

Infinitives: Classification and Usage

Dr. Waadullah Younis Mohammed

Al- Noor University College
waedullah.younis@alnoor.edu.iq

• Remal Munther Abd

Abstract

Some learners of English express difficulties regarding whether to use the infinitive form or the gerund form of a verb . Thus , knowing the difference and the verbs used with each form can save the learners from making costly grammar mistakes when writing.

The present research aims at investigating the forms , uses , and functions of infinitives . It also investigates the verbs used with infinitives only , and tries to find out the verbs used with both infinitives and gerunds, and the semantic overlap between them.

Throughout the investigation , this research paper manifests the following conclusions :

1. Infinitives have simple and complex forms.
2. Infinitives have different uses with special finites , verbs of perception , after had better , after ought and used. Also with the verbs do , need , dare , be , and have .
3. Infinitives have a number of functions , e.g. noun , adverbial , adjectival , with adjectives expressing desire or emotion , absolute function , and in exclamatory sentences.
4. Infinitives are only used with a number of common verbs. (See 6.2)
 1. Infinitives can be used with gerunds with or without a change in meaning. (See 6.3)
 2. There is a semantic overlap between infinitives and gerunds. (see examples 59 - 60)

Infinitives

1-Introduction

1-1-Definition

The infinitive is the “dictionary form” of the verb ,i-e. the form under which a verb appears in the dictionary. It expresses the notion of the verb in its general sense, not as it applies to any particular subject.

It is called “infinitive” because its form is not limited (Latin finis=limit), as a finite verb is, by the number and person of its subject. (C.E. Eckersley, 1960 p. 230)

Buwamo (2015) states that in traditional descriptions of English, the infinitive is the basic dictionary form of a verb when used non-finitely,

with or without the particle **to** -Thus to go is an infinitive, as is go in a sentence like:

1. I must go there. (nonfinite verb)
but not in
2. I go there. (finite verb) (Buwamo, 2015)

1-2-Aims:

The present research aims at investigating

1. The forms and uses of infinitives.
2. The functions of infinitives.
3. The verbs used with infinitives only.
4. The overlap between infinitives and gerunds.
5. The verbs used with gerunds only.
6. The verbs used with both infinitives and gerunds.

1-3-Hypotheses: It is predicted that infinitives have different uses and forms with different functions . In addition, English infinitives maybe used with a limited number of verbs. It is also hypothesized that there is a semantic overlap between infinitives and gerunds.

1-4-The Problem: Learners of English express difficulties regarding whether to use the infinitive form or the gerund form of a verb. Thus, knowing the difference and the verbs used with each form can save the learners form making costly grammar mistakes when writing.

2-Infinitive Form:

2-1-Simple Infinitive Forms

The most familiar infinitive is the to-infinitive – to go ,to sell, etc.

It is also used without **to** when it is known as the bare infinitive –go, have, etc.

2-2-Complex Infinitive Forms

The complex forms are marked for progressive and perfect aspect and passive voice:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| -To be sold | simple passive infinitive |
| -to be selling | progressive active infinitive |
| -to be being sold | progressive passive infinitive |
| -to have sold | perfect active infinitive |
| -to have been sold | perfect passive infinitive |
| -to have been selling | perfect progressive active infinitive |

The infinitives are most commonly used to form complex verb groups with catenative verbs:

3. Let us get down to business.

4. You seem to be giving them a hard time. (Broughton, 1990 p. 135)

۳-The Uses of Infinitives

3-1-The plain infinitive (without to) or bare infinitive is used:

3-1-1-after the special finites can (could) , do (did) , may (might) , shall (should) . will (would) , must , need , dare , e.g.

5. He can speak French.

6. We shall meet him.

7. Did you hear a noise ?

8. I might go.

9. We will help you.

10. You needn't go yet.

11. I daren't leave him.

12. You must come with us.

3-1-2-After the verbs of perception : see , hear , feel , etc , and after make and let e.g.

13. She saw him take the money.

14. I heard her play piano.

15. He felt his blood run cold and his flesh creep.

16. The teacher made him write out the exercise again.

17. I will let you use my bicycle.

But if these verbs are used in the passive voice , the infinitive takes to,

18. He was heard to cry.

19. They had been made to work.

20. He was seen to take the money.

The verb help sometimes, and generally in American English , is followed by the infinitive without to:

21. He helped me (to) compose the letter.

22. Will you help me (to) clean the car?

3-1-3-After had better , had (would) rather , had (would) sooner , need hardly ... cannot but , e.g.

