Worksheet 1: Theoretical Foundations

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: The Gerund in Grammatical Theory

The gerund sits at the intersection of nominality and verbality — what linguists call a **mixed category**. Quirk et al. (*A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*) treat the gerund and present participle as a single **-ing participle** form, with function determining class. Huddleston and Pullum (*The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*) similarly collapse the distinction, using **gerund-participle** as a single category. The practical consequences:

Property	Noun-like	Verb-like
Modification	Adjective: *good cooking*; article: *the cooking*	Adverb: *cooking carefully*; no article
Complementation	*of*-phrase: *the cooking of the meal*	Direct object: *cooking the meal*
Subject expression	Possessive genitive: *his cooking*	Accusative / fused: *him cooking*
Aspect and voice	None (nouns lack these)	Perfect: *having cooked*; passive: *being cooked*
Negation	No negation	*not cooking*

The more **noun-like** the -ing form (article, adjective, *of*-phrase), the more it functions as a **verbal noun**. The more **verb-like** (adverb, direct object, aspect), the more it functions as a **gerund**. These are endpoints of a continuum, not discrete categories.

Part A – Placing Forms on the Continuum

> **Place each -ing phrase at the appropriate point on the noun–verb continuum. State which noun-like and verb-like properties it displays.**

1. *the careful measuring of outcomes*

2. *measuring outcomes carefully*

3. *his carefully measuring the outcomes*

4. *not having measured the outcomes correctly*

Part B – Theoretical Problems

> **Analyse each example. State the problem it poses for a strict gerund/participle distinction, and give the most defensible analysis.**

1. "*The growing problem of urban inequality...*" — Is *growing* an adjective, a participle, or something else? What test would decide?

2. "*I enjoy my students asking good questions.*" — Is *asking* a gerund (object of *enjoy*) or a participle (complement of *students*)?

3. "*Seeing is believing.*" — Both -ing forms appear to be gerunds. Are they syntactically parallel? What would an analysis that treats them as participles say?

Score: _____ / 20

Worksheet 2: Gerunds in Discourse and Cohesion

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: Gerunds as Discourse Devices

Beyond the clause, gerunds serve important **cohesive** functions in extended discourse. Three functions are especially significant:

Function	How it works	Example
Encapsulation	A gerund or verbal noun sums up a preceding clause or proposition, allowing the writer to treat it as a single entity and build on it	"The government raised taxes. *This raising of taxes* provoked a public backlash." (encapsulates and repackages)
Topic-launching	A gerund subject at sentence-initial position presents a process as the topic of the sentence — especially effective in opening sentences	"*Balancing economic growth with environmental protection* is the central dilemma of our time."
Rheme-packaging	A gerund at sentence-end (in the rheme position) introduces a new process as the point of the sentence	"What this policy ultimately amounts to is *passing the problem to the next generation*."

Part A – Identify the Discourse Function

> **For each underlined gerund or gerund phrase, state its discourse function (encapsulation, topic-launching, rheme-packaging, or another function) and explain its role in the text's logic.**

1. "The results were deeply ambiguous. Interpreting them required judgements that went beyond the data."

2. "Attributing all social problems to economic causes is tempting but reductive."

3. "What the study shows, ultimately, is the need for rethinking our assumptions."

4. "The board refused to engage. The consequence of this refusing to engage was a loss of public trust."

Part B – Cohesion Repair

This passage reads as disconnected. Rewrite it using gerunds and verbal nouns to create cohesion. Use encapsulation, topic-launching, or rheme-packaging where appropriate.

The researchers collected data over three years. They found significant variation between groups. They could not explain this variation at first. Later they controlled for confounding variables. The results then became clearer. This confirmed what the initial hypothesis had predicted.

Part C – Given–New and Gerund Placement

Explain how the placement of the gerund in each pair creates a different given–new structure, and which is more effective for the context given.

1. **a.** *Ignoring the evidence* was the committee's fatal mistake. **b.** The committee's fatal mistake was *ignoring the evidence*. *(Context: a report's conclusion)*

2. **a.** *Reducing inequality* requires long-term investment. **b.** Long-term investment is required for *reducing inequality*. *(Context: an essay opening)*

Score: _____ / 25

Worksheet 3: Stylistic Control and Register

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: Gerunds as Stylistic Resources

At C2, choosing between a gerund, a verbal noun, a finite clause, or a nominalization is a **stylistic decision**, not merely a grammatical one. Each creates a different texture:

Structure	Effect	Example
Gerund subject	Direct, process-foregrounded; often reads as assertive or moralising	*Accepting failure* is the first step to growth.
Verbal noun (*the* + -ing + *of*)	Formal, distanced; suitable for academic hedging	*The accepting of failure* as a cultural norm has been documented.
Abstract nominalisation	Most formal and impersonal; can obscure agency and process	*The acceptance of failure* as a norm has been documented.
Finite clause	Explicit, accessible, less dense; suited to narrative or argument in steps	When people accept failure, they tend to grow.
Perfect gerund clause	Compact; encodes temporal precedence elegantly	*Having accepted this*, we can move to the next question.

