

Identifying and Writing Infinitive Phrases

One Skill at a Time Lesson

Teacher Overview

Skills Focus:

Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyze	Evaluate	Create
Close Reading		Grammar		Composition	
Reading Strategies Annotation		Usage Direct/Indirect Objects Phrases Infinitive Prepositional Clauses Dependent/Subordinate			

Materials and Resources

The following are websites that offer students additional practice in identifying and writing infinitive phrases:

- http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_verbals.html
- http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/eduweb/grammar/course/sentence/2_4d.htm
- <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/phrases.htm>

Other lessons in the LTF guides which deal with infinitive phrases are

- Sentence Structure Basics
- Sentence Variations
- The Poetry of Phrases

Lesson Introduction

Infinitive phrases are introduced in the sixth grade, along with prepositional phrases. This lesson uses both literary and rhetorical texts that include many infinitive phrases for students to work with as well as activities that require students to write sentences that include infinitive phrases.

Definitions and Examples

You may want to review direct objects and prepositional phrases before asking students to complete the Middle School Activities.

Identifying and Writing Infinitive Phrases

One Skill at a Time Lesson

An infinitive is a verbal (a verb not functioning as a verb) that is easy to recognize. All infinitives begin with the word “to” and end with a verb. An infinitive phrase consists of the infinitive plus any other modifying words. Infinitives can function as nouns, adjectives, and adverbs.

A.

Look at the poem below, “Woman Work,” by Maya Angelou. The first stanza contains several infinitives which are bolded. Think about the effect of using these infinitives.

I’ve got the children to tend	
The clothes to mend	
The floor to mop	
The food to shop	
Then the chicken to fry	5
The baby to dry	
I got company to feed	
The garden to weed	
I’ve got the shirts to press	
The tots to dress	10
The cane to be cut	
I gotta clean up this hut	
Then see about the sick	
And the cotton to pick.	
Shine on me, sunshine	15
Rain on me, rain	
Fall softly, dewdrops	
And cool my brow again.	
Storm, blow me from here	
With your fiercest wind	20
Let me float across the sky	
‘Til I can rest again.	
Fall gently, snowflakes	
Cover me with white	
Cold icy kisses and	25
Let me rest tonight.	
Sun, rain, curving sky	
Mountain, oceans, leaf and stone	
Star shine, moon glow	
You’re all that I can call my own.	30

1. List the verbs in stanza one that follow the word “to.”
2. Convert the following infinitives from the lines of the poem into the verb of the sentence. For example:

I’ve got the children **to tend** becomes: I tend the children.

<i>Original with infinitive</i>	<i>Revised</i>
I’ve got the children to tend	<i>I tend the children</i>
The clothes to mend	
The floor to mop	
The food to shop	
Then the chicken to fry	
The baby to dry	
I got company to feed	
The garden to weed	
I’ve got the shirts to press	
The tots to dress	
The cane to be cut	

3. Read the first stanza aloud in its original form. Then read the revised stanza. Fill in the blanks below to explain the effect of changing the infinitives to verbs.

Angelou uses infinitive phrases in the first stanza of “Woman Work” to _____.
In _____.
the original form, the last word of each line is a _____, _____ emphasizing _____.
The repetition of _____.
_____ calls attention to _____.
In _____.
the revision, the last word of each line is _____, taking the focus away from _____
and placing in on _____.

Middle School Activities:

B.

The following are lines of poetry containing infinitive phrases.

- First underline the infinitive phrase in the line of poetry.
- Then fill in the blanks, substituting your own infinitives and other elements to create your own line of poetry.

1. To see a world in a grain of sand—from “Auguries of Innocence,” William Blake

To _____ a _____ in a _____ of _____ .

2. Three fields to cross till a farm appears –from “Meeting at Night,” Robert Browning

Three _____ to _____ till _____

3. To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees—from “To Autumn,” John Keats

To _____ with _____ the _____

4. How dull it is to pause, to make an end

To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!

As though to breathe were life!—from “Ulysses,” Alfred, Lord Tennyson

How dull it is to _____ , to _____

To _____ not to _____

As though to _____ were life!

5. To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.—from “Ulysses”

To _____ , to _____ , and not _____

6. The mermaids in the basement

Came out to look at me—Emily Dickinson

The _____ in the _____

Came out to _____ at _____

D.

“To” can be used to introduce both prepositional phrases and infinitive phrases. The difference is that a prepositional phrase contains a preposition and a noun (or pronoun) but NO verb. An infinitive is created with the word “to” plus a VERB. An infinitive phrase may contain a noun but a prepositional phrase never contains a verb.

- Read the following excerpt from Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Speech.
- Phrases from the speech containing the word “to” are highlighted and each is numbered.
- In the activity below the speech, circle the word preposition if the “to” phrase is a prepositional phrase. If the phrase is an infinitive, circle the word infinitive and write the verb from the phrase in the blank.

At this second appearing **to take the oath of the presidential office** (1), there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement, somewhat in detail, of a course **to be pursued** (2), seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention, and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known **to the public** (3) as **to myself** (4); and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging **to all** (5). With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard **to it** (6) is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed **to an impending civil war** (7). All dreaded it—all sought **to avert it** (8). While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether **to saving the Union without war** (9), insurgent agents were in the city seeking **to destroy it without war** (10) —seeking **to dissolve the Union** (11), and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would *make* war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would *accept* war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said “the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether.”

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us **to see the right** (12), let us strive on **to finish the work we are in** (13); **to bind up the nation’s wounds** (14); **to care for him who shall have borne the battle** (15), and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations (16).

