The Gerund Phrase

Recognize a gerund phrase when you see one.

A gerund phrase will begin with a gerund, an *ing* word, and will include other modifiers and/or objects. Gerund phrases always function as nouns, so they will be subjects, subject complements, or objects in the sentence. Read these examples:

*Eating ice cream on a windy day* can be a messy experience if you have long, untamed hair.

*Eating ice cream on a windy day* = subject of the verb *can be*.

A more disastrous activity for long-haired people is *blowing giant bubble gum bubbles with the car windows down*.

*Blowing giant bubble gum bubbles with the car windows down* = subject complement of the verb *is*.

Wild food adventures require *getting your hair cut to a short, safe length*.

*Getting your hair cut to a short, safe length* = direct object of the verb *require*.

Don't mistake a gerund phrase for a present participle phrase.

Gerund and present participle phrases are easy to confuse because they both begin with an *ing* word. The difference is that a gerund phrase will always function as a noun while a present participle phrase describes another word in the sentence. Check out these examples:

*Jamming too much clothing into a washing machine* will result in disaster.

*Jamming too much clothing into a washing machine* = gerund phrase, the subject of the verb *will result*.

*Jamming too much clothing into the washing machine*, Aamir saved $1.25 but had to tolerate the curious stares of other laundry patrons as his machine bucked and rumbled with the heavy load.

*Jamming too much clothing into the washing machine* = present participle phrase describing *Aamir*.

Bernard hates *buttering toast with a fork*.

*Buttering toast with a fork* = gerund phrase, the direct object of the verb *hates*. 
Buttering toast with a fork, Bernard vowed that he would finally wash the week’s worth of dirty dishes piled in the sink.

*Buttering toast with a fork* = present participle phrase describing *Bernard*.

My dog’s most annoying habit is *hogging the middle of the bed*.

*Hogging the middle of the bed* = gerund phrase, the subject complement of the linking verb *is*.

Last night I had to sleep on the couch because I found my dog Floyd *hogging the middle of the bed*.

*Hogging the middle of the bed* = present participle phrase describing *Floyd*. 