
EVERYDAY GRAMMAR

Thinking About Using -ing Words?

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In the English language, putting two *-ing* words together often is not only natural but correct.

Listen to an example:

I've been avoiding going to the doctor.

In today's Everyday Grammar, we will look at examples of when two or *more -ing* words appear next to each other.

What's the present participle?

To understand why two *-ing* words can appear in a **row** in English, you must first understand the present participle.

A present participle is a word that is formed from a verb and ends in *-ing*. For example, the present participle of the verb *to avoid* is *avoiding*.

The present participle is used with the verb *to be* to form the continuous tenses. For instance, a few continuous tenses of *to avoid* include *are avoiding*, *was avoiding* and *has or have been avoiding*.

But, the present participle can also act as a **gerund** or an adjective. Consider the verb *to sing*. The present participle is *singing*.

Listen to an example of singing as a gerund:

Singing is my favorite activity.

As an adjective:

The singing man was happy.

And as part of a continuous verb tense:

The man was singing in the rain.

verb + gerund

One common situation in which two *-ing* words can appear next to each other is when the first *-ing* word is part of a continuous verb tense and the second *-ing* word is a gerund, as in the first example:

I've been avoiding going to the doctor.

Here, *have been avoiding* is the present perfect continuous form of *to avoid*. *Going* is the gerund.

Here's another example:

I'm considering buying a home in DC.

Here, *am considering* is the present continuous form of the verb *to consider*. *Buying* is the gerund.

go + gerund

Two *-ing* words can also appear together in what we call “go + gerund.” Go + gerund is an example of the verb + gerund construction.

In English, we add the verb *to go* to certain **recreational** activities. These activities include fishing, swimming, shopping and **skating**, plus more than a dozen more.

Because of this, when *go* is in the continuous verb tense, you will see two *-ing* words together.

Listen:

I'm going shopping in Alexandria next weekend.

In this sentence, *am going* is the present continuous form of the verb *to go* and the gerund is *shopping*.

Here's another:

*We're going skating on Friday in the **sculpture garden**.*

In this sentence, *are going* is the present continuous form of the verb *to go* and *skating* is the gerund.

Note, however, that you will not see two *-ing* words together when *go* is not in the continuous tense with these activities. For example: "We went skating in the sculpture garden last Friday" is still part of the *go + gerund* structure.

verb + adjective

Another English construction in which two *-ing* words commonly appear next to each other is the verb + adjective structure.

Listen to the example:

*The noise is becoming **irritating**.*

In this example, *is becoming* is the present continuous form of the verb *to become* and *irritating* is an adjective that describes the noun *noise*. Here's another:

I've been hearing disturbing stories about that place.

In this example, *have been hearing* is the present perfect continuous form of the verb *to hear* and *disturbing* is an adjective that describes the noun *stories*.

three -ing words

You may be surprised to know that, in English, it's also possible to put three -*ing* words together.

Listen to an example:

We're considering going fishing near Providence or Newport.

No one would look at you strangely if you said this because it sounds natural in English.

In this sentence, *are considering* is the present continuous form of the verb *to consider*. And, *going fishing* follows the go + gerund construction.

But, if you wanted to express the same meaning in another way, you could say, "We're thinking about going fishing near Providence or Newport."

Notice that there are still three -*ing* words close together, but the **preposition** *about* separates the first two.

However, many examples of three -*ing* words together do not sound natural. Listen to this example from the website English Stack Exchange:

*Some doctors are considering stopping recommending **high-carb** diets.*

According to the website, this sentence is **grammatically** correct. However, it sounds less natural than the example about fishing.

Now, listen to a sentence with the same meaning.

Some doctors are rethinking recommending high-carb diets.

It sounds a little better than the **original** example. But this next one sounds better:

Some doctors are rethinking their recommendations of high-carb diets.

These examples sound more natural in English.

Putting three *-ing* words together is often complicated and can sound unusual. So, until you've mastered English, you should probably avoid it. However, in many situations you can feel comfortable using two *-ing* words in a row.

I'm Alice Bryant.

Alice Bryant wrote this story for Learning English. Kelly Jean Kelly was the editor.

Words in This Story

row – *n.* a straight line of people or things that are next to each other

gerund – *n.* an English noun formed from a verb by adding *-ing*

recreational – *adj.* done for enjoyment

skating – *n.* the activity or sport of gliding on skates or a skateboard (gerund of the verb *to skate*)

sculpture garden – *n.* an outdoor garden dedicated to the presentation of sculpture

irritating – *adj.* causing annoyance, impatience or anger

preposition – *n.* a word or group of words that is used with a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase to show direction, location, or time, or to introduce an object

high-carb – *adj.* having a high number of carbohydrates

grammatically – *adv.* in a way that relates to the rules of grammar

original – *adj.* happening or existing first or at the beginning
