# Worksheet 1: Gerund, Verbal Noun or Participle?

*Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)*

## Reference: Three Overlapping Categories

The -ing form creates genuine ambiguity across three categories. At C1, the ability to distinguish them — and to exploit their overlap — is a mark of grammatical mastery.

| Category | Key properties | Test |
|---|---|---|
| **Gerund** *(verbal noun)* | Functions as a noun; retains verbal properties (takes object, is modified by adverbs); no article; no adjective modifier | Can it be replaced by a pronoun (*it/this*)? *Swimming* is fun → *It* is fun. ✓ |
| **Verbal noun** *(nominalised -ing)* | Fully nominalised; can take article, adjective, plural; modified by *of* phrase rather than direct object | Can it take a definite article and adjective? *The careful reading of the text* ✓ |
| **Present participle** *(adjectival or adverbial)* | Functions as an adjective (pre- or post-nominal) or in a participial clause (adverbial) | Can it be moved to the front as an adverbial? *Running down the street, he tripped.* |

**The overlap:** many grammars merge gerund and verbal noun into one category. What matters practically is knowing which properties a given -ing form has: does it take an article? An adverb? A direct object? An *of*-phrase? These distributional tests are more reliable than category labels.

## Part A – Which Category?

**Classify each bold -ing form: G (gerund), VN (verbal noun), or PP (present participle). Apply the tests from the table.**

| # | Sentence | Category |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | The **testing** of the new drug took two years. | |
| 2 | **Testing** new drugs takes time and investment. | |
| 3 | The **running** water in the background was distracting. | |
| 4 | **Running** marathons requires serious commitment. | |
| 5 | He left the room, **slamming** the door behind him. | |
| 6 | The **writing** of the constitution was a complex process. | |
| 7 | **Writing** the constitution required months of negotiation. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **8** | A **governing** body must be accountable. | |

## Part B – Applying the Tests

> **Apply the distributional tests and state what each result tells you about the category of the underlined -ing form.**

1. "Carefully reading the instructions before starting is essential." — Can you insert *the* before it? Can you replace it with *it*?

2. "The careful reading of the instructions is essential." — Can you add an adverb (*carefully*) instead of an adjective (*careful*)?

3. "Knowing the answer, she stayed silent." — Can this be moved? Is it adverbial or nominal?

*Score: _____ / 20*

# Worksheet 2: The Fused Participle and Scope

*Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)*

## Reference: The Fused Participle

When a gerund has its own subject, prescriptivists historically required the **possessive**: *I resent **his** being late*. The alternative — using an object pronoun or bare noun — is known as the **fused participle** (the noun/pronoun and participle are "fused" without possessive marking): *I resent **him** being late*.

| Construction | Analysis | Register |
|---|---|---|
| *I resent **his** being late.* | Possessive + gerund: *being late* is a gerund noun phrase; *his* is its subject in genitive form. The whole is a gerund phrase functioning as object. | Formal, conservative written English |
| *I resent **him** being late.* | Fused participle: *him* is object of *resent*; *being late* is a participial complement. Structurally different, but near-identical in meaning. | Standard in speech; acceptable in most written contexts |

**When does the possessive become hard or impossible?**
(1) With indefinite or plural nouns: *I dislike **strangers reading** my emails* (not *strangers' reading).
(2) With clauses: *I'm surprised at **this happening** so quickly.*
(3) When the subject is long or heavy: *The possibility of **the project being abandoned** without notice*.

## Part A – Possessive or Fused Participle?

**For each sentence, decide whether the possessive or the fused participle is required, preferred, or whether both are possible. State the register implications.**

| # | Sentence | Analysis |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | "I object to *them / their* changing the rules without consultation." | |
| 2 | "Nobody expected *the project / the project's* being cancelled." | |
| 3 | "The idea of *anyone / anyone's* objecting seemed far-fetched." | |
| 4 | "She resented *her colleagues constantly interrupting / her colleagues' constantly interrupting* her." | |

## Part B – Scope of the Gerund Phrase

> **Each sentence is ambiguous because the scope of the gerund is unclear. Write two readings and rewrite the sentence to make each reading unambiguous.**

1. "She doesn't like people criticising her work."

2. "I remember the teacher explaining grammar carefully."

## Part C – Formal Analysis

> **Explain why the fused participle is unavoidable in each of the following, and what prescriptive grammarians who demand the possessive would have to say about them.**

1. "I can't stand everyone talking at once."

2. "The risk of something going wrong is always present."

