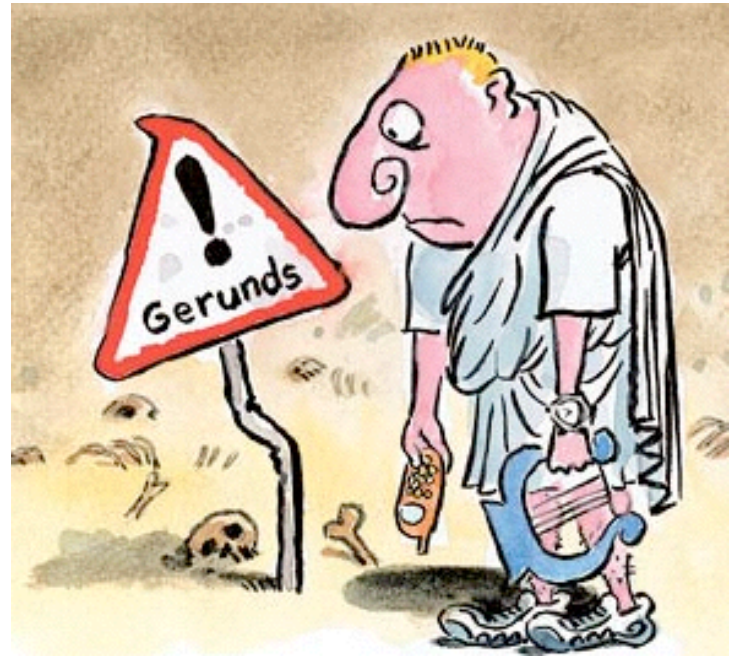


VERBAL NOUNS II: The Gerund (and Gerundive)



A gerund is a verbal noun— a noun derived from a verb. It is active in meaning, and refers to the whole class of activities described by the verb; consequently, it is always singular. Gerunds (& all verbal nouns) are always neuter. As an active verbal form, it can take a direct object. The basic translation is “VERBing,” i.e., add “—ing” to the verb stem of the definition to form the English gerund. (This “—ing” form is also used for the English present active participle; make sure you don’t get them confused. The present active participle is an adjective— it describes some person as *doing* something, e.g. “I saw the *running* man today.” The gerund is an abstract noun that signifies an entire class of verbal actions, e.g. “*Running* is good for you.”)

In Latin, there is no nominative form of the gerund. The nominative form of the gerund is supplied by the present active infinitive. The other forms of the gerund for the first three regular conjugations are created by taking the present stem (present infinitive minus *-re*), adding *-nd-* to the stem, and adding the endings of a second declension neuter noun.

So, *dīce* + *-nd-* + *-ī* = *dīcendī* = gerund of *dīcere* (in the genitive).

The third conjugation *-iō* verbs (like *capīō*, *capere*) and the fourth conjugation are a little different. As for present active participles, you form the stem by striking off *-ere* / *-īre* from the present active infinitive, and adding the vowels *-ie-* to the stem, and tacking the *-nd-* suffix onto the vowels. Then add the endings of a second declension neuter noun.

So: *cap-* + *-ie-* + *-nd-* + *ī* = *capiendī*, gerund of *capere* (in the genitive); *aud-* + *-ie-* + *-nd-* + *ī* = *audiendī*, gerund of *audire* (in the genitive).

The full declension of the gerund for *dīcere* “to speak, say”:

Nominative	dīcere	“to say” / “saying”
Genitive	dīcendī	“of saying”
Dative	dīcendō	“for saying”
Accusative	dīcendum / dīcere	“saying” (see below)
Ablative	dīcendō	“by means of saying”

Dīcere est bonum.

To speak is [a] good [thing].

Ars dīcendī est melior.

The art of speaking is better.

Verba sunt dīcendō.

Words are for speaking.

In forum vēnī ad dīcendum.

I came into court to speak / for the purpose of speaking.

In causā superāvī dīcendō bene.

I won the case (lit: I won in the case) by speaking well.

NOTE especially the idiom **ad** + the gerund (in the accusative) means “for the purpose [of doing something], in order [to do something].”

bellum gerō ad pugnandum.

I wage war for the purpose of fighting (or: in order to fight).

For any other occasion where a gerund is needed in the accusative, the infinitive is used.

dīcit dīcere bonum esse.

He says that speaking is a good thing.

scit dīcere bene.

He knows speaking well. (He knows [how] to speak well).

Purpose can also be indicated with **causa** in the ablative of cause, plus the gerund in the objective genitive. Translate, “for the sake of VERBing.”

dīcendī causā in forum vēnī in forum.

I came into the forum for the sake of speaking.

rīdendī causā in theatrum vēnērunt.

They came to the theater for the sake of laughing.

Gerunds are active in meaning and can take direct objects.

ars bona verba dīcendī est optima.

The art of speaking good words is best.

candidātī sunt dīcendō verba.

Political candidates exist for speaking words.

in forum vēnī ad dīcendum verba.

I came into court to speak words.

in causā superāvī dīcendō verba bene.

I won the case (lit: I won in the case) by speaking words well.

Lots of Roman writers try to avoid this construction, though. More often than not, they will replace the gerund with the future passive participle of the verb (known as the **gerundive** in this context). If one translates the future passive participle literally here, it may be correct, but it sounds pretty clumsy.

dīcendōrum verbōrum causā in forum vēnī in forum.

I came into the forum for the sake of words going to be spoken.

in forum vēnī ad dīcenda verba.

I came into the forum for going-to-be-spoken words.

No one talks like this in English (unless they’re translating from Latin), so it makes sense to translate the **gerundive** as if it really were a gerund and the *noun* it agrees with as if it were the direct object of that gerund.

dīcendōrum verbōrum causā in forum vēnī in forum.

I came into the forum for the sake of speaking words.

in forum vēnī ad dīcenda verba.

I came into the forum to speak words.