

Unit 8 Infinitives and gerunds

Infinitives

We use infinitives (to + verb) and negative infinitives (not to + verb) after verbs (1), adjectives (2) or nouns (3).

1. We agreed **to meet** on Fridays.
He promised **not to tell** a soul about their secret liaison.
2. We'd be happy **to give** you a hand.
I was sorry **to hear** that you weren't feeling well.
3. She made a decision **to confront** the criminal. It wasn't her intention **to attack** or injure him.

We can use a passive form of the infinitive (to be + past participle) for an action which is received (4) and a perfect infinitive (to have + past participle) for an earlier action (5).

4. The workers want **to be paid** today.
I pleaded with her **not to be taken** in by his smooth talk.
5. I hope **to have read** the guidebook before we go to Berlin.
You seem **to have been** very busy.

We can use an infinitive (for example, *to get*) to express purpose and *only* with an infinitive (for example, *only to find out*) when we want to express an unexpected result.

6. We made a big effort **to get** to the meeting **only to find out** that it had been postponed.

Bare infinitives

We use bare infinitives (base form of the verb) after *modals* (7) and after verbs such as *make* or *let* with objects (8).

7. I *can't* **stay** long. What *will* we **do** if they tell us we *must* **pay** more?
8. Please *make* her **stop** that noise. They won't *let* us **leave** unless we pay more.

Gerunds

We use gerunds (verb + -ing) like nouns: as subjects (9), as objects after verbs (10) and after prepositions (11). We can use determiners such as *the* or *his* before gerunds (12).

9. **Studying** makes me sleepy.
My doctor says that **swimming** is the best exercise.
10. We don't mind **waiting**.
Paul enjoys not **having** a job.
I suggested **taking** a coffee break.
11. She watches TV instead of **working**.
Ryan got angry and left without **saying** another word.
12. Do the **dusting** first, then the **vacuuming**.
The baby's okay, but his **crying** upsets me.

We can use a perfect gerund (having + past participle) to focus on a complete action in the past:

Karl felt guilty about not **having saved** enough money to buy Lucy an expensive present.

We can use gerunds in phrases with objects and complements (13). We use present participles, not gerunds, in participle clauses that are similar to reduced versions of relative clauses and adverbial clauses (14).

13. **Helping people** is more fulfilling for me than **making a lot of money** and **feeling miserable**.
14. Two American tourists (who were) **visiting** London on their honeymoon were attacked by a group of young people while (they were) **walking** near Hyde Park late last night.

Verbs used with infinitives and gerunds

We use infinitives, not gerunds, after verbs such as hope and offer (15). After verbs such as tell and warn, we must include a noun phrase to identify the subject of the infinitive (16).

15. I'm hoping **to get** a day off soon.
We offered **to pay** for the damage (~~We offered paying~~)
→ Other verbs used with an infinitive include: agree, aim, claim, decide, fail, plan, refuse, vote, want
16. They told us **to wait** for them.
We warned everyone not to leave their doors unlocked.
→ Other verbs used with a noun phrase + an infinitive include: force, order, persuade, remind, tempt

After advise, allow, encourage and permit, we use a noun phrase before an infinitive (17). We can also use these verbs with a gerund to describe an activity in general terms (18).

17. They advised us **to cook** the eggs thoroughly.

The hotel doesn't permit non-residents **to swim** in the pool.

18. They advise **cooking** eggs thoroughly.

The hotel doesn't permit **swimming** in the pool after ten o'clock.

After regret, remember, stop and go on, we use an infinitive for something that happens later (19) and a gerund for something that happened or was happening before (20).

19. Remember **to take** an umbrella.

After Steve Jobs left Apple, he went on **to develop** Pixar.

20. Don't you remember **taking** it earlier?

After he left the company, it went on **losing** money.

We can use stop + object + gerund:

The main goal was to stop people **drinking** and **driving**.

Some verbs have different meanings when used with an infinitive or a gerund. We use mean with an infinitive (= 'intend') or with a gerund (= 'result in') (21). We usually use dread with a gerund (= 'be anxious about'), but the verb is also used with an infinitive in expressions such as I dread to think (= 'I don't want to think') (22).

21. I meant **to ask** you about your new job. Will it mean **spending** more time on the road?

22. I dread **getting** sick again.

I dread **to think** of how I'm going to pay my bills.

We can use some verbs, such as like, start or try, followed by either an infinitive or a gerund with little difference in meaning.

23. I tried to learn/learning German, but it was hard.

Have you ever tried to ski/skiing?

Note that after '*try your best*', we only use an infinitive:

We tried our best **to be** on time.

24. Bob likes **to listen/listening** to jazz.

Their child started **to talk/talking** at 9 months

→ Other verbs used like this: begin, continue, hate, intend, love, prefer

Gerunds and other nouns

We can create nouns called gerunds from the -ing forms of both action and stative verbs (25). We tend to avoid using gerunds when an alternative noun is available (26). In some cases, as with smoke and smoking, the two nouns have different meanings (27) .

- 25. A recent finding from research on neutrinos has complicated our understanding of the physical universe and challenged traditional thinking.
(~~our understand~~)
- 26. The threat of conventional nuclear war has diminished with the negotiation of new treaties and the reduction of weapons stockpiles. (~~the threatening;~~
~~the negotiating; the reducing~~)
- 27. It's my smoking that annoys her the most. She can't understand why I haven't given up yet. (= She's annoyed by the fact that I am smoking, not by the smoke.)