



**Sprachenzentrum**  
Universität Stuttgart  
Breitscheidstraße 2  
70174 Stuttgart

www.sz.uni-stuttgart.de

**Contact Us:**  
newsletter@sz.uni-  
stuttgart.de

# English Revisited:

## Tips, Tidbits & Tutorials

### In this issue

**Currently on Offer** 1

**Grammar** 2  
The Confounding  
Gerund and Infinitive  
Forms

**Intercultural Communication** 3  
Hierarchies - More  
Present Than You  
Think

**Vocabulary** 4  
Collective Nouns

### Glossary

*cumbersome*: difficult to  
manage

*to delve into something*: to  
investigate

*to be associated with*: to be  
connected with

### Editorial

“Practice makes perfect”, as the saying goes. Sometimes topics are quite cumbersome and require one to revisit them. All three of the articles in this issue of the newsletter will delve further into topics we have covered in the past.

The more grammar-based sections will consider patterns associated with infinitive and gerund forms as well as collective nouns (e.g., “the company is” versus “the company are”).

Did you know that roughly 22% of the University of Stuttgart’s student population in the winter semester 2018-19 came from foreign countries? This

issue will also explore examples of cultural misunderstandings by taking another look at so-called high-context and low-context cultures.

Dr. Joseph Michaels

### Upcoming Issue:

The definite article (“the”), avoiding phrasal verbs in academic writing, cultural differences in asking for help



### Comments

Do you have any ideas for future issues or would like to give us feedback? Please contact us.



### Subscription

### Currently on Offer

If you are interested in any of the following, please click on the links or [contact us](#).

- We are pleased to announce the launch of the **Academic Manual!** This resource provides students, faculty, and staff the opportunity to improve their English through self-study and a comprehensive collection of exercises. A broad range of topics are covered, including grammar, vocabulary, writing skills, intercultural communication, e-mailing, and presentations. Click [here](#) to be taken to the Academic Manual.
- The **Schreibwerkstatt** is now available **in English!** Regardless of your area of study, we can assist you with sharpening your writing skills, whether for your thesis, a dissertation, or for coursework. Click [here](#) for more information.
- We are coming even closer to you. Starting in the summer semester 2019, the Language Center will offer courses in two recently acquired rooms in the Telekom building. For students based in Vaihingen, this means a lot less commuting!

## Grammar

### The Confounding Gerund and Infinitive Forms

One of the struggles non-native English speakers have is whether to use the gerund (“running”) or infinitive form (“to run”) following a verb. Sometimes both forms are possible while other times only one or the other is allowed. Remembering which form to use can be quite tricky, so much so that even though we have covered this topic [before](#), its difficulty invites further consideration.

Unfortunately, there is no rhyme or reason to which form is taken after the verb. Native English speakers instinctively know which one to use and sometimes wince when they hear the wrong one.

First, let us consider words that are only followed by the gerund form. Two such examples are the verbs *to enjoy* and *to contemplate*:  
She *enjoys running* so much that she is registered for the Stuttgart half marathon in May. She had *contemplated doing* it for quite a while but always hesitated.

There are also a number of verbs which are only followed by an infinitive. Examples of this are the verbs *to fail* and *to want*:  
Although she had *failed to complete* the previous half marathon, she *wanted to attempt* it again.

There are some verbs which can be followed by either a gerund or an infinitive without any change in meaning. Two common examples are the verbs *to like* and *to love*:  
He *likes/loves to eat* in restaurants.  
He *likes/loves eating* in restaurants.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect about the use of gerunds and infinitives is the verbs which can be followed by either form but where there is a change in meaning. For instance, consider the varying connotations of these forms in the following text.

Chuck *stopped to smoke* a cigarette. He had wanted *to stop smoking* for a long time but hadn't. Chuck quickly sprayed deodorizer to get rid of the smell when he *remembered telling* his children that he had *stopped smoking*. He

*regretted lying* to his children about something which was so important to them. When he got home, Chuck *remembered to look* into methods to help him *quit smoking*. He had tried *to quit smoking* many times in the past. For example, he had *tried chewing* nicotine gum and *drinking coffee*. This time he would *try vaping*. Maybe that was the answer to his struggles.

