

GERUNDS AND INFINITIVES

Grammar

ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC SUPPORT



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VERB FORMS:

Understanding how verbs are conjugated is an important part of understanding a language.

Gerunds and infinitives are two of the most commonly used verb forms in the English language. This handout outlines the differences between each form and how to use them.



THE PRESENT PARTICIPLE:

Before the gerund can be understood, it is important to be familiar with the present participle.

The gerund and the present participle are formed the same way, so they can be difficult to tell apart.

Present participle = Base + ing

Gerund = Base + ing

However, the two forms have different uses.

The present participle can be used as a **verb** or an **adjective** as explained below.

Uses of the present participle:

1. Present participle as a **continuous verb**:
She is writing.
I have been waiting for an hour.
2. Present participle **following movement and position verbs**:
I like to go sightseeing when I travel.
He sat watching the performance.

3. Present participle **following perception verbs**:

Perception verbs: Seeing/watching, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling

I watched the ballerinas dancing.

He could hear music playing.

4. Present participle as an **adjective**:

He made a startling discovery.

Let's get out of this freezing weather!

5. Present participle expressing **two simultaneous actions**:

She **wrote** her essay while she **listened** to music →
She wrote her essay listening to music.

He **passed** his old school as he **drove** to work →
Driving to work, he passed his old school.

6. Present participle as an **explanation**:

Present participles can be used instead of *since* or *because* to explain a reason for an action

Being afraid of the dark, he always slept with a light on.

Remembering that they were out of eggs, she headed to the grocery store.

GERUNDS:

Although gerunds look the same as the present participle, they are used for a different purpose.

Gerunds function as **nouns** and can be used in a number of contexts as highlighted below.

Uses of the gerund:

1. Gerund as the **subject** of the sentence:

Exercising can help improve physical and mental health.

Reading is a great way to pass the time.

2. Gerund as the complement of the verb **to be**:

The most important strategy for learning a new language is practicing regularly.

His pastimes are skiing, biking, and cooking.

3. Gerund **following prepositions**:

The gerund is **required** when a verb follows a preposition.

Prepositions: *At, before, after, by, etc.*

I've never been good at saying goodbye.

Be sure to check over your work before submitting it.

She expressed her feelings by writing about them.

4. Gerund in **compound nouns**:

I'll meet you at the swimming pool.

She bought a new pair of running shoes for the race.

When the washing machine was broken, he had to wash his clothes by hand.

Note: Based on the context of these nouns, it is clear that the gerund is used as part of a compound noun and not as a verb. For example, *running shoes* is a compound noun that means shoes worn for running and not shoes that are performing the action of running.



5. Gerund **following phrasal verbs**:

Phrasal verbs: verb + **preposition** or **adverb**

She gave up eating junk food for her diet.

His mom hinted at getting a dog for his birthday.

I always put off starting my homework until the last minute.

Note: Some phrasal verbs include the word *to* as a preposition and therefore must be followed by a gerund (e.g., *to look forward to, to be used to, to get around to*).

These can be distinguished from infinitives by checking to see if the word *it* can follow the word *to* logically; if it can, then *to* is a preposition and a gerund should follow it.

I look forward to seeing you again.

(*I look forward to it* → *to* is a preposition)

She is used to living on her own.

(*She is used to it* → *to* is a preposition)

6. Gerund **after certain expressions**:

Gerunds are required after expressions like *can't help, can't stand, to be worth, and it's no use*.

I couldn't help feeling bad about what had happened.

He can't stand being late for work.

It might be worth considering other options.

It's no use trying to reason with her.

INFINITIVES:

Infinitives = to + verb base (verb in simplest stem form)

Infinitives can function as nouns, adjectives, and adverbs

Noun: She likes *to ski*. (*To ski* is a thing, or noun, that she likes.)

Adjective: Canada is one of his favourite places *to visit*. (*To visit* is an adjective that modifies the noun *Canada*.)

Adverb: I always go to the library *to study*. (*To study* is an adverb that modifies the verb *go*.)

Note: Sometimes, the *to* is optional:

Herbal tea helps me *(to)* sleep at night.

The zero infinitive:

Sometimes, the word *to* is omitted when forming an infinitive. A **zero infinitive** then, is just the base form of the verb.

Unlike the example above, omitting the *to* is not optional. The zero infinitive is required when the word *to* would not make sense in the context of the sentence.

Incorrect: He can *to* see better with his new glasses.

Correct: He can *see* better with his new glasses.

The following list clarifies when the zero infinitive should be used.

Uses of the zero infinitive:

1. Zero infinitive after **auxiliaries**:

Auxiliaries: can, cannot, should, would, could, shall, must, might, etc.

I **can** go tomorrow if you **would** like.

He **might** stay another night if he **cannot** find another place to stay.

