

Gerunds, Infinitives and Participles

A gerund is a verbal that ends in *-ing* and functions as a noun. The term *verbal* indicates that a gerund, like the other two kinds of verbals, is based on a verb and therefore expresses action or a state of being. However, since **a gerund functions as a noun**, it occupies some positions in a sentence that a noun ordinarily would, for example: subject, direct object, subject complement, and object of preposition.

Gerund as subject:

- *Traveling* might satisfy your desire for new experiences.
- The study abroad program might satisfy your desire for new experiences.

Gerund as direct object:

- They do not appreciate my *singing*.
- They do not appreciate my assistance.

Gerund as subject complement:

- My cat's favorite activity is *sleeping*.
- My cat's favorite food is salmon.

Gerund as object of preposition:

- The police arrested him for *speeding*.
- The police arrested him for criminal activity.

A Gerund Phrase is a group of words consisting of a gerund and the modifier(s) and/or (pro)noun(s) or noun phrase(s) that function as the direct object(s), indirect object(s), or complement(s) of the action or state expressed in the gerund.

Punctuation

A gerund virtually never requires any punctuation with it.

Points to remember:

- 1. A gerund is a verbal ending in -ing that is used as a noun.**
- 2. A gerund phrase consists of a gerund plus modifier(s), object(s), and/or complement(s).**
- 3. Gerunds and gerund phrases virtually never require punctuation.**

Exercise on Gerunds:

Underline the gerunds or gerund phrases in the following sentences and label how they function in the sentence (subject, direct object, subject complement, object of preposition).

1. Swimming keeps me in shape.
2. Swimming in your pool is always fun.
3. Telling your father was a mistake.
4. The college recommends sending applications early.
5. He won the game by scoring during the overtime period.
6. Her most important achievement was winning the national championship.
7. Going to work today took all my energy.
8. Fighting for a losing cause made them depressed.

Exercise Answers:

Underline the gerunds or gerund phrases in the following sentences and label how they function in the sentence (subject, direct object, subject complement, object of preposition).

1. Swimming keeps me in shape. [subject]
2. Swimming in your pool is always fun. [subject]
3. Telling your father was a mistake. [subject]
4. The college recommends sending applications early. [direct object]
5. He won the game by scoring during the overtime period. [object of preposition]
6. Her most important achievement was winning the national championship.
[subject complement]
7. Going to work today took all my energy. [subject]
8. Fighting for a losing cause made them depressed. [subject]

Infinitives

An infinitive is a verbal consisting of the word *to* plus a verb (in its simplest "stem" form) and functioning as a noun, adjective, or adverb. The term *verbal* indicates that an infinitive, like the other two kinds of verbals, is based on a verb and therefore expresses action or a state of being. However, the infinitive may function as a subject, direct object, subject complement, adjective, or adverb in a sentence. Although an infinitive is easy to locate because of the *to* + verb form, deciding what function it has in a sentence can sometimes be confusing.

- *To wait* seemed foolish when decisive action was required. (subject)
- Everyone wanted *to go*. (direct object)
- His ambition is *to fly*. (subject complement)
- He lacked the strength *to resist*. (adjective)
- We must study *to learn*. (adverb)

Be sure not to confuse an infinitive--a verbal consisting of *to* plus a verb--with a prepositional phrase beginning with *to*, which consists of *to* plus a noun or pronoun and any modifiers.

Infinitives: to fly, to draw, to become, to enter, to stand, to catch, to belong

Prepositional Phrases: to him, to the committee, to my house, to the mountains, to us, to this address

An Infinitive Phrase is a group of words consisting of an infinitive and the modifier(s) and/or (pro)noun(s) or noun phrase(s) that function as the actor(s), direct object(s), indirect object(s), or complement(s) of the action or state expressed in the infinitive.

Punctuation: If the infinitive is used as an adverb and is the beginning phrase in a sentence, it should be set off with a comma; otherwise, no punctuation is needed for an infinitive phrase.

- *To buy a basket of flowers*, John had to spend his last dollar.
- *To improve your writing*, you must consider your purpose and audience.

Points to remember:

- 1. An infinitive is a verbal consisting of the word *to* plus a verb; it may be used as a noun, adjective, or adverb.**
- 2. An infinitive phrase consists of an infinitive plus modifier(s), object(s), complement(s), and/or actor(s).**
- 3. An infinitive phrase requires a comma only if it is used as an adverb at the beginning of a sentence.**

Exercise on Infinitives:

Underline the infinitive phrase and label the way it is used in the sentence, adding any punctuation as needed.

1. I want to go.
2. I want you to go home.
3. We want to see the play.
4. To see a shooting star is good luck.
5. To fight against those odds would be ridiculous.