23. You had better tell him the truth.

24. I had (would) rather not see him.

25. I'd sooner take a taxi than walk.

26. I need hardly tell you how serious the matter is.

3-2-The infinitive with to is used:

3-2-1-After the special finites ought and used :

27. You ought to go.

28. I used to live there.

3-2-2-With do, need and dare when they are used not as special finites but as full verbs:

29. I did it to please you.
30. You don't need to go yet.
31. He won't dare to disobey his teacher.

3-2-3-With be and have when they are used to express commands, compulsion, etc:

32. You are to go to the Headmaster's room at once.
33. I have to beat my office by a o'clock.

4-Omission of the infinitive verb:

There are occasions when the particle **to** is used without the infinitive verb. This construction occurs when the **to** refers to a verb that has previously been used and that, if expressed, would be an infinitive with to:

34. I shall go if I want to (go).
35. If you don't know the answer, you ought to (know it). (Eckersley, 1960 pp. 230-232)

5-Functions of The Infinitive

5-1-The infinitive can act as a noun. Thus , it may be :

(a) The Subject of a sentence:

36. To act like that is childish.

(b) The complement of a verb:

37. They are to be married soon.

38. To live like this is to enjoy life.

(c) The object of a verb:

39. I want to know the answer.

40. He must learn to work hard and to save money.

5-2-The infinitive may have an adverbial function , generally of purpose or result:

41. I went there to see him.

42. He was lucky enough to win the prize.

43. You should eat to live , not live to eat.

5-3-It may have an adjectival function and qualify a noun or an indefinite pronoun:

44. That is not the way to speak to your uncle (qualifying way) That was a silly thing to do.

45. He gave me something to eat.

5-4-It is used with adjectives expressing emotion or desire:

46. I was very glad to see you.

47. He was anxious / eager / to get home.

- It is used also with some other adjectives, e.g. fit, able, etc.

48. These shoes are not fit to wear.

49. Tom is not able to go to the party.

- Other adjectives that can take this construction are: afraid , ready , worthy , easy , hard , possible , wrong , etc.
Some adverbs also take these constructions, far, best:
50.He knows how far to go.
51.She explained how best to cook the meat.

5-5-The infinitive can be used in ‘absolute’ constructions such as:

- 52.To tell you the truth , I don't know what the answer is.
53.To hear him talk, you'd think he was a millionaire .

5-6-It is used after know and certain other verbs with interrogative words:

- 54.I don't know how to tell you.
55.You will soon learn when to use that construction.

5-7-It is Sometimes used in exclamatory sentence, or in sentences expressing a wish unlikely to be realized:

- 56.To think he knew about it all the time!
57.Oh! to be young again.
58.Oh! to be in England. (Charles E. Eckersley, 1973)

6-Infinitives vs. Gerunds:

Many students have expressed difficulties regarding whether to use the gerund form of a verb or the infinitive form. Deciding which to use is not always easy, but the more you read and listen to English, the easier it will become. Sometimes either the gerund or the infinitive form can be used, either with the same or different meanings, and sometimes there is only one form which is correct.

In the example sentences below both forms can be used, but the meanings are not the same:

- 59.Stop smoking. (means terminate the action of smoking)
60.Stop to smoke. (means stop an activity in progress for the purpose of starting the action of smoking) (McCarthy, 2009)

6-1-Common Verbs Followed Only by a Gerund:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| Admit | He admitted stealing the money. |
| Advise | She advises waiting until tomorrow. |
| Anticipate | I anticipate having a good time on vacation. |
| Appreciate | I appreciate hearing from you. |
| avoid | He avoided answering my questions. |
| complete | She finally completed writing her term paper. |
| Consider | I will consider going with you. |

delay	He delayed leaving for school.
deny	She denied knowing anything about it.
discuss	They discussed opening a new business.
Enjoy	We enjoyed visiting them.
escape	The team escaped losing the final game.
Finish	She finished studying at about ten.
Imagine	We imagined returning the next summer.
keep	I keep hoping she will come.
Mention	She mentioned going to a movie.
Mind	Would you mind helping me?
miss	I miss being with my family.
Postpone	Let's postpone leaving until tomorrow.
Practice	The athlete practiced throwing the ball.
quit	He quit trying to solve the problem.
Recall	I don't recall meeting him before.
Recommend	She recommended seeing that play.
Regret	I regret telling him my secret.
resist	I could not resist eating dessert.
Risk	She risked losing everything.
stop	She stopped going to classes.
suggest	She suggested going to a movie.
Tolerate	He won't tolerate cheating during an examination.