Part A – Choose and Justify

> **For each context, choose the most appropriate structure from the table above and write a sentence. Justify your choice.**

1. Opening of a philosophical essay arguing that doubt is necessary for progress.

2. A transition sentence in an academic paper, signalling that a point has been established.

3. The conclusion of a formal report, recommending a course of action.

4. An informal talk to students about dealing with exam stress.

Part B – Rewrite Across Registers

> **Rewrite the same idea in three different styles, using a different -ing structure for each.**

Idea: *People who take risks tend to learn more than those who do not.*

1. Formal academic (verbal noun or gerund as subject):

   _____

2. Journalistic / persuasive (gerund or infinitive, shorter):

   _____

3. Formal-literary (perfect gerund or participial clause):

   _____

Part C – Stylistic Error Identification

> **Each sentence uses a gerund structure that is grammatically acceptable but stylistically wrong for the context given. Identify the problem and rewrite.**

#	Context	Sentence	Problem & rewrite
1	Academic paper, methods section	"We used a questionnaire for getting data from participants."	
2	Informal blog post	"The achieving of work–life balance is a challenge faced by many professionals in the contemporary era."	
3	Legal contract	"The signing of this agreement means you'll be bound by the terms."	
4	Philosophical essay opening	"It is interesting to think about whether knowledge can be separated from the person knowing it."	

Score: _____ / 30

Worksheet 4: Scholarly Analysis and Extended Writing

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Part A – Scholarly Text Analysis

Calling something a "gerund" implies a category boundary that the form itself does not observe. The -ing form exists on a continuum: at one end, entirely nominal (*the writing of the report*); at the other, entirely verbal (*having written the report hastily before the deadline*). In between lies a vast middle ground that has kept grammarians occupied for over a century. The practical consequence of not recognising this continuum is a tendency to treat every gerund question as binary — gerund or participle? — when the more productive question is: which properties does this instance display, and in what proportions?

Avoiding this binary thinking is, paradoxically, easier said than done. Having been trained to sort forms into boxes, most language users — including teachers — resist the idea that the same surface form can be simultaneously more or less nominal, more or less verbal, depending on its company. Yet this is precisely what the evidence demands.

Questions

1. The writer uses three different -ing forms: one at the fully nominal end, one at the fully verbal end, and one in the middle. Identify each, state where it sits on the continuum, and justify using distributional criteria.

2. Analyse *Avoiding this binary thinking* as an opening gerund subject. What are its noun-like and verb-like properties? What is the stylistic effect of making it the subject?

3. The writer uses the phrase *easier said than done*. This contains two past participles used predicatively. How does this phrase relate to the gerund, and what does its idiomatic status tell us about the process of nominalisation?

4. The second paragraph begins with *Having been trained to sort forms into boxes*. Identify every grammatical property of this phrase (voice, aspect, subject, function in the sentence) and comment on what it achieves economically.

Part B – Extended Scholarly Writing

Write the opening **two paragraphs** (**230–270 words**) of a scholarly essay on one of the following:

A: "*The gerund is not a category but a cluster of properties distributed across a continuum. Discuss.*"
B: "*Nominalisation in academic English: resource or obfuscation?*"

Requirements: (1) at least one gerund used for topic-launching; (2) one verbal noun with article and *of*-phrase used for encapsulation; (3) one perfect gerund clause marking a logical transition; (4) one possessive + gerund in a context where the possessive is analytically motivated; (5) a metalinguistic adverb used with precision; (6) a conjunct that maps the argument's logical structure accurately.