Now underline the infinitive phrase and label how it is used in the sentence.

6. To design a new building for them would be challenging.
7. I want him to be my bodyguard.
8. Jim is expected to program computers at his new job.
9. They will try to build a new stadium in ten years.
10. To distill a quart of moonshine takes two hours.
11. The president wants to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.
12. She has the money to buy it.
13. We demonstrated to attract attention to our agenda.
14. I do not like to give poor grades.
15. The dogs were taught to stand, to sit, and to bark on command.
16. To be great is to be true to yourself and to the highest principles of honor.
17. To see is to believe.

Exercise Answers:

Underline the infinitive phrase and label the way it is used in the sentence.

1. I want to go. [noun/direct object]
2. I want you to go home. [noun/direct object]
3. We want to see the play. [noun/direct object]
4. To see a shooting star is good luck. [noun/subject]
5. To fight against those odds would be ridiculous. [noun/subject]
6. To design a new building for them would be challenging. [noun/subject]
7. I want him to be my bodyguard. [noun/direct object]
8. Jim is expected to program computers at his new job. [noun/direct object]
9. They will try to build a new stadium in ten years. [noun/direct object]
10. To distill a quart of moonshine takes two hours. [noun/subject]
11. The president wants to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. [noun/direct object]
12. She has the money to buy it. [adjective/modifying *money*]
13. We demonstrated to attract attention to our agenda. [adverb/modifying *demonstrated*; note that *to our agenda* is a prepositional phrase, not an infinitive phrase]
14. I do not like to give poor grades. [noun/direct object]
15. The dogs were taught to stand, to sit, and to bark on command. [nouns/direct objects]
16. To be great is to be true to yourself and to the highest principles of honor.
[nouns: 1. subject; 2. subject complement; note that *to yourself* and *to the highest principles of honor* are both prepositional phrases, not infinitive phrases]
17. To see is to believe. [nouns: 1. subject; 2. subject complement]

Comparing Gerunds and Infinitives

The difference in the form of gerunds and infinitives is quite clear just from comparing the following lists:

Gerunds: swimming, hoping, telling, eating, dreaming

Infinitives: to swim, to hope, to tell, to eat, to dream

Their functions, however, overlap. Gerunds always function as nouns, but infinitives often also serve as nouns. Deciding which to use can be confusing in many situations, especially for people whose first language is not English.

Confusion between gerunds and infinitives occurs primarily in cases in which one or the other functions as the direct object in a sentence. In English some verbs take gerunds as verbal direct objects exclusively while other verbs take only infinitives and still others can take either. Many such verbs are listed below, organized according to which kind of verbal direct object they take.

Verbs that take only infinitives as verbal direct objects

agree	decide	expect	hesitate
learn	need	promise	neglect
hope	want	plan	attempt
propose	intend	pretend	

Examples:

I hope to go on a vacation soon.

(not: I hope going on a vacation soon.*)

He promised to go on a diet.

(not: He promised going on a diet. *)

They agreed to sign the treaty.

(not: They agreed signing the treaty.*)

Because she was nervous, she hesitated to speak.

(not: Because she was nervous, she hesitated speaking.*)

They will attempt to resuscitate the victim

(not: They will attempt resuscitating the victim.*)

Verbs that take only gerunds as verbal direct objects

deny	risk	delay	consider
can't help	keep	give up	be fond of
finish	quit	put off	practice
postpone	tolerate	suggest	stop (quit)
regret	enjoy	keep (on)	dislike
admit	avoid	recall	mind
miss	detest	appreciate	recommend
get/be through	get/be tired of	get/be accustomed to	get/be used to

Examples:

They always avoid drinking before driving.

(not: They always avoid to drink before driving.*)

I recall asking her that question.

(not: I recall to ask her that question.*)

She put off buying a new jacket.

(not: She put off to buy a new jacket.*)

Mr. Allen enjoys cooking.

(not: Mr. Allen enjoys to cook.*)

Charles keeps calling her.

(not: Charles keeps to call her.*)

Verbs that take gerunds or infinitives as verbal direct objects

start	begin	continue	hate
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prefer	like	love	try
remember			

Examples:

She has continued *to work* at the store.

She has continued *working* at the store.

They like *to go* to the movies.

They like *going* to the movies.

Brent started *to walk* home.

Brent started *walking* home.

Forget and remember

These two verbs change meaning depending on whether a gerund or infinitive is used as the object.

Examples:

Jack forgets to take out the cat. (He regularly forgets.)

Jack forgets taking out the cat. (He did it, but he doesn't remember now.)

