

Decoding the Action: Mastering Russian Gerunds (Деепричастия)

Materials Needed:

- Notebook or paper
- Pen or pencil
- Access to online Russian dictionary (e.g., Reverso Context, Multitran)
- A good Russian grammar reference (book or online resource)
- Prepared handout or digital document with Russian text excerpts containing gerunds (examples provided below)
- List of Russian verbs for practice (provided below)

Introduction: The Action Within the Action (5-10 minutes)

Привет! Ever notice how Russian sentences can pack a lot of action into a small space? One of the secrets is the mighty 'деепричастие' (gerund). Think of it like the Russian equivalent of English '-ing' forms used adverbially, like '*Smiling*, she entered the room' or '*Having finished his work*, he went home.' These little words add dynamism and flair, describing a secondary action performed by the same subject as the main verb. Today, we'll unlock the secrets of forming and using these powerful words!

Activity 1: Gerund Spotting (15 minutes)

Let's become detectives! Read the following short sentences/excerpts. Can you spot the word that seems to describe *how* or *when* the main action is done, often ending in -а, -я, -в, -вши, or -ши? Underline or list them.

1. Мальчик читает книгу, *сидя* у окна. (The boy reads a book, sitting by the window.)
2. *Работая*, он слушал музыку. (While working, he listened to music.)
3. *Прочитав* письмо, она заплакала. (Having read the letter, she cried.)
4. *Вернувшись* домой, я сразу лёг спать. (Having returned home, I immediately went to bed.)

Discuss: What do these highlighted words tell us? Do they describe an action happening at the same time as the main verb, or before it?

Explanation: Forming the Gerunds (20 minutes)

Okay, detective work done! Let's learn the rules. Russian has two main types of gerunds, linked to verb aspect:

- **Imperfective Gerunds (Деепричастия несовершенного вида):** Describe an action happening *at the same time* as the main verb ('while doing something'). Usually formed from the 3rd person plural (они) present tense stem by replacing the ending (-ут, -ют, -ат, -ят) with **-а** (after ж, ч, ш, щ) or **-я** (after other consonants and vowels).
 - Example: читать (to read) -> они читают -> читая (reading)
 - Example: говорить (to speak) -> они говорят -> говоря (speaking)
 - Example: дышать (to breathe) -> они дышат -> дыша (breathing)
 - *Special case: быть -> будучи (being)*

- **Perfective Gerunds (Деепричастия совершенного вида):** Describe an action completed *before* the main verb ('having done something'). Usually formed from the past tense stem (masculine form) by adding **-в** (if stem ends in a vowel) or **-ши** (if stem ends in a consonant). Sometimes **-вши** is used after a vowel if reflexive (-ся).

- Example: прочитать (to read pf.) -> он прочитал -> прочита**в** (having read)
- Example: написать (to write pf.) -> он написал -> написа**в** (having written)
- Example: принести (to bring pf.) -> он принёс -> принёс**ши** (having brought)
- Example: вернуться (to return pf.) -> он вернулся -> вернувш**ись** (having returned)

Key point: The gerund describes an additional action of the **same subject** performing the main verb action. They don't change form (no declension!).

Activity 2: Gerund Factory (15 minutes)

Time to practice! Try forming the gerunds from these verbs. Identify if it should be imperfective or perfective based on the verb given.

- Делать (impf. to do) -> ?
- Сделать (pf. to do/make) -> ?
- Смотреть (impf. to watch) -> ?
- Посмотреть (pf. to watch) -> ?
- Жить (impf. to live) -> ?
- Открыть (pf. to open) -> ?
- Закрывать (impf. to close) -> ?
- Улыбаться (impf. reflexive, to smile) -> ?
- Улыбнуться (pf. reflexive, to smile) -> ?

(Check answers using grammar reference or dictionary if needed)

Activity 3: Reading in Action & Sentence Building (20 minutes)

Let's see gerunds in their natural habitat – literature! Read this excerpt from Tolstoy's 'War and Peace' (Война и мир). Identify the gerunds and think about how they enhance the description.

«Князь Андрей [...] вошёл в палатку. [...] Кутузов сидел [...] на покрытом ковре складном стуле, *понутив* свою седую голову и *опустив* своё тучное тело. Он [...] не пошевелился, не *взглянув* даже на вошедшего.»

(Prince Andrei entered the tent. Kutuzov sat on a folding chair covered with a carpet, *having bowed* his grey head and *having lowered* his stout body. He didn't stir, not even *having glanced* at the person who entered.)

Discuss: How do 'понутив', 'опустив', and 'не взглянув' add to the image of Kutuzov? What actions are simultaneous? What actions are completed before the main (or implied main) action?

Sentence Building: Now, translate these ideas into Russian using gerunds:

1. While walking down the street, I saw my friend.
2. Having finished her homework, she went for a walk.
3. He explained the rule, using examples.
4. Having woken up, he drank coffee.

Wrap-up & Creative Application (10 minutes)

Quick review: What's the difference between imperfective and perfective gerunds? How are they typically formed?

Challenge: Write a short paragraph (3-4 sentences) describing a simple scene (e.g., someone entering a room, someone preparing breakfast). Try to use at least two different gerunds (one imperfective, one perfective if possible) to make your description more dynamic!

Молодец! You've taken a big step in understanding the flow and elegance of the Russian language!