As one can see, the infinitive or the gerund form can alter the meaning considerably. The following definitions will clarify the differences.

*To stop to do/to quit to do* something means that one action is interrupted in order to start a new action. *To stop/quit doing* something is to cease doing something altogether.

*To remember doing* something indicates that one remembers the action taking place. *To remember to do* something is to make a mental note in order to do something at a later time.

*To try to do* something is an attempt at something while *to try doing* something one option among other possibilities.

*To regret doing* something is to feel bad about an action completed in the past. *To regret to do* something is to feel bad in the moment. One common example of this is the expression *to regret to inform*: “We *regret to inform* you that the train cannot move into the station.”

As is the case for all language rules, it is advisable to pay attention and note the forms being used. This way if you *remember hearing* the pattern, you will *remember to do* it correctly in the future. I have *attempted to give* you some enlightening examples and suggest that you learn the words in the lists provided [here](#). If you find that you are still making mistakes, *try adding* to the lists and *creating* practice sentences.

Click below for more practice with gerunds and infinitives.

Gretchen Chojnacki-Herbers

#### Glossary

*confounding*:  
confusing

*no rhyme or reason*:  
no particular logic

*to wince*:  
to make a facial expression to show pain or displeasure

*to contemplate*:  
to think about

*connotation*:  
implication

*to cease*:  
to stop



Exercises

## Intercultural Communication

### Hierarchies - More Present Than You Think

As a teacher, working with international and local students and academics has many positive sides. Amongst others, you become a life-long learner, you never accept things at face value, and, what is more, you reflect on yourself and your role as a teacher quite a bit. Sometimes, I have to grin inwardly at the confusing situations I find myself in, especially when students insist on calling me “professor” or when they start repeating every word I say as if it was the gospel. At other times, I find that students hold back in discussions or will not point out the occasional mistakes I make. Why? Well, sometimes those in front of me have a different concept of hierarchy than mine.

Next to group orientation and proxemics<sup>1</sup>, hierarchy plays an important role in intercultural communication. According to Geert Hofstede, no cultural setting can do without hierarchies. They are to be found in all cultural contexts to varying degrees. Edward Hall’s concept of high-context cultures versus low-context cultures goes hand in hand with this theory, as hierarchies play a role here as well<sup>2</sup>.

In high-context settings a great deal of implied information is needed to establish rapport and the basis for communication. Rules about gestures, tone of voice, and respect for superior rank are as important as the personal relationship of the communicators. In low-context cultures, in contrast, communication relies more on the factual level. Communication partners tend to call a spade a spade. There is less protocol, and disagreements are quite often discussed directly and openly. Communicators of lower rank are expected to proactively voice criticism and point out negative developments – though nobody is supposed to behave like a bull in a china shop.

This idea of high-context vs. low-context cultures is similar to what Hofstede pointed out with respect to “Power Distance,” which

*expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. (...) People in societies exhibiting a large degree of Power Distance accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification.*

*In societies with low Power Distance, people strive to equalise the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power.<sup>3</sup>*

Translated into every day realities: In high Power Distance contexts managerial styles are more direct and authoritative, which employees expect. The tone of communication is a formal one, and there are many rules and procedures which have to be taken into account. The same applies to the status of the “professor,” who is an authority in his/her field and not to be questioned. On the other hand, in low Power Distance settings the boss or teacher is more a partner and facilitator, who encourages team members to develop and contribute their own solutions.

In high-context/high Power Distance cultures the role of the teacher may reach beyond the classroom since he/she has a multitude of social network responsibilities and is responsible for his/her students’ success.<sup>4</sup> As a student from the Indian subcontinent once explained to me: “Our teachers and lecturers are very good and of course they are authorities, people you look up to, but caring ones and they give you directions. You are not as alone in what you are doing as you are here [in Germany].”

To look at further examples of intercultural critical incidences in the classroom, click below.

Dr. Ines Böhner

<sup>1</sup>For more about intercultural differences with group and individual settings, see [this](#) article from a previous newsletter.

