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.

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.”

References

Purdue OWL. (2022). Count and noncount nouns. Purdue University.

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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%20that%20is,phrases%20virtually%20never%20require%20punctuation.