



DOUGLAS COLLEGE

Learning Centre

Using a Dictionary for Help with GERUNDS and INFINITIVES

Writing sentences in English that “sound” right to most English speakers requires more than using grammar rules correctly. Choosing correct idiomatic expressions is also important. Using gerunds and infinitives correctly in English is one of these idiomatic challenges for ESL writers because grammar rules don’t help much with them.

A **gerund** is the **–ing** form of a verb (e.g. *running, jumping, developing*) when it is used as a noun.

An **infinitive** is **to+verb** – e.g. *to run, to jump, to develop*.

Gerunds and infinitives belong to a category of words called “verbals” because they look like verbs (and even act somewhat as verbs) in a sentence, but they do the job that nouns usually perform in a sentence. One key way that nouns function in sentences is as Objects of the Verb. Here is an example of a simple English sentence which follows a subject, verb, object order; notice that the object (*books*) is a noun.

The student forgot her books.
 subject verb object of the verb

However, sometimes we want to use a gerund or infinitive in the object position. For example:

I'll never forget visiting the Prime Minister's home.
 verb object of the verb

He forgot to exercise yesterday.
 verb object of the verb

The difficult part about using gerunds and infinitives as objects of verbs is that there are few rules that help you decide whether to choose a gerund form or an infinitive form for the second verb. The choice almost always depends on which verb comes in front. Different verbs take different verbal object forms.

Choosing Verbal Forms

Four ways to improve your use of verb + verbal combinations are listed below. You will need to combine all four of these methods to significantly improve in this area.

- ◆ Regularly read and listen to English. Notice the verbal forms used. Try to use them whenever possible. This method is slow, but it works. Unfortunately, when you don't know which verbal form to use, this method doesn't give you any short-term way to solve the problem.
- ◆ When you learn new verbs, take the extra step of also memorizing the verbal forms that follow these new verbs. This is a good strategy for commonly used expressions, but English has so many verbs that it will be difficult for you to memorize all verb + verbal combinations that you will need.
- ◆ Ask a native English speaker. This works, but there is not always someone available to answer your questions.
- ◆ Use a good learner's dictionary (hard copy or online). The most effective strategy for improving verbal use in your writing is to check an ESL dictionary every time you are not sure which verbal form follows a verb. When you cannot ask a native English speaker, this is the only independent solution for choosing between the gerund form and the infinitive form. The rest of this handout explains how to use a good learner's dictionary in this way.

Using a Dictionary to Choose Verbals

The first step to using a dictionary to choose verbal forms is to find the right kind of dictionary. Most standard dictionaries do not include help with which verbal form comes after verbs, so although they provide other kinds of useful help, they are of no use with verbal choices because they do not show how words are used in combination with each other in English. However, most dictionaries written specifically for ESL students provide help with verbals. Good ESL learners' dictionaries include the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary and the Collins Cobuild Dictionary.

Each dictionary uses a slightly different system to show verbal usage. In this handout, we will use the online version of the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. You can find this free, online dictionary at:

www.ldoceonline.com.

To do the exercises below, you will need to work at a computer with an internet connection, or use one of the ESL dictionaries listed above. Hard copies of these dictionaries are available for use in the Learning Centre and in the Library.

Dictionary Task

In the dictionary you are using (online or hard copy), look up the word “*postpone*.”

To find out whether *postpone* should be followed by a gerund or an infinitive, look at the examples and patterns that the dictionary gives for the use of this word. Copy the way that the dictionary entry shows you which verbal form to use with the word “*postpone*.”

Let’s look at another example. Look up the verb “*arrange*.”

Does this entry tell you to use the infinitive form (*arrange to do something*) or the gerund form (*arrange doing something*)? In the space below, copy the way that the dictionary shows you which verbal form to use.

Now look at a more difficult example. Look up the verb “*like*.”

This entry is more complicated because *like* can be a verb, a preposition, a noun, an adverb, or an adjective. The first step is to find the information about *like* as a verb and to ignore all the other forms of the word *like*. When you find the entry for *like* used as a verb, look for the examples or word patterns that go with this verb. You should see that either the gerund or the infinitive can be used after the verb *like*. In the space below, copy down how the dictionary shows you these two patterns of verbal use with the word *like*.

Exercise 1: Choosing verbals -- gerunds and infinitives

1. Find the verb in the sentence.
2. Look up the verb in the dictionary you are using.
3. Find out whether you need the gerund or infinitive form after the verb in the sentence.
4. Rewrite the word in brackets (at the end of each sentence) in the correct form in the blank.

Example:

She permitted her daughter to stay at her friend's overnight. (stay)

To answer this question, I looked for the verb in the sentence and found *permitted*. I looked up *permit* in the dictionary and found that the infinitive form (to + verb) is needed after *permit*. The infinitive form of *stay* is *to stay*, so I wrote *to stay* in the blank.

