

Horribile Dictu! Supines, Gerunds, Gerundives, and Periphrastics

GERUNDS: Gerunds are verbal nouns, and they only show up in four forms. (Latin uses the infinitive for a nominative verbal noun, so the gerund doesn't exist in the nominative.) They have no nominative, and they have no plurals. They are always neuter and are translated as “__ing”.

Gerunds inspire more fear than they deserve. In fact, the only really fancy thing a Gerund can do is express purpose when in the accusative and paired with “ad”: *ad audiendum aderant*, “They were there for the purpose of listening,” or in better English, “they were there to listen.”

The rest of the time, translate a gerund as you would any noun in its case.

Summary of the uses of gerunds in their cases:

- Accusative: The accusative of a gerund often follows a preposition, usually *ad*, usually expressing purpose.
- Ablative: The ablative either follows a preposition taking the ablative, or else it expresses instrument or cause, like any noun in the ablative.
- Dative: The dative works like any dative noun: *Par est disserendo*, he is equal to arguing.
- Genitive: The genitive often describes abstract nouns, i.e., *ars scribendi*, the art of writing.

GERUNDIVES: Gerundives are really future passive participles. They decline like “bonus.” They are verbal adjectives, always passive in meaning. They show necessity, obligation, or propriety.

If you put the gerundive with a form of *sum*, you get the meaning of “ought to be ...,” and this construction gets its own name, the dreaded “**Passive Periphrastic Construction**.” All this means is that it is a gerundive with a form of *sum*, and it expresses obligation. The person who is obligated is written with a dative of agent. This makes sense if you think about it literally:

Longum iter mihi faciendum erat: I had to make a long journey.

But literally, since “Faciendum” is a future passive participle agreeing with “iter,” the sentence reads, *there was a long journey-needing-to-be-made by me*

Ut tibi ambulandum, sic mihi dormiendum est. *As walking must be done by you, so sleeping must be done by me*, or more naturally, *As you need to walk, I need to sleep*.

Periphrastic constructions are really just combinations of future participles with some form of *sum*: therefore:

the future active participle + *sum* = the active periphrastic construction, meaning “about to ___” (i.e. *amaturus sum*, I am about to love”); or

the future passive participle (gerundive) + *sum* = the passive periphrastic construction, expressing necessity or obligation: *Carthago delenda est*, “Carthage must be destroyed.”

The dative of the gerundive can show purpose: *Comitia regi creando*, “an assembly for electing a king,” or more literally, “an assembly for a king to be elected.” The dative of the gerundive with a dative of agent also expresses something that must be done.

SUPINES

Supines are technically cases of a verbal abstract noun. They only show up in two cases, ablative and accusative.

- The ablative is the stem of the fourth principle part of the verb plus a “-u” ending, and is an ablative of respect.
- The accusative is the fourth principle part with the ending “-um.” It expresses purpose with a verb of motion: *Cives dormitum abierunt*. The citizens went away to sleep. (N.B.: If you combine the accusative supine with *iri*, you get the future passive infinitive.)

Though weirdly intimidating, supines are actually quite easy to translate once you recognize them: *dictu*: to say, *visu*: to see, etc. Whether they’re in the ablative or the accusative, they’ll be translated as “to ___.” The only tricky thing about the supine is the fact that you won’t see it much, so people tend to forget that it exists until faced with it on the Ph.D. exam.