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------|
| 1. preposition infinitive | _____ |
| | (verb) |
| 2. preposition infinitive | _____ |
| | (verb) |
| 3. preposition infinitive | _____ |
| | (verb) |

4. preposition infinitive

(verb)

5. preposition infinitive

(verb)

6. preposition infinitive

(verb)

7. preposition infinitive

(verb)

8. preposition infinitive

(verb)

9. preposition infinitive

(verb)

10. preposition infinitive

(verb)

11. preposition infinitive

(verb)

12. preposition infinitive

(verb)

13. preposition infinitive

(verb)

14. preposition infinitive

(verb)

15. preposition infinitive

(verb)

16. preposition infinitive

(verb)

Look again at the last paragraph of the speech. List the infinitives from that paragraph in the blanks below:

to _____, to _____, to _____, to _____, to _____.

What effect do you think Lincoln intended to achieve by using all these infinitives at the end of his speech? What was his purpose?

Write three or four sentences that explain how the infinitives help Lincoln achieve his purpose.

Identifying and Writing Infinitive Phrases

One Skill at a Time Lesson

High School Activities:

B. Probably the most recognizable lines ever written that contain infinitive phrases occur in Act III, scene 1 of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Read the lines from the play and then highlight the infinitive phrases.

To be or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them. To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep; perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come?

Fill in the blanks below with the infinitives from the soliloquy:

To _____ or not to _____

To _____ or to _____

To _____, _____ to _____, _____ to _____

What do the infinitives seem to "point out?"

Think about a dilemma you or someone you know might have experienced. Write about it using infinitives:

_____ or _____

C.

The following poem contains two infinitive phrases.

- Highlight the infinitives.

“Heaven-Haven” by Gerard Manley Hopkins

A Nun Takes the Veil

I have desired to go

Where springs not fail,
To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail
And a few lilies blow.

And I have asked to be

Where no storms come,
Where the green swell is in the havens dumb,
And out of the swing of the sea.

1. What is the difference in meaning between the infinitive in stanza 1 and the one used in stanza 2?

2. Write three or four sentence explaining why the poet organized the poem around the infinitives in the way that he did.

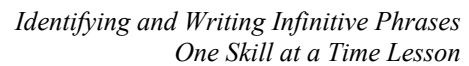
E.

- Read the whole of Abraham Lincoln’s “Second Inaugural Address” below.
- Pay particular attention to his use of infinitive phrases in the final paragraph (boxed).
- Highlight the infinitive phrases in this paragraph.
- Write commentary explaining how using these phrases help Lincoln achieve his rhetorical purpose in this speech.

At this second appearing to take the oath of the presidential office, there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement, somewhat in detail, of a course to be pursued, seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention, and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it—all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to *saving* the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to *destroy* it without war—seeking to dissolve the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would *make* war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would *accept* war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

One eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the Southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the *cause* of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God’s assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men’s faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has his own purposes. “Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!” If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another



With malice toward none, with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

F. Challenge

The paragraph below was written by William Hazlitt.

- Notice Hazlitt's *long* second sentence, composed of many infinitive phrases.
- Underline each infinitive phrase.
- Think about Hazlitt's purpose in writing such a long sentence containing parallel infinitive phrases.
- On your own paper, write commentary explaining how the infinitive phrases help convey Hazlitt's attitude toward money.

Literally and truly, one cannot get on well in the world without money. To be in want of it, is to pass through life with little credit or pleasure; it is to live out of the world, or to be despised if you come into it; it is not to be sent for to court, or asked out to dinner, or noticed in the street; it is not to have your opinion consulted or else rejected with contempt, to have your acquirements carped at and doubted, your good things disparaged, and at last to lose the wit and the spirit to say them; it is to be scrutinized by strangers, and neglected by friends; it is to be a thrall to circumstances, an exile in one's own country; to forego leisure, freedom, ease of body and mind, to be dependent on the good-will and caprice of others, or earn a precarious and irksome livelihood by some laborious employment; it is to be compelled to stand behind a counter, or to sit at a desk in some public office, or to marry your landlady, or not the person you would wish; or to go out to the East or West Indies, or to get a situation as judge abroad, and return home with a liver-complaint; or to be a law-stationer, or a scrivener or scavenger, or newspaper reporter; or to read law and sit in court without a brief; or to be deprived of the use of your fingers by transcribing Greek manuscripts, or to be a seal-engraver and pore yourself blind; or to go upon the stage, or try some of the Fine Arts; with all your pains, anxiety, and hopes, and most probably to fail, or, if you succeed, after the exertions of years, and undergoing constant distress of mind and fortune, to be assailed on every side with envy, back-biting, and falsehood, or to be a favourite with the public for a while, and then thrown into the background - or a gaol, by the fickleness of taste and some new favourite; to be full of enthusiasm and extravagance in youth, of chagrin and disappointment in after-life; to be jostled by the rabble because you do not ride in your coach, or avoided by those who know your worth and shrink from it as a claim on their respect or their purse; to be a burden to your relations, or unable to do anything for them; to be ashamed to venture into crowds; to have cold comfort at home; to lose by degrees your confidence and any talent you might possess; to grow crabbed, morose, and querulous, dissatisfied with every one, but most so with yourself; and plagued out of your life, to look about for a place to die in, and quit the world without any one's asking after your will. The *wiseacres* will possibly, however, crowd round your coffin, and raise a monument at a considerable expense, and after a lapse of time, to commemorate your genius and your misfortunes!