3. "I was disturbed by the whole thing unravelling so quickly."

*Score: _____ / 25*

# Worksheet 3: Gerunds in Academic and Formal Writing

*Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)*

## Reference: Why Academic Writing Favours Gerunds

Academic and formal written English relies heavily on gerunds and verbal nouns because they allow:

| Function | Example | Alternative (avoided) |
|---|---|---|
| **Nominalisation** — turning a process into a topic | *The measuring of success* is complex. | It is complex to measure success. |
| **Agency suppression** — removing the doer | *Increasing the sample size* reduces error. | If researchers increase the sample size, they reduce error. |
| **Dense information packaging** | *Having established the baseline, researchers proceeded to…* | After they had established the baseline, the researchers proceeded to… |
| **Hedging and qualification** | *Assuming this to be correct…* | If we assume this is correct… |

## Part A – Rewrite as Academic Prose

> **Rewrite each informal sentence using a gerund or gerund phrase to create a more formal, dense style.**

1. "If you reduce class sizes, students learn better."

   _____

2. "After they had collected the data, the team analysed it statistically."

   _____

3. "It is important to consider the long-term effects."

   _____

4. "Because we don't know the cause, we cannot predict the outcome."

   _____

5. "When they used a control group, the results became clearer."

   _____

## Part B – Analyse the Gerund's Role

> **For each underlined gerund or gerund phrase, state: (i) its grammatical function; (ii) what it achieves stylistically (nominalisation, agency suppression, hedging, etc.)**

1. "Establishing a clear causal link remains the central challenge of the study."

   _____

2. "The data were analysed by applying a standard regression model."

3. "Having controlled for socioeconomic factors, the researchers found a significant correlation."

4. "Assuming the null hypothesis holds, the result would be expected by chance alone."

## Part C – Register Shift

**This paragraph is too informal for academic writing. Rewrite it using gerunds and verbal nouns to raise the register.**

When researchers test new drugs, they have to be very careful. If they don't control for side effects, they might get the wrong results. After they collect all the data, they analyse it. It is important that they don't rush this process. They need to report what they find honestly.

*Score: _____ / 30*

# Worksheet 4: Critical Analysis and Extended Writing

*Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)*

## Part A – Critical Reading

Reducing educational inequality is not simply a matter of increasing funding, though funding matters. It requires rethinking how schools are structured, who gets to decide what counts as knowledge, and — most controversially — whose ways of speaking and thinking are validated by the system. Assuming that access to schooling alone solves the problem is a category error: it conflates the provision of a service with the dismantling of the barriers that make that service unequally effective. Having acknowledged this, we can begin asking better questions — not "are students attending?" but "what are they experiencing when they get there?"

### Questions

1. Identify every gerund, verbal noun, and present participle in the passage. For each, state which category it belongs to and give a brief distributional justification.

2. The writer uses *the dismantling of the barriers*. Is this a gerund or a verbal noun? What formal features support your answer?

3. Analyse the phrase *Having acknowledged this*. What information does it encode (agent, aspect, relation to the main clause) that a simple finite clause would express more laboriously?

4. The writer uses *whose ways of speaking and thinking*. What kind of complement does the gerund here take, and what does the possessive *whose* do in this construction?

## Part B – Extended Writing

Write a formal analytical paragraph (**180–220 words**) responding to: "*Educational systems reproduce inequality rather than reduce it.*"

You must include and underline: (1) a gerund as sentence subject; (2) a verbal noun with article and *of*-phrase; (3) a perfect gerund; (4) a possessive + gerund in formal style; (5) a gerund used for agency suppression (omitting the doer).

*Word count: _____ Features: _____ / 5*

*Score: _____ / 35*

# Answer Key & Teacher Notes

*For teacher use only — C1 Level, Gerunds*

## Worksheet 1 – Part A

| # | Category and justification |
|---|---|
| 1 | **VN — takes definite article *the*; takes *of*-phrase (*of the new drug*); no adverb possible here** |
| 2 | **G — takes direct object (*new drugs*); no article; replaceable by *it*** |
| 3 | **PP — premodifies noun (*water*); adjectival function** |
| 4 | **G — takes direct object (*marathons*); replaceable by *it*; no article** |
| 5 | **PP — participial clause (adverbial); describes manner of leaving** |
| 6 | **VN — takes definite article; takes *of*-phrase (*of the constitution*)** |
| 7 | **G — takes direct object (*the constitution*); no article** |
| 8 | **PP — premodifies noun (*body*); adjectival; = "a body that governs"** |

