

MPC English & Study Skills Center

Infinitives

An **infinitive** consists of the word “**to**” plus the base form of a verb (**to + verb**), for example, *to eat, to study, to sing, to worry*. An **infinitive phrase** is a group of words starting with an infinitive and including the infinitive’s object and/or its modifiers. Although an infinitive is a verb form, it is **never** part of the main verb of the sentence.

‡ Infinitives can be used in a number of different ways in a sentence:

Noun--to name an action:

I love **to eat**. (direct object)

To speak requires vocal chords. (subject)

To show appreciation for a gift is a good practice. (infinitive phrase as subject)

Adjective--to describe:

Her need **to study** is clear from her scores.

His desire **to be a success** makes him study hard.

Adverb--to describe:

He cut the flowers **to make a bouquet**.

Grandma will bake cookies tomorrow **to make her grandson happy**.

‡ The infinitive and the gerund (verb + ing) frequently follow the verbs in sentences. In some cases, either form can be used:

I like **to swim**. (Infinitive)

I like **swimming**. (Gerund)

‡ In other cases, only the infinitive can be used or the meaning changes, depending upon whether the infinitive or the gerund is used. The following structures use infinitives rather than gerunds.

After verbs that show thought processes or plans

hope	promise	agree	offer
refuse	decide	intend	plan

I hope **to go to Spain next year**.

I plan **to attend college**.

I refuse **to do your homework**.

She decided **to quit**.

The lawyers will offer **to settle**.

After verbs that show necessity or desire

need	want	expect	ask	would like
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I need **to take a bath**.
I want **to go home on time**.
He asks **to stay home**.

After "it is" plus adjective

It is nice **to stay in bed all morning**.
It is great **to go home**.
It is difficult **to understand some rules of English**.

Alone, in place of "in order to" to show intent

He goes to school in order **to study**.
He goes to school **to study**.

She works in order **to make enough money to live**.
She works **to make enough money to live**.

After "seem" and "appear"

Jake seems **to be irritable**.
You appear **to want something more**.

After "advise" + noun or pronoun

He advised her **to go home**.
Aunt Maria advised Uncle Jorge **to change jobs**.

After "remember" and "forget" when they refer to past, current, or future actions

He remembered **to bring food for the cat**.
This means that he didn't forget to do it.

They forgot **to buy tickets for the play**.
This means that they won't be able to see the play because they have no tickets.

Note: The use of the gerund changes the meaning:

He remembered **bringing food for the cat**.
*This means that he remembers **the act** of bringing the food.*

They forgot **buying tickets for the play**.
*This means that they don't remember **the act** of buying the tickets, but, in fact, they did buy the tickets.*

After "too" and "enough"

The box is too heavy **to lift**.
The song is too long for her **to sing**.
I am tall enough **to reach the shelf**.
He is crazy enough **to steal the money and run**.

After "stop" when it refers to purpose

He stopped **to buy groceries**.
She stopped **to watch the parade**.

Note: When "stop" means "to quit," a gerund is used:

He stopped **buying groceries**.
This means that he didn't buy food anymore.

She stopped **watching the parade**.
This means that she didn't see the end of the parade.

NOTE: For additional information, **see also** the related handout on **Gerunds**.