

Infinitives and Gerunds

See *A Writer's Reference*, pp. 382-83; 393-94; 406; 443-45; 464; 544-46 for in-depth information on infinitives and gerunds.

What is an infinitive?

An **infinitive** is the “to” form of a verb (e.g., *to run, to sleep, to watch*). The word “to” serves as a marker that is added to the base form of the verb. Infinitives can function as adjectives, nouns, or adverbs.

Examples:

- *Adjective:* The best paper to write is one about President Lincoln.
- *Noun:* The quickest way to get there is to drive.
- *Adverb:* Smokers find it difficult to quit.

Infinitive phrases also serve as adjectives, nouns, and adverbs.

Examples:

- *Adjective phrase:* Traveling can sometimes create the impulse to paint something beautiful.
- *Noun phrase:* He loves to paint elaborate pictures.
- *Adverbial phrase:* A painting is designed to make people think.

What is a gerund?

A **gerund** is the “-ing” form of a verb* (e.g., *jumping, sleeping, reading*). Gerunds always serve as nouns.

Examples:

- *Subject:* Sleeping is my favorite activity of the day.
- *Object:* I do not like shopping.

A **gerund phrase** serves the same function as a noun.

Examples:

- *Subject:* Sleeping late is the best part about Saturdays.
- *Object:* I have never liked shopping at the mall.

***Important Note:** Not all verb forms ending with “-ing” are gerunds. The word could also be a present participle, which serves as an adjective (e.g., a *teaching* degree). The best way to determine whether the word is a gerund or a present participle is to see whether it serves as a noun or an adjective. If it is a noun, it is a gerund.

When to know which one to use

Unfortunately, there is not a simple explanation to determine whether one should use an infinitive or a gerund; however, there are some helpful hints.

When to use infinitives

Infinitives are typically used when representing intentions, desires, or expectations.

Examples:

- I decided to find a job.
- My advisor wanted me to apply to several colleges.
- I expect to make good grades this year.
- Kelly was working as a waitress, but she stopped to study English.

When to use gerunds

Gerunds tend to represent facts.

Example:

- Her writing a strong letter of recommendation made a big difference.

In this sentence, the gerund, *writing*, serves as the subject of the sentence and calls attention to the FACT that the letter was written. In contrast, if we were to use an infinitive instead, the sentence would be stating an expectation instead of a fact.

Example:

- To write a strong letter of recommendation would make a big difference.

Another rule for when to use gerunds is that, any time one follows a preposition, *always* use a gerund and never an infinitive.

Examples:

- The berries are all right for eating. [correct]
- The berries are all right for to eat. [incorrect]

The following verbs are followed only by gerunds, not by infinitives:

admit	discuss	finish	practice	resist
avoid	dislike	imagine	put off	risk
consider	enjoy	miss	quit	suggest
deny	escape	postpone	recall	tolerate