1. He threatened _____ the police about the accident. (tell)
2. She stopped _____ to that store when she found out about the manager's dishonesty. (go)
3. She hired a boy _____ her grass. (cut)
4. He suggested _____ another doctor. (consult)
5. He deserved _____ a medal. (get)
6. He promised _____ her a gift. (bring)
7. He caused her _____ the dish. (break)
8. She finished _____ her homework. (do)
9. He tolerates them _____ in class. (eat)
10. She struggled _____ her children. (feed)
11. He persuaded her _____ the night off. (take)
12. They go _____ every Saturday night. (dance)

Exercise 2: Choosing verbals

1. Find the verb in the sentence.
2. Look up the verb in the dictionary you are using.
3. Find out what verbal form is needed after the verb in the sentence.
4. Put the word in brackets in the correct form and write it in the blank.

1. She dared him _____ across the highway. (run)
2. I will miss _____ you. (see)
3. He quit _____ for the telephone company. (work)
4. Frank challenged Sandra _____ a better mark than him on the exam.
(get)
5. They considered _____ by plane, but decided the bus would be cheaper. (go)
6. The bank manager expects all employees _____ on time for work.
(be)
7. The old man appreciated _____ the award. (receive)
8. They offered _____ me a ride home. (give)
9. The children pretended _____ wild animals. (be)
10. The student practiced _____ his presentation in front of the mirror. (give)
11. He wants _____ during the Christmas holidays. (go, ski)
Note: For this one, you need to look up *want*; then you need to look up *go*.
12. My mother dislikes _____ dishes. (wash)

Exercise 3: Choosing verbals and prepositions

1. Find the verb in the sentence.

2. Look up the verb in the dictionary you are using.

3. Find out what verbal form is needed after the verb in the sentence. Some sentences require a preposition before the verbal. Use the dictionary to help you find the correct preposition, too. Notice that after most prepositions the gerund form is used.

4. Put the word in brackets in the correct form and write it in the blank. Also add any prepositions that are needed.

1. He wishes _____ his uncle in Toronto over the holidays. (visit)
2. He is looking forward _____ Toronto's famous places, too.
(see)
3. The young man denied _____ into the drugstore. (break)
4. Cathy is interested _____ Anthropology at college.
(study)
5. Peter saw the police _____ a man down the street. (chase)
6. The man was accused _____ an old lady's purse. (steal)
7. Alex apologized to his sister _____ her feelings. (hurt)
8. The rain prevented us _____ on the picnic. (go)
9. Because he is a student, he can't afford _____ that expensive suit.
(buy)
10. The bad news stopped him _____ his birthday party.
(enjoy)

Exercise 4: Finding verbals to use in your own sentences

Write a sentence using forms of each of the two verbs in brackets. Change the second verb to a verbal form. If necessary, add a preposition as well. Use a dictionary to help you. When you're finished, discuss your sentences with your tutor.

1. (encourage, study)

2. (thank, give)

3. (mention, meet)

4. (forbid, go)

5. (deserve, win)

6. (resist, live)

Proofreading for Verbals

Verbals are an issue that should not concern you while you are writing a paragraph or essay. Instead, you should leave concerns about verbals until the editing or proofreading stage of writing. After you have completed a draft, you need to go back and check your writing for problems with verbals.

This is a process you can use to check verbals:

1. Underline all verb forms that are followed by another word that looks like a verb.
2. If you are in doubt about which verbal form to use or about a preposition that goes between the verb and verbal, look up the verb in the dictionary to check the sentence structure suggestions.
3. Cross out mistakes in verbal form or preposition usage and write in the corrections.

Exercise 5: Proofreading for Verbal Errors – Sentences

Proofread for verbal errors and their prepositions in the following sentences. Use the proofreading steps described above. Some sentences are correct.

Example:

to study
Mike is too tired ~~about studying~~ every night.

1. The teacher recommended to study the chapter carefully before the exam.
2. The students postponed preparing for the exam until the night before.
3. Helen promised taking the library book back.
4. Don't let the bad weather deter you in having a good time.
5. The teacher insisted for the students arriving on time for class.
6. Paul hates getting up early in the morning.
7. Lisa delayed to phone home until she got her exam back.
8. They worked all day preparing for the big party.
9. The janitor started to clean the floor after everyone left.
10. The rain prevented the children from go to the park.

Exercise 6: Proofreading for Verbal Errors - Paragraph

1. Underline all verbs that are followed by another word that looks like a verb.
2. If you are in doubt about the form of the verbal or about a preposition that goes between the verb and its verbal, look up the verb in the dictionary to check which form of verbal should be used with it.
3. Cross out the mistakes in verbal form or preposition, and write in the corrections.

The teacher expected the students doing lots of homework, but they complained about having to do so much work. When the teacher expressed concern about the situation, the students said that the assignments were boring, and this led them to avoiding the work. The teacher said they should not avoid doing the work because it would cause them doing poorly on their tests. However, she also said she would try to make the assignments more interesting. She advised them doing the work if they expected on passing the course. The students agreed with trying harder. A few weeks later, the teacher and the students discussed the homework situation again. She reported that more students had managed to complete the work. The students hesitated telling her that the assignments were still boring. They realized they just needed to do the assignments anyway.