You **must** bring warm clothes and you **should** also pack an umbrella.

2. Zero infinitive after **verbs of perception**:

Verbs of perception: See/watch, hear, feel, smell, taste

I **saw** you *wave* from across the parking lot.

They **heard** someone *knock* at the door.

She **felt** the wind *brush* against her face.

3. Zero infinitive after the verbs "make" and "let":

My parents **made** me *finish* my homework.

The teacher **let** them *leave* class early.

Let's *wait* a while before we go swimming.

4. Zero infinitive after the expression "had better":

We **had better** *study* for the test next week.

I **had better** *go* to bed, I have an early morning.

5. Zero infinitive with suggestions using "why":

Why *wait* to see the movie? We could go now.

Why not *get* some pizza for supper?



GERUNDS VS. INFINITIVES:

Certain verbs can be followed by either a gerund or an infinitive. Sometimes, both expressions will have the same meaning, but sometimes they will mean different things.

Some examples of gerund and infinitives with the **SAME** meaning:

Verb	Followed by a Gerund	Followed by an Infinitive
Attempt	I attempted <i>surfing</i> for the first time in California.	I attempted <i>to surf</i> for the first time in California.
Begin	Did you begin <i>noticing</i> any changes in his behavior?	Did you begin <i>to notice</i> any changes in his behaviour?
Continue	She continued <i>working</i> on her Spanish after the class ended.	She continued <i>to work</i> on her Spanish after the class ended.
Neglect	Don't neglect <i>changing</i> your car's oil	Don't neglect <i>to change</i> your car's oil
Start	The store started <i>selling</i> the product in November.	The store started <i>to sell</i> the product in November.
Prefer	If you prefer <i>waiting</i> until next week, that's fine	If you prefer <i>to wait</i> until next week, that's fine
Recommend	She recommended <i>checking</i> online for the product	She recommended <i>to check</i> online for the product

Some examples of gerunds and infinitives with **DIFFERENT** meanings:

Verb	Followed by a Gerund	Followed by an Infinitive
Come	They came <i>running</i> in the gym. (i.e., They entered the gym while running)	They came <i>to run</i> in the gym. (i.e., they came to the gym <i>in order to</i> run)
Go on	She went on <i>singing</i> until the teacher asked her to stop. (i.e., she continued to sing in that moment)	She went on <i>to sing</i> professionally. (i.e., she became a singer later in life)
Stop	He stopped <i>speaking</i> with his friend after their argument. (i.e., he no longer spoke with his friend)	He stopped <i>to speak</i> with his friend on his way to work. (i.e., he stopped what he was doing to speak to his friend)
Try	She tried <i>meditating</i> to relieve her stress. (i.e., She tried meditation as a possible solution to her stress)	She tried <i>to meditate</i> to relieve her stress, but she was interrupted. (i.e., she was unsuccessful in her attempt to meditate)
Remember	Do you remember <i>going</i> to see that play? (i.e., the remembered action is a definite past event)	Did you remember <i>to go</i> to the bank? (i.e., the remembered action is in question; it may not have happened)

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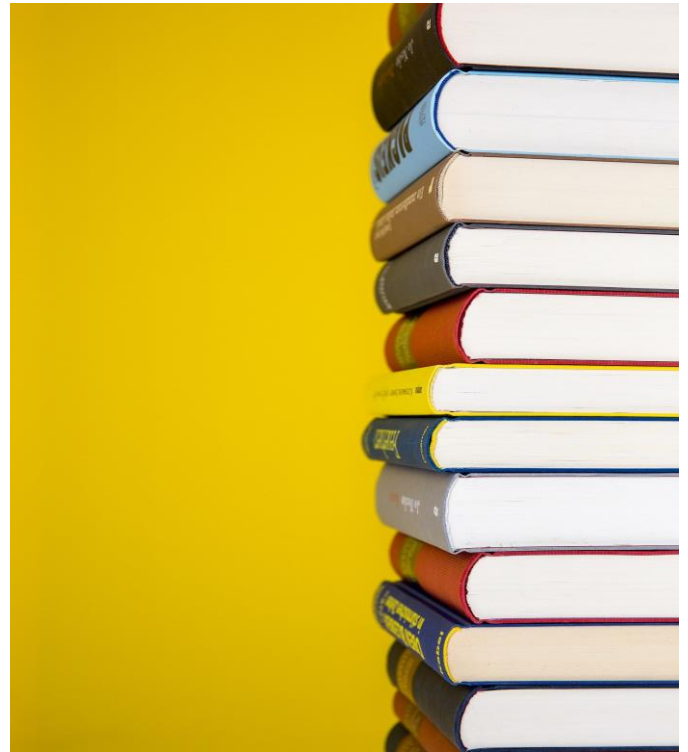
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