Gerunds

In English, there are two ways to talk about an action (a verb) as though it were a thing (a noun).

One way is to use the infinitive of the verb (to sing, to play, to sleep):

* He loves to sing “Kayna Wla Makaynash.”
* Houda loves to play with her little sister.
* All I want to do right now is to sleep.

Another and slightly more sophisticated way is to turn the verb into a noun by adding –ing. This is called a gerund:

* He loves singing popular songs.
* Houda loves playing with her little sister.
* Sleeping until noon is my favorite thing to do.

Gerunds are also useful to say things in a polite or conditional way:

* Have you thought about singing a bit more quietly?
* Why don’t you try playing the piano instead of the drums?
* Sleeping until noon could get you in trouble at work.

Conditionality and Politeness

Although there are some traces of the subjunctive mood left in English (If I were you, I would…), its use is rare today. To express the same sense of a lack of certainty or to show politeness, in English we more often use a range of phrases and modals (could, might, should, would). For example:

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| **A Bit Rude or Too Direct in English** | **Phrased More Politely or Diplomatically** |
| * You should get out of the way! | * Would you mind stepping aside? |
| * Just go to the doctor. | * Have you considered visiting a doctor? |
| * Call that boy’s parents and tell them what he did. | * You might think about a phone call to his parents. |
| * Tell him to leave you alone. | * I might suggest asking him not to bother you again. |
| * It’s easy: Change your phone number. | * You could possibly change your phone number. |
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Using phrases and gerunds in this way is particularly important when doing something as diplomatic and challenging as giving advice