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TiDbits on writing[®] part 6

LETTER FROM TD

We hope you enjoy Part 6 of our series, *TiDbits on Writing*[®].

These practical tips will help you tackle some of the major stumbling blocks in writing on the job – whether preparing reports, proposals, or even e-mails. We'll cover issues such as how to write with clarity, how to make subjects and verbs agree, and even how to use proper punctuation.

Enjoy! And happy writing!

— Laura Winterroth
Managing Director



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That Crazy Gerund

Any news junkie watching interviews on cable television is likely to hear the host thank his guest with the oft-repeated –and always incorrect–send-off: “I appreciate **you coming on the show.**”

To dissect this common error, we must venture into an obscure grammar phenomenon known as the *gerund*. (Personally, the very sound of that word – JERR-und—makes me glaze over.) Understanding what it is, however, is worth the effort.

There are two essential ingredients to keep in mind:

- ◆ A gerund is a noun that looks like a verb ending in *-ing*.
- ◆ A gerund is usually preceded by a possessive pronoun.

Possessive Pronouns

Singular	Plural
my, mine	our, ours
your, yours	your, yours
his	their, theirs
her, hers	
its	

Gerund Defined

Let's look at how a verb ending in *-ing* morphs into a noun, or gerund.

John is *singing* an old song.

Here, *singing* is part of the verb (*is singing*). Now, suppose I were to say instead:

I like John's *singing*.

In this sentence, the word *singing* looks exactly the same as the verb in the previous sentence, but now it has become a noun. It answers the question: *What do I like?* I like John's *singing*—*singing* being the object of the sentence—a noun.

Let's break that out using the standard sentence structure –Subject-Verb-Object (S-V-O).

I like John's *singing*.
S V O

And when you substitute a possessive pronoun for “John's,” your sentence will read: “I like *his singing*.”

Let's do the same S-V-O test with our TV host's remark.

I appreciate *your coming on the show*.
S V O

Our host does not mean “I appreciate *you*” (in fact, he may think his guest is an idiot!). But, he does mean “I appreciate *your coming* on the show.” *Coming* is a gerund, a noun, and it requires a possessive pronoun in front of it – not the word “you.”

Look at these other phrases that show the link between possessive pronouns and gerunds.

I don't mind *your using* my pen.
There's no point in *her telling* lies.
He counted on *our voting* for him.

I hope my explaining the gerund can lead to your identifying the two gerunds in this sentence. Got them? ☐

TiDbits

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