Topic: ___ A ___ B Word count: _____ Features: _____ / 6

Score: _____ / 35

Answer Key & Teacher Notes

For teacher use only — C2 Level, Gerunds

Worksheet 1 – Part A

#	Analysis
1	**Fully nominal end: article (*the*), adjective (*careful*), *of*-phrase. No adverb, no direct object. → Verbal noun.**
2	**Fully verbal end: direct object (*outcomes*), adverb (*carefully*), no article. → Gerund.**
3	**Middle: possessive subject (*his*) — noun-like; adverb (*carefully*) and direct object (*the outcomes*) — verb-like. Hybrid.**
4	**Fully verbal: negation (*not*), perfect aspect (*having measured*), adverb (*correctly*), direct object. → Gerund, verb-like pole.**

Worksheet 1 – Part B

#	Analysis
1	***growing* here can be analysed as an adjective: it cannot take a direct object (**growing the problem*), does not take an adverb (**growingly*), and is fixed in its relationship to the noun. The test: can you say *the problem is growing* (as an attribute)? Marginally — but the attributive use is lexicalising toward a simple adjective meaning 'increasing'. Verdict: adjective or adjectivalised participle.**
2	**This is the fused participle ambiguity. Under a gerund analysis, *my students' asking good questions* is the object of *enjoy*. Under a participle analysis, *my students* is the object of *enjoy* and *asking good questions* is a participial complement. Both analyses are defensible. The fused participle construction makes the two formally identical.**
3	**Both are subject gerunds. They are syntactically parallel (both = NP in subject position; both = replaceable by *it*). A participle analysis would need to supply an implicit subject, which creates problems — participles need something to modify, and here there is no noun. The gerund analysis is more economical.**

Worksheet 2 – Part A

#	Function and role
1	**Encapsulation: *interpreting them* takes the preceding proposition (ambiguous results) and repackages it as a process, making it the subject of the next sentence. Creates cohesive chain.**
2	**Topic-launching: the gerund phrase fills the subject slot, presenting the attribution process as the topic before the evaluative predicate (*tempting but reductive*).**
3	**Rheme-packaging: the gerund phrase is in the rheme (sentence-final, new information) position, presenting the recommendation as what the study points toward.**

4	**Encapsulation with demonstrative: *this refusing to engage* packages the preceding clause as a nominal, then uses it as subject of a consequence clause. The demonstrative *this* is the cohesive link.**

Worksheet 2 – Part C

1a: Gerund in given position (subject) — the action is treated as known/established, making the mistake (predicate) the new information. Good for a conclusion where the action has been discussed. **1b:** Gerund in rheme — the mistake is given, the action is new. Better if the focus is on what was done wrong, not who did it. **2a:** Gerund subject launches the process as topic — assertive and direct. Good for an essay opener making a strong claim. **2b:** Process in rheme — long-term investment is the topic. Suggests the essay has already established investment as the focus.

Worksheet 3 – Part A (model answers)

1 Doubting what we know is the engine of philosophical progress. [Gerund subject — assertive, moralising tone appropriate for an essay opening making a bold claim.] **2** Having established that X, we can now turn to Y. [Perfect gerund clause — signals transition economically.] **3** The achieving / achieving of X would require significant reform. [Verbal noun or gerund — formal, distanced, appropriate for recommendations.] **4** Feeling anxious about exams is completely normal. [Gerund subject — direct, inclusive, accessible.]

Worksheet 3 – Part C

#	Problem and rewrite
1	**"for getting data" — preposition + gerund is informal; use "to collect data" or "for the purpose of collecting data" or restructure: "A questionnaire was administered to collect data from participants."**
2	**Verbal noun (*the achieving of*) is too formal/dense for an informal blog; "contemporary era" is tautological. Rewrite: "Achieving work–life balance is something many professionals find genuinely difficult."**
3	**"means you'll be bound" — informal; legal language requires precision: "By signing this agreement, you agree to be bound by its terms." or "The signing of this agreement constitutes acceptance of its terms."**
4	***it is interesting to think about* — weak, hedged opening; philosophical essays benefit from a bolder gerund subject. Rewrite: "Separating knowledge from the knower is, on examination, impossible."**

Worksheets 3 and 4: Marking Rubric

Criterion	Descriptor at C2	Marks
Topic-launching gerund	Gerund subject creates appropriate rhetorical force for essay opening	0–5
Encapsulating verbal noun	Article + -ing + *of*-phrase; used to package a preceding idea	0–5

Perfect gerund transition	*Having established X, …* structure; temporal and logical relation clear	0–5
Possessive + gerund	Possessive analytically motivated (not interchangeable with fused participle)	0–5
Metalinguistic precision	Adverb frames the claim without over- or under-committing	0–5
Conjunct accuracy	Conjunct maps logical relation correctly; not a vague connector	0–5

> *The C2 benchmark for gerunds: the student does not just use them correctly but uses them purposefully — choosing a gerund subject because it foregrounds the process, choosing a verbal noun because it distances the agency, choosing a perfect gerund because it signals temporal precedence economically. When marking, ask: could this particular -ing structure have been avoided? If not, was the student aware of why they needed it?*