GERUNDS

What is a gerund?
A gerund is the -ing form of a verb used as a noun in sentence structure. Though it has the same form as the present participle, its uses differ.

GERUND: Walking the dog is Kim’s job. (acts as a subject)
PARTICIPLE: Ken, walking the dog, got very tired. (modifies Ken)

A gerund may serve in any noun function:

SUBJECT: Looking at tropical fish didn’t satisfy the child.
OBJECT: He taught swimming.
PREDICATE NOUN: Seeing is believing.
MODIFIER: I used a cutting board. (That is, a board for cutting, not a board that cuts.)

A gerund may be in present or perfect tenses, and in the active or passive voice:

my seeing
your having seen
his being seen
her
its having been seen (passive)
our
their

What is the subject of a gerund?
The subject of a gerund is the noun or pronoun that occurs before the gerund, and the gerund can be used in 2 ways: Formal Possessive and General Object.

FORMAL: The neighbors complained about the dog’s barking at night.
GENERAL: The neighbors complained about the dog barking at night.

FORMAL: Janet was excited about Jim’s/his coming.
GENERAL: Janet was excited about Jim/him coming.

When is the possessive case preferred?
1. In formal usage.
2. When the emphasis is on the gerund:

Janet was excited about Jim’s/his coming. About what? Jim’s/his coming.

We were concerned with Taffy’s/his constant scratching.
About what? About the scratching.
When is the object case preferred?
1. When the gerund is separated from its subject by other words:

   People were surprised at him, a veteran speaker on many campuses, having no ready reply.

2. When the subject is emphatic:

   We were proud of him winning the race. Who is winning the race? Him. Have you heard of them losing their baby? Who is losing a baby? Them.

3. When the subject
   --is abstract, or the name of an inanimate object:
       Imagination getting out of control was the cause of the problem.

   --has no possessive form:
       They disapproved of so many being given. Nobody could imagine this happening.

   --is a plural noun:
       I don’t approve of children (possibly children’s) stealing