

## Gerund and Infinitive Phrases

Gerunds and Infinitives are both verbals. A verbal is a word formed from a verb but functioning as a different part of speech, usually a noun. Gerunds are formed when an “-ing” ending is added to a verb, and every infinitive is composed of “to” plus a verb. When grouped with modifiers, gerunds and infinitives form verbal phrases that perform the function of nouns.

### Using Gerunds in a Sentence

In the examples below, the gerund appears in *italics* and the main verb appears in **bold**.

#### Gerund as subject

Because gerunds act as nouns, they can take any role that a noun would usually take in a sentence. The most obvious role is the gerund as subject, in which the sentence is about an action:

Ex. *Waking up early* **is** always difficult.

*Waking up early* is the gerund phrase that forms the subject of the main verb **is**.

#### Gerund as a direct object

A gerund or gerund phrase can also be the object of a verb, making it the recipient of an action

Ex. Usually, my problem **is** *staying up too late*.

*Staying up too late* is the gerund phrase that functions as the object of the main verb **is**.

#### Gerund as the object of a preposition

Ex. Michael Phelps **won** the gold medal *by training every day*.

*Training every day* is the object of the preposition *by* and separate from the main verb **won**. Although gerund phrases do not require commas, if we were to rearrange our last example, a comma would be necessary.

Ex. *By training every day*, Michael Phelps **won** the gold medal.

It is important to remember, however, that the gerund phrase only gets a comma because it is part of an introductory prepositional phrase, not because it is a gerund.

### Things to Remember

- While every gerund is a verb with an “-ing” ending, it does not act as the main verb of the sentence and usually acts as the subject or object of a sentence.
- Generally, gerunds do not require commas.

- Although a gerund phrase can function as the subject of a sentence, adding an “ing” to a verb does not make it a noun.

## Using Infinitives in a Sentence

Infinitive verbal phrases are composed of “to” plus the verb and can act as a noun. Like gerunds, infinitive verbal phrases can function as subjects, objects, and complements in a sentence. However, when infinitive phrases are used as adverbs at the beginning of a sentence, they must be punctuated with a comma.

### Infinitive as a Subject

Infinitives can function as subjects, but gerunds and gerund phrases take this role more commonly and usually sound more normal. Typically, an infinitive at the beginning of a sentence will be part of an adverbial phrase,

Ex. *To run* **seemed** dangerous given the conditions.

*To run* is the subject of the main verb **seemed**. This is correct, but “Running seemed dangerous given the conditions” sounds more natural.

### Infinitive as a Direct Object

Infinitives are much more common as direct objects: “I want to...” is one of the most common examples. Place almost any verb after “to” in that sentence and you have a functional infinitive as a direct object. However, that is certainly not the only phrase to use this construction:

Ex. Jim **decided** *to take* the car for a test drive.

*To take* is the direct object of the main verb **decided**.

### Infinitive as an Adjective

Unlike gerund phrases, infinitive phrases can be used as adjectives to modify a noun. In such a case, the infinitive phrase will follow the noun

Ex. I **need** a book *to read on the beach*.

*To read on the beach* describes the noun “book,” which is the direct object of the main verb **need**.

### Infinitive as Part of an Adverbial Phrase

When an infinitive is part of an adverbial phrase, the phrase usually answers the question “why?” for the verb.

Ex. *To see her face more clearly*, Jenny **cleaned** the mirror.

*To see her face more clearly* is the infinitive phrase and **cleaned** is the main verb. *When an infinitive phrase is used as an adverb **and** introduces your main clause, it should always be*

*punctuated with a comma.* However, when this sentence is rearranged, we no longer need the comma.

Ex. Jenny **cleaned** the mirror *to see her face more clearly*.

It is common to see the phrase “in order” before this use of an infinitive, as in “Jimmy paraphrased the main points in the margin *in order to learn* quickly.”

### Things to Remember

- Like gerunds and gerund phrases, infinitives and infinitive phrases are verbs that act as nouns in a sentence.
- Infinitives are composed of “to” plus the verb and can be the subject, object, or complement in a sentence.
- Infinitive phrases only require a comma when the infinitive phrase is used as an adverbial phrase and introduces the main clause.

### Contact

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