

NOUNS AND GERUNDS

Nouns make up the [subjects and objects](#) of sentences, and gerunds are verbs that act as nouns. These parts of speech often provide a concrete character or tangible thing for the reader to visualize. It is important to understand the different types of nouns in order to meaningfully incorporate them into sentences.

Academic Coaching offers resources on other parts of speech too! Go to the "Resources" page on the Academic Coaching website to access other handouts.

NOUNS

A noun may be a person, place, thing, or idea and often constitutes the subject of a sentence.

Ex. *Dr. Harper* taught *the class* about the *Civil War* with his Southern *drawl*.

Dr. Harper is the subject of the sentence, and the other nouns are objects of the sentence. *Dr. Harper* is a person, *the class* is a collection of persons, and *the Civil War* and *drawl* are things.

1. **Proper Nouns** – The names of specific people, places, and things should be capitalized in your sentences.

Ex. *Uncle Earl* spent the summer in *Northern Italy*, and he missed celebrating *Independence Day*. What did your uncle do during *July*?

Notice that the underlined words are not capitalized because they don't refer to a specific time (e.g., the Summer of 1969 vs. the summer), and they are not part of a specific person's title (e.g., Uncle Earl vs. your uncle).

2. **Countable and Uncountable Nouns** – All nouns are either countable or uncountable. Uncountable nouns cannot be pluralized, while countable nouns can!

Ex. *Philosophers* meditate on ideas and wisdom, taking into account the dangers of deranged *scholars*.

The underlined words are uncountable, and the *italicized* words are countable. Often, uncountable nouns include substances, food and drink, categories, and abstract nouns. Here are some more examples of uncountable nouns:

Ex. biology, tennis, oxygen, wood, beef, paper, fulfillment

3. **Collective Nouns** – Collective nouns refer to a group of nouns (often a group of people) as a single entity. In most cases, collective nouns are treated as singular.

Ex. *Everybody* wants affordable products, but *no one* supports *the Rowing Company* and its use of child labor.

Everybody, no one, and the Rowing Company are treated as singular nouns even though they encompass multiple people.

GERUNDS

Gerunds are verbs that end in *-ing* and function as nouns.

Ex. Your *thinking* is on the right track; I can tell that you've committed to *studying*.

Thinking and *studying* fulfill the noun roles of subject and direct object respectively, even though *think* and *study* are verbs. However, not every verb that ends in *-ing* is a gerund:

Ex. The other day I was *thinking* you should start *studying* more.

In this sentence, *thinking* and *studying* are NOT gerunds because they represent the progressive verb tense and do not act as nouns.

1. **Gerunds and possessives** – If a noun or pronoun precedes a gerund, it should be possessive:

Ex. The principal banned John's *singing* in the halls.

Ex. My husband was delighted by my *watching* baseball with him.

In these sentences, it would be incorrect to say, "John singing," or "me watching." If these examples strike you as too formal for the writing style you want to achieve, consider rewording the sentence to exclude gerunds: "My husband was delighted that I watched baseball with him."

PRACTICE NOW

References

Purdue OWL. (2022). Count and noncount nouns. Purdue University.
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl_exercises/grammar_exercises/count_and_noncount_nouns/index.html.

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https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/mechanics/gerunds_participles_and_infinitives/index.html#:~:text=A%20gerund%20is%20a%20verbal%20ending%20in%20%2Ding%20that%20is,phrases%20virtually%20never%20require%20punctuation.