deer) as "hunted" is, when we say "The men hunted the deer in the wood." We keep, then, for "hunting" and similar words similarly used the term "imperfect participle," meaning by that that a word so called (1) is one of the verbal forms; (2) may form with parts of the verb "to be" various uses that are called "progressive;" (3) that when thus used it has adjectival relation to the subject; (4) that it may be used apart from the verb "to be," in qualitative relation to any noun or pronoun; (5) that even when used apart from the verb "to be" it is not purely an adjective, since, if the

* Forms such as *Harding*, *Atheling*, afford no grammatical difficulty. In A.S. they are represented by similar forms, *atheling*, etc. Morning, evening, are later formations on the nouns *morgen*, *mornung*, and *even*, evening. Nouns such as *king*, *thing*, etc., need no special mention, as this paper deals merely with forms where the *-ing* is in active use as a suffix.

participle form a transitive verb, it may take an object like a true verb.

[Historically, this imperfect participle is a regular successor of the A.S. imperfect participle in *-ende* (*onde*), and is similarly used:—He was gongonde, He was going; He was spaende, He was speaking; He fæth secende, He goes seeking; Thæt hi geseonde geseon, and na ne geseon, That they seeing may see, and not perceive; tha godan lareowas tha haligan gesommunge lærende, the good teachers teaching the holy scriptures (lit. collections).]

C. "That is an interesting book." We have just seen that the imperfect participle is in one respect adjectival and is frequently used immediately to qualify a noun. Nothing could be more natural than that certain participles should from the frequency of this adjectival use attain to full adjectival force, taking the positive and comparative, etc. This change can be seen by comparing the force of "interesting" in the sentence beginning this paragraph with its force in "This is a book interesting us by its faithful details;" or "rising," in "He is a rising man," with "He is a man rising from humble condition;" or "He is a most promising student," and "He is a student promising much but never performing."

This adjective in *-ing* is best called a *verbal adjective*, by which we mean (1) that it was originally an imperfect participle, (2) that it has become entirely adjectival in syntax and comparison, etc. The meaning, moreover, becomes vague and general; the verbal force disappears. Of course, like other adjectives it may take on, when the noun is really understood, a noun force.

Compare, "The saving are sure of comfort in their old age" with "Saving persons are," etc.

[So in A.S. *neriende* gave *nergend*, the Savior, i.e., the Saving One.]

D. "Hunting deer is not an easy sport." Plainly "hunting" is here a noun so far as it is the name of a sport (cf. A.) Yet it is verbal in so far as it expresses an action that passes over to an immediate recipient. This double force cannot be described by any of the terms we have so far had. It is plainly of verbal origin. It is called a *gerund*, by which we mean that it is (1) a noun, and (2) it is verbal to the extent of having, if derived from a transitive verb, an object, and of often being modified by an adverb.

[Historically, this "gerund" is, as Dr. Morris has pointed out, only a noun in *-ing* of verbal origin with the loss of a following preposition. In Selden we have constructions such as, "The giving a bookseller his price for his book has this advantage," beside such constructions as, "Quoting of authors is most for matter of fact." There can be no doubt that the modern usage of saying "Quoting authors is most," etc., has been greatly influenced by the regular construction of imperfect participle and direct object. In the same way we must deal with such expressions as "The house is a building," which, in its earlier form, was, "The house is in building." Of this once common construction we have left in standard English practically only such expressions, He is gone a fishing, a hunting, where a = in, on.

Etymologically the "gerund" is only the verbal noun (A), but in modern usage it has usurped a verbal construction that differentiates it from the verbal noun.

E. The omission of this preposition in such constructions as "The house is building," has given rise therefore to a form which is felt to be an *imperfect participle with passive meaning*, rather than a noun, and it may thus be described. It is very necessary, however, to keep the origin of the form in mind, so that there may be no confusion with such sentences as, "He was busy writing" = "he was busy at (with) writing."

In conclusion, we have thought it unwise to follow Professor Earle and the H. S. Grammar in regarding such forms as "Seeing is believing" as infinitives. Neither by derivation nor form are they such.

It is held by some that the A. S. dative of the infinitive *gending* in *-enne* is the origin of the modern gerund. For example, "hlaif to etanne" has become "bread for eating." This is scarcely possible, for readers of Chaucer know that practically both the simple infinitive and the gerundial infinitive had become similar in form *-e(n)*, and very few traces of the gerundial infinitive in *-ing* are to be found in Middle English, and these died out with the extension of the use of the verbal noun (A) about the fifteenth century,

EXERCISES.

Point out the relation, function and history of the forms in *-ing* in the following:

- A. 1. Seeing is believing.
2. I do not like travelling.
3. The invention of writing was a great step in the civilization of mankind.
4. By carving we mean the art of fashioning wood into artistic forms.
5. The men declared it was impossible to go on with the building of the bridge.
- B. 1. Standing by the river was his young friend.
2. There are few men interesting us by both their genius and their goodness.
3. When arriving at his home, he met with a serious accident.
4. He will be reading when you return.
5. See the birds fluttering, singing, darting in the early morn.
- C. 1. They are interesting people.
2. It is very fascinating to watch that game.
3. Such children are best looking when they are most cared for.
4. The most surprising result was the defeat of our candidate.
5. The living and the dead will one day meet.
- D. 1. Building the bridge was not easy.
2. By seeing your friend you will gain your end.
3. He has gone a-fishing.
4. By quickly withdrawing his forces the General saved his troops from defeat.
5. I was not sure of going or I should have spoken of accompanying you.
- A, B, C, D, E. 1. Giving one's best friend money is the first steps towards losing him.
2. They laugh best who, when laughing, are the last to laugh.
3. His travelling there will not prevent my seeing you.
4. I saw vast bridges building.
5. He was long in rising, but once through washing himself, he became anything but lazy.
6. Upon pain of being fined, trespassers are warned from crossing these grounds.
7. Women are angels, wooing.
8. Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.
9. The babbling brook ran chattering past his feet.
10. They were busy ploughing.
11. I am weary of talking so much over so little.
12. I purpose starting to-morrow, when you, too, will be leaving.
13. His father's blessing he was desirous of receiving.
14. He goes to a place where there is neither marrying, nor giving in marriage.
15. Brandishing his hunting-knife, he told us a harrowing tale of his thrilling exploits.
16. Speaking of John, what do you think of him?
17. Having given his blessing the old man died.
18. He goes up and down seeking whom he may devour.
19. A deep sound came from the frowning guns declaring that the battle had begun.
20. Your being here is in your favor.
21. "With never an end to the stream of pressing feet—
Driving, hurrying, marrying, burying,
Clamor, and rumble, and ringing, and clatter."
22. "Or ravished with the whistling of a name,
See Cromwell damned to everlasting fame."
23. "In squandering weath was his peculiar art,
Nothing went unrewarded but desert."
24. "And there was mounting in hot haste; the steed,
The mustering squadron, and the clattering car,
Went pouring forward with impetuous speed,
And swiftly forming in the ranks of war."
25. "Ruling with an iron hand
O'er the intermediate land
'Twixt the plains of rich completeness,
And the realms of budding sweetness,
Winter! from thy crystal throne,
With a keenness all thy own
Dartest thou, through gleaming air,
O'er the glorious barren glare
Of thy sunlit wildernesses,
Thine undazzled level glances,