<sup>2</sup>For more about high-context vs. low-context cultures, see [this](#) article from a previous newsletter.

<sup>3</sup>National Culture. (n.d.). Retrieved March 06, 2019, from <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/models/national-culture/>

<sup>4</sup>If you are interested in a case study, please continue reading [here](#).

#### Glossary

*to take/accept things at face value:*  
to accept something as it appears to be

*proxemics:*  
the study of people’s attitudes towards personal space

*to establish rapport:*  
to achieve a basis of trust by getting to know the communication’s partner

*to call a spade a spade:*  
to be very direct and not necessarily diplomatic

*proactively:*  
to act on one’s own impulse and not wait for instructions

*to behave like a bull in a china shop:*  
to act clumsily and with no manners



Exercises

## Vocabulary

### Collective Nouns

Here's a question for (not only the perfectionists among) you: which of the two sentences is, to your mind, grammatically correct<sup>1</sup>?

Our team *is* going<sup>2</sup> to win!  
Our team *are* going to win!

Tricky? The answer is simple: either. In English there are a number of nouns which refer to a group of people or things regarded as a whole, i.e. "collectively". To mention just a few "collective" nouns:

audience, the BBC, cast, club, committee, community, company, council, crew, England (the football team!), enemy, family, **flock**, gang, government, group, jury, opposition, public, staff, team, union

A collective noun is, properly speaking, of course singular. However, as it refers to a group or its individual members, you can combine it either with a singular or a plural verb. Going back to our example, in the first sentence you look at the team as a single impersonal unit, whereas in the second sentence you consider the team as a collection of individuals hoping for a personal goal like winning. In the **latter** case you would use *who* and not *which* as a relative pronoun.

The average British family *has* two children.

Paul's family *have* decided to move to Brighton.

*They* think it's a better place to live.

My company *was* founded in 1996.

My company *are* wonderful. *They* do what *they* can for *their* employees.

The opposition, *who are* hoping for the Brexit deal to be rejected in Parliament, *want* the government to collapse.

There is one important collective noun, which should set off grammatical alarm bells in your mind since it is only used with a plural verb:

London *police have arrested* a man after two **make-shift** bombs were found in an unoccupied flat in Camden.

Be careful not to mix singular and plural verbs or pronouns in the same sentence, paragraph or assignment as this would make your writing grammatically incorrect:

The British government *is* by no means environmentally conscious: *its* clean energy investment

plummeted in 2018.

or:

The British government *are* by no means environmentally conscious: *their* clean energy investment **plummeted** in 2018.

When a collective noun is used with a singular determiner such as *a/an, each, every, this or that*, singular verbs and pronouns are generally the rule: Each group *who is planning* on participating *needs* to register by March 15th.

(not: Each group *who are planning... need*)

If you want to **disambiguate** when talking about the individuals who make up a group, you can use *member*:

*The members* of our department *are* mostly absent during the December/January break.

Each *member* of our department *has* an email address.

*Data, bacteria* and *media* are a special case. Their origin is Latin. Strictly speaking, *data* is the plural of *datum*; *bacterium* and *medium* are the rare singular forms of *bacteria* and *media*. This, of course, makes them count nouns and only a plural verb should be used, especially in technical English. However, as language evolves with time, in modern non-scientific English usage a singular verb is most common. Today, they feature in many a list of collective nouns.

These *data show* that most cancers develop due to faults in particular genes.

Our latest *data shows* that more and more firms are investing in Central Africa.

To practice collective nouns, click on the link below.

Sylvia Grade

<sup>1</sup> This article looks predominantly at British usage. American English has a strong preference for the use of singular verbs with collective nouns.

<sup>2</sup> *going to*: a prediction based on evidence that the team will win. For more about this tense, see [this](#) article from a previous newsletter.

#### Glossary

**flock:**  
groups of animals like sheep or birds

**latter:** the second of the two examples just mentioned

**makeshift:**  
improvised, provisional

**to plummet:**  
to fall dramatically, to plunge

**to disambiguate:**  
to be clear, remove uncertainty



Exercises