

Gerunds and Infinitives

What Are Gerunds and Infinitives?

Gerunds and infinitives look like verbs but they act as the subject or object of a sentence.

A gerund is *verb-ing* used as a noun. An infinitive is *to verb* used as a noun.

	Subject	+	verb	(+ object).
Gerund verb-ing	<u>Swimming</u>		feels	great.
	I		enjoy	<u>playing</u> the guitar.
Infinitive to verb	I		want	<u>to learn</u> Spanish.
	<u>To become</u> rich		is	my dream.

Top tip: If you're not sure whether your word is a verb or a gerund/infinitive, try swapping it for *it*. (It feels great. I enjoy it. I want it. It is my dream).

Now here's the tricky part. Some verbs work with both gerunds and infinitives, but some verbs only work with gerunds, and some verbs only work with infinitives. And sometimes, a verb will work with both gerunds and infinitives, but they have different meanings.

I like to dance.	✓	I want watching TV.	✗
I like dancing.	✓	I want to watch TV.	✓
I enjoy cooking.	✓	I stopped sleeping.	✓
I enjoy to cook.	✗	I stopped to sleep.	✓

Learning Through Context

The best way to learn which verbs work with gerunds or infinitives is by noticing them in context as you read, watch, or listen. This is the same way you learned your first language, and the same way native speakers learn English.

Let's look at some examples for each group of verbs.

Work with gerunds

I miss *going* outside the walls.
 I enjoy swimming.
 He delayed *making* a decision.
 They avoid *talking* during meetings.
 We discussed *moving* to a new city.
 Would you mind *waiting* for a few minutes?
 Can you imagine *flying* like a bird?
 He mentioned *hearing* strange noises.

Work with infinitives

I don't want *to ruin* my makeup.
 She appeared *to be* crying.
 He spoke *to break* the silence.
 They intend *to meet* tomorrow.
 We should aim *to leave* at 5pm.
 I was asked *to take out* the rubbish.
 Do you consent *to share* your data?
 They seem *to be* angry with us.

Work with both (same meaning)

I can't stand *looking* / *to look* at you.
 I like *reading* / *to read*.
 She loves *cooking* / *to cook*.
 They prefer *walking* / *to walk*.
 We hate *waiting* / *to wait*.
 I continue *studying* / *to study*.
 He began *learning* / *to learn*.
 She started *singing* / *to sing*.

Work with both (different meaning)

I regret *saying* / *to say* that.
 She forgot *bringing* / *to bring* her umbrella.
 She went on *studying* / *to study*.
 He remembered *calling* / *to call* her.
 He tried *restarting* / *to restart* the computer.
 She quit *playing* / *to play* the piano.
 I stopped *dancing* / *to dance*.

We have to learn these one by one, but luckily there are some patterns to help us.

Gerunds are often used after prepositions.

Have you thought about *starting* a new hobby? / He apologized for *being* late.

Infinitives are used after too and enough.

It's too hot *to go* for a walk. / She's tall enough *to reach* the top shelf.

Infinitives are also used after indirect objects.

I reminded them *to lock* the door. / He convinced his brother *to join* the gym.

Infinitives explain purpose or why something happens.

I'm learning English *to communicate* better. / She saved money *to buy* a new car.

Test Your Knowledge

Now you have a good understanding of gerunds and infinitives, but it may take some time before you feel completely comfortable using them. The main thing to remember is that even if you make mistakes, listeners will usually understand you.

Now, let's test what you've learned. Fill in the gaps with either a gerund or an infinitive.

1. He seems _____ the problem. (understand)
2. We were asked _____ this before Friday. (finish)
3. Did he mind _____ you there? (drive)
4. They're aiming _____ at 6am. (leave)
5. She misses _____ her friends back home. (see)
6. Do you want _____ dancing tonight? (go)
7. They intend _____ abroad next summer. (travel)
8. They appeared _____ for some clues. (look)

Answers:

1. He seems to understand the problem.
2. We were asked to finish this before Friday.
3. Did he mind driving you there?
4. They're aiming to leave at 6am.
5. She misses seeing her friends back home.
6. Do you want to go dancing tonight?
7. They intend to travel abroad next summer.
8. They appeared to look for some clues.

Split Infinitives

There is one advanced point I want to share with you. Look at this sentence.

I decided to *really* enjoy my holiday.

To enjoy is an infinitive, and we've put *really* in the middle. This is what we call a split infinitive. *Really* shows how much I enjoyed my holiday. Split infinitives can make your sentence stronger and help others to understand your meaning better.

The company plans to *gradually* increase its production next year.

She wants to *quickly* improve her English skills.

I want to *completely* finish this project by Friday.

You need to *dramatically* change the way you speak to your employees.

At school, you may have learned that they are incorrect English, but this is very old-fashioned. These days, native speakers use them often. And, if a lot of native speakers say it, then it becomes correct English.

So, if a split infinitive helps you to explain your ideas better, then use it.

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