

DEEP GRAMMAR

ACES 2015 | Pittsburgh

1. Fused participle / Genitive with a gerund

Participle = verbal that works like an adjective

Gerund = verbal that works like a noun

Genitive = possessive case

What construction are we talking about here? Examples:

She was annoyed at **her roommate unloading** the dishwasher at 6 a.m. vs.

She was annoyed at **her roommate's unloading** the dishwasher at 6 a.m.

The chef took **them adding** salt as a personal affront. vs.

The chef took **their adding** salt as a personal affront.

The genitive is traditionally correct and is usually preferred, but exceptions abound.

What's the focus? That will determine the better choice.

Focus on the action → use a genitive with a gerund

Focus on the noun (especially non-person nouns) → use a fused participle

The students worried about **the test being** moved up. vs.

The students worried about **the test's being** moved up.

2. Hortatory subjunctive

This type of subjunctive is used for suggestions, requests and commands (exhortations).

These sentences often start with "let" or "may" and almost always occur in the present tense. Use the infinitive form of the verb (that is, don't conjugate it).

The easy ones:

Let us **be** sensible about this.

May you **live** to be 100.

The trickier ones:

The City Council is proposing that elections **be moved** to November.

The dean asked that every effort **be made** to accommodate the changes.

The agency requires that each drug **go** through rigorous testing.

3. Double genitive

What construction are we talking about here? Examples:

Barney is a friend **of mine**.

That book **of Jane's** took her years to write.

Those dogs **of Jackson's** win every year.

This construction seems redundant, but has been used for centuries and is considered acceptable. It is necessary with personal pronouns: a cousin **of hers**, a neighbor **of theirs**.

4. Nominative absolute

This uncommon type of phrase uses a **noun + participle** to adverbially modify a sentence, adding extra information. If you take it out, the sentence is still grammatical.

Examples:

The templates were redone, the **editor having criticized** the staleness of the pages.

Jordan having won six championships with the Bulls, the team retired No. 23.

The noun prevents the participle from dangling, so placement in the sentence is more flexible. The verbal is a participle, not a gerund, so resist the temptation to make the noun possessive; also, an absolute phrase does not require a preposition.

5. Sequence of tenses

Editors working often in reported speech (see what I did there?), sequence of tenses is essential. It can get a little more complicated than it seems.

Primary sequence: Main clause in present/future, dependent clause in present/future

Sally **says** she **wants** to be a veterinarian.

If the weather **is** nice tomorrow, we **will go** to the park.

Secondary sequence: Main clause in past, dependent clause in past, straight infinitives

Sally **said** she **wanted** to be a veterinarian.

The mayor **had said** she **wanted** to widen Main Street, but she changed her mind.

The soldiers **took** cover quickly, fearing that snipers **would** see them.

The students **had had** plenty of time **to write** their papers, but some were still late.

Ongoing or "universal" truth: dependent clause in present

Even ancient peoples realized that the sun **rises** in the east.

Grammatical precedents for changing usages

1. Singular "they" – preceded by expansion of second-person plural pronoun to singular:

"thou/thee" (singular) + "you" (plural) gave way to

"you" (singular) + "you" (plural)

(and the rise of y'all, youse, yinz, you lot, etc., for clarity)

2. Loss of "whom" – preceded by loss of case in inanimate interrogative and relative pronoun usage:

Interrogative "who" → inanimate counterpart is "what" (no longer case-marked)

Who is that? / **What** is that? vs. **Whom** did you see? **What** did you see?

Relative "who" → inanimate counterparts are "which" and "that" (no longer case-marked)

We gave the boxes to people **who** are moving soon.

We gave the boxes to a nonprofit **that** is moving soon.

The people **whom** we gave the boxes to are moving soon.

The nonprofit **that** we gave the boxes to is moving soon.