Exercise 7: Proofreading your own Writing for Problems with Verbals

Write a paragraph about one of the following:

- ◆ your plans at the end of term
- ◆ a disagreement you have had with someone
- ◆ your goals in coming to Douglas College

While writing the paragraph, don't worry about verbals. Concentrate on writing an interesting paragraph. When you have finished writing a draft of the paragraph, proofread for verbal errors and prepositions.

For more practice, see:

Azar, B. (1989). *Understanding and Using English Grammar*. (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents. Chapters 14 and 15.

Learning Centre handout: "Using a Dictionary for help with Idiomatic Prepositions"

Recommended Dictionaries:

Collins Cobuild English Dictionary. (1995). London: Harper Collins Publishers.

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. (3rd ed.) (1995). Harlow Essex: Longman.
(The online website for this dictionary is www.ldoceonline.com.)

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. (4th ed.). (1989). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

DICTIONARY HELP FOR GERUNDS AND INFINITIVES – ANSWER KEY

Exercise 1: Choosing verbals -- gerunds and infinitives

1. He threatened to tell the police about the accident. (tell)
2. She stopped going to that store when she found out about the manager's dishonesty. (go)
3. She hired a boy to cut her grass. (cut)
4. He suggested consulting another doctor. (consult)
5. He deserved to get a medal. (get)
6. He promised to bring her a gift. (bring)
7. He caused her to break the dish. (break)
8. She finished doing her homework. (do)
9. He tolerates them eating in class. (eat)
10. She struggled to feed her children. (feed)
11. He persuaded her to take the night off. (take)
12. They go dancing every Saturday night. (dance)

Exercise 2: Choosing verbals

1. She dared him to run across the highway.
2. I will miss seeing you.
3. He quit working for the telephone company.
4. Frank challenged Sandra to get a better mark than him on the exam.
5. They considered going by plane, but decided the bus would be cheaper.
6. The bank manager expects all employees to be on time for work.
7. The old man appreciated receiving the award.
8. They offered to give me a ride home.
9. The children pretended to be wild animals.
10. The student practiced giving his presentation in front of the mirror.
11. He wants to go skiing during the Christmas holidays.
12. My mother dislikes washing dishes. (wash)

Exercise 3: Choosing verbals and prepositions

1. He wishes ____to visit_____ his uncle in Toronto over the holidays.
2. He is looking forward _____to_____ _____seeing_____ Toronto's famous places, too.
3. The young man denied _____breaking_____ into the drugstore.
4. Cathy is interested _____in_____ _____studying_____ Anthropology at college.
5. Peter saw the police _____chase/chasing_____ a man down the street.
6. The man was accused _____of_____ _____stealing_____ an old lady's purse.
7. Alex apologized to his sister _____for_____ _____hurting_____ her feelings.
8. The rain prevented us _____from_____ _____going_____ on the picnic.
9. Because he is a student, he can't afford _____to buy_____ that expensive suit.
10. The bad news stopped him _____from_____ _____enjoying_____ his birthday party.

Exercise 4: Finding verbals to use in your own sentences

Answers will vary. These answers below are examples of what your sentences could look like.

1. (encourage, study)
He encouraged her to study.
2. (thank, give)
He thanked her for giving him a present.
3. (mention, meet)
He mentioned meeting her last week.
4. (forbid, go)
She is forbidden from going to the dance.
5. (deserve, win)
The girl deserved to win first place.
6. (resist, live)
I resist living in poverty.

Exercise 5: Proofreading for Verbals – Sentences

1. The teacher recommended ~~to study~~ **studying** the chapter carefully before the exam.
2. The students postponed preparing for the exam until the night before.
3. Helen promised ~~taking~~ **to take** the library book back.
4. Don't let the bad weather deter you ~~in~~ **from** having a good time.
5. The teacher insisted ~~for~~ **that** the students ~~arriving~~ **arrive** on time for class.
6. Paul hates getting up early in the morning.
7. Lisa delayed ~~to phone~~ **phoning** home until she got her exam back.
8. They worked all day preparing for the big party.
9. The janitor started to clean the floor after everyone left.
10. The rain prevented the children from ~~go~~ **going** to the park.

Exercise 6: Proofreading for Verbals - Paragraph

The teacher expected the students ~~doing~~ **to do** lots of homework, but they complained about having to do so much work. When the teacher expressed concern about the situation, the students said that the assignments were boring, and this led them to ~~avoiding~~ **avoid** the work. The teacher said they should not avoid doing the work because it would cause them ~~doing~~ **to do** poorly on their tests. However, she also said she would try to make the assignments more interesting. She advised them ~~doing~~ **to do** the work if they expected ~~on~~ to ~~passing~~ **pass** the course. The students agreed ~~with trying~~ **to try** harder. A few weeks later, the teacher and the students discussed the homework situation again. She reported that more students had managed to complete the work. The students hesitated ~~telling~~ **to tell** her that the assignments were still boring. They realized they just needed to do the assignments anyway.