> *Items 6 and 7 make the sharpest contrast: same word, same surface form, but one is a verbal noun (with of) and one is a gerund (with a direct object). This is the key diagnostic.*

## Worksheet 1 – Part B

| # | Analysis |
|---|---|
| 1 | **No article possible (*the carefully reading); replaceable by *it*; takes adverb *carefully* and direct object *the instructions*. → Gerund.** |
| 2 | **Takes definite article; takes adjective *careful* (not adverb *carefully*); takes *of*-phrase. → Verbal noun.** |
| 3 | **Can be moved to the front of its clause ("Knowing the answer, she stayed silent" is the original); describes a circumstance. → Present participle (adverbial participial clause), not a gerund.** |

## Worksheet 2 – Part A

| # | Analysis |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Both possible: *their changing* (formal, possessive) / *them changing* (fused participle, standard). Register distinction clear.** |
| 2 | **Fused participle (*the project being cancelled*) is more natural; the possessive form (*the project's being) is awkward with inanimate nouns and would be marked.** |
| 3 | **Fused participle required — *anyone's* as a possessive with indefinite pronoun is unidiomatic; *anyone objecting* is the only natural form.** |

| | |
|---|---|
| 4 | **Fused participle strongly preferred — the subject (*her colleagues constantly interrupting*) is heavy; the possessive would require a cumbersome *her colleagues*' followed by the adverb. Fused participle is the natural solution.** |

## Worksheet 2 – Part B

| # | Readings and rewrites |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Reading 1: She doesn't like it when people criticise her work (= she dislikes the fact of criticism). Reading 2: She doesn't like people who criticise her work (= she dislikes those people). Rewrite 1: She doesn't like her work being criticised. Rewrite 2: She doesn't like people who criticise her work.** |
| 2 | **Reading 1: I recall the event of the teacher explaining it carefully (the care is remembered). Reading 2: I recall the teacher doing the explaining, and I recall it carefully (my remembering is careful). Rewrite 1: I remember the teacher's careful explanation of grammar. Rewrite 2: I carefully remember the teacher explaining grammar.** |

## Worksheet 2 – Part C

**1** *everyone* cannot take a possessive (*everyone's). Prescriptivists would have to rewrite: "I can't stand everyone's talking at once" — but this is not natural English. The fused participle is the only real option here.
**2** *something* cannot take a possessive (*something's going wrong). Again, the possessive is structurally blocked.
**3** The subject *the whole thing* could take a possessive (*the whole thing's unravelling*) but it is highly marked and sounds archaic. The fused participle is the unmarked choice.

## Worksheet 3 – Part A (model answers)

**1** Reducing class sizes improves student learning. / Reducing class sizes has been shown to improve learning outcomes. **2** Having collected the data, the team analysed it statistically. **3** Considering the long-term effects is essential. **4** Without knowing the cause, predicting the outcome is impossible. **5** Using a control group clarified the results.

## Worksheet 3 – Part B

| # | Function and stylistic role |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Subject; nominalisation — the complex task is turned into a topic/noun phrase, allowing it to be positioned as the 'given' information.** |
| 2 | **Object of preposition *by*; agency suppression — the researchers are not mentioned; the focus is on the method.** |
| 3 | **Perfect participial clause (adverbial); dense information packaging — replaces a full subordinate clause; the perfect aspect signals that this happened before the main event.** |
| 4 | **Adverbial participial clause; hedging — signals the conditional nature of the claim without using an explicit *if*-clause.** |

## Worksheets 3 and 4: Marking Rubric

| Criterion | Descriptor | Marks |
|---|---|---|
| **Gerund as subject** | Gerund phrase correctly positioned; singular verb agreement | 0–5 |
| **Verbal noun** | Article + verbal noun + *of*-phrase correctly formed | 0–5 |
| **Perfect gerund** | *Having* + *pp*; temporal relationship to main clause clear | 0–5 |
| **Possessive + gerund** | Possessive form correct; formal register maintained | 0–5 |
| **Agency suppression** | Doer genuinely absent or backgrounded; not just a passive | 0–5 |
| **Task, register, argument** | 180–220 words; formal-academic; position stated and developed | 0–5 |

> *At C1, the distinction between gerund and verbal noun is crucial for academic writing. A student who writes the increasing of productivity (VN) where increasing productivity (gerund) is more natural — or vice versa — is making a register error, not a grammatical one. Discuss both options explicitly.*