6-2-Common Verbs Followed Only by an Infinitive:

Afford	I can't afford to buy it.
agree	They agreed to help us.
Appear	She appears to be tired.
arrange	We arranged to meet at ten.
Ask	He asked to come with us.
beg	He begged to come .
care	I don't care to see that show.
claim	She claims to be a descendent of Karl Marx.
consent	She finally consented to marry him.
decide	I have decided to leave on Monday.
demand	I demand to know who is responsible.
deserve	She deserves to win the prize.
expect	I expect to enter graduate school in the fall.
fail	She failed to return the book to the library.
forget	I forgot to mail the letter.
Help	He wanted to help with the clean-up.
Hesitate	Don't hesitate to ask for my help.

Hope	Jack hopes to arrive next week.
Learn	He learned to play the piano.
Manage	She managed to finish her work early.
Mean	I didn't mean to hurt your feelings.
Need	I need to have your opinion.
Offer	They offered to help us.
Plan	I am planning to have a party.
Prepare	We prepared to welcome them.
Pretend	He pretends not to understand .
Promise	I promise not to be late.
Refuse	I refuse to believe his story.
Regret	I regret to tell you that you failed.
Seem	That cat seems to be friendly.
Struggle	I struggled to stay awake.
Swear	She swore to tell the truth.
Threaten	She threatened to tell my parents.
Volunteer	He volunteered to help us.
Wait	I will wait to hear from you.
Want	I want to tell you something.
Wish	She wishes to come with us.

6-3-Common Verbs Followed by a Gerund or an Infinitive: Either with Little or No Difference in Meaning or with a Significant Change in Meaning (see “forget,” “remember,” and “stop”):

Begin	He begins working at ten a.m. He begins to work as soon as he arrives.
Continue	He continues studying . He continues to study .
forget	She forgot calling her friend. She forgot to call her friend.
Hate	I hate arguing about politics. I hate to argue with you.
Like	They like skiing . They like to ski .
Love	Children love playing with their friends. Children love to play .
Neglect	She neglected telling her about the fire. She neglected to tell her the whole story.
Prefer	She prefers eating a light dinner. She prefers to eat a light dinner.
Remember	I remember locking the door. I remembered to lock the door.

Start	He started running . He started to run .
Stop	They stopped buying groceries at the market. They stopped to buy groceries at the market.
Try	The instructor tried rereading the papers. The instructor tried to reread the papers. (Rockowitz)

7-Gerund and Infinitive usage:

At first glance, it may seem difficult to know when to use an infinitive and when to use a gerund. The following guidelines for gerund or infinitive usage are helpful. ()

1-A gerund is a verb form that ends in “-ing” and is used as a noun (walking, traveling, voting).

2-An infinitive is the base form of a verb preceded by “to” (to walk, to travel, to vote).

3-Gerunds and infinitives can function as the subject of a sentence or the object of a verb. (Rockowitz)

4-Whether to use a gerund or an infinitive depends on the main verb in the sentence:

61.I expect **to have** the results to the operation soon. (infinitive)

62.I anticipate **having** the research completed eventually. (Gerund) (Gonzales, 2016)

7-1-Gerunds and infinitives can replace a noun in a sentence:

Gerund = the present participle (-ing) form of the verb, e.g., singing, dancing, running.

Infinitive = to + the base form of the verb, e.g., to sing, to dance, to run.

Gerunds can be used after certain verbs including enjoy, fancy, discuss, dislike, finish, mind, suggest, recommend, keep, and avoid.

1.After **prepositions** of place and time.

63.I made dinner **before getting** home.

64.He looked unhappy **after seeing** his work schedule.

2.To replace the **subject or object** of a sentence.

65.Lachlan likes **eating** coconut oil.

66.**Jumping** off a cliff is dangerous, but a real thrill.

Infinitives can be used after certain verbs including agree, ask, decide, help, plan, hope, learn, want, would like, and promise.

1.After many **adjectives**:

67.It is hard **to make** dinner this late.

2.To show **purpose**:

68.I left for Russia **to study** Russian. (Gonzales, 2016)

8-conclusions:

As predicted the investigation related to English infinitives manifests the following conclusions:

1. Infinitives have simple and complex forms .
 2. Infinitives have different uses with special finites , verbs of perception , after had better, after ought and used. Also with the verbs do , need, dare , be , and have .
 3. Infinitives have a number of functions , e.g. noun , adverbial, adjectival , with adjectives expressing desire or emotion , absolute function , and in exclamatory sentences .
 4. Infinitives are only used with a number of common Verbs . (See 6.2)
 5. Infinitives can be used with gerunds with or without a change in meaning.(see 6.3)
 6. There is a semantic overlap between infinitives and gerunds .(see sentences 59-60)
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