Jack forgot to take out the cat. (He never did it.)

Jack forgot taking out the cat. (He did it, but he didn't remember sometime later.)

Jack remembers to take out the cat. (He regularly remembers.)

Jack remembers taking out the cat. (He did it, and he remembers now.)

Jack remembered to take out the cat. (He did it.)

Jack remembered taking out the cat. (He did it, and he remembered sometime later.)

In the second of each pair of example sentences above, the past progressive gerund form *having taken* can be used in place of *taking* to avoid any possible confusion.

Participles

A participle is a verbal that is used as an adjective and most often ends in *-ing* or *-ed*. The term *verbal* indicates that a participle, like the other two kinds of verbals, is based on a verb and therefore expresses action or a state of being. However, since they function as adjectives, participles modify nouns or pronouns. There are two types of participles: present participles and past participles. Present participles end in *-ing*. Past participles end in *-ed*, *-en*, *-d*, *-t*, or *-n*, as in the words *asked*, *eaten*, *saved*, *dealt*, and *seen*.

- The *crying* baby had a wet diaper.
- *Shaken*, he walked away from the *wrecked* car.
- The *burning* log fell off the fire.
- *Smiling*, she hugged the *panting* dog.

A participial phrase is a group of words consisting of a participle and the modifier(s) and/or (pro)noun(s) or noun phrase(s) that function as the direct object(s), indirect object(s), or complement(s) of the action or state expressed in the participle.

Punctuation: When a participial phrase begins a sentence, a comma should be placed after the phrase.

- *Arriving at the store*, I found that it was closed.
- *Washing and polishing the car*, Frank developed sore muscles.

If the participle or participial phrase comes in the middle of a sentence, it should be set off with commas only if the information is not essential to the meaning of the sentence.

- Sid, *watching an old movie*, drifted in and out of sleep.
- The church, *destroyed by a fire*, was never rebuilt.

Note that if the participial phrase is essential to the meaning of the sentence, no commas should be used:

- The student *earning the highest grade point average* will receive a special award.
- The guy *wearing the chicken costume* is my cousin.

If a participial phrase comes at the end of a sentence, a comma usually precedes the phrase if it modifies an earlier word in the sentence but not if the phrase directly follows the word it modifies.

- The local residents often saw Ken wandering through the streets.
(The phrase modifies *Ken*, not *residents*.)
- Tom nervously watched the woman, alarmed by her silence.
(The phrase modifies *Tom*, not *woman*.)

Points to remember:

1. A participle is a verbal ending in *-ing* (present) or *-ed*, *-en*, *-d*, *-t*, or *-n* (past) that functions as an adjective, modifying a noun or pronoun.
2. A participial phrase consists of a participle plus modifier(s), object(s), and/or complement(s).
3. Participles and participial phrases must be placed as close to the nouns or pronouns they modify as possible, and those nouns or pronouns must be clearly stated.
4. A participial phrase is set off with commas when it: a) comes at the beginning of a sentence, b) interrupts a sentence as a nonessential element, or c) comes at the end of a sentence and is separated from the word it modifies.

Exercise on Participles:

Underline the participial phrase(s) in each of the following sentences, and draw a line to the noun or pronoun modified.

1. Getting up at five, we got an early start.
2. Facing college standards, the students realized that they hadn't worked hard

enough in high school.

3. Statistics reported by the National Education Association revealed that seventy percent of American colleges offer remedial English classes emphasizing composition.

4. The overloaded car gathered speed slowly.

5. Gathering my courage, I asked for a temporary loan.

In each of the following sentences, underline the participial phrase(s), draw a line to the word(s) modified, and punctuate the sentence correctly. Remember that some sentences may not need punctuation.

6. Starting out as an army officer Karen's father was frequently transferred.

7. Mrs. Sears showing more bravery than wisdom invited thirty boys and girls to a party.

8. The student left in charge of the class was unable to keep order.

9. Applicants must investigate various colleges learning as much as possible about them before applying for admission.

10. The crying boy angered by the bully began to fight.

Rewrite the following sentences (you may need to reword them slightly) with the correct placement and punctuation of the participial phrases.

11. Espousing a conservative point of view the proposal for more spending on federal social programs bothered him.

12. Absorbed in an interesting conversation my scheduled appointment time passed unnoticed.

Exercise Answers:

Underline the participial phrase(s) in each of the following sentences, and draw a line to the noun or pronoun modified.

1. Getting up at five, we got an early start. [modifies *we*]

2. Facing college standards, the students realized that they hadn't worked hard enough in high school. [modifies *the students*]

3. Statistics reported by the National Education Association revealed that seventy

percent of American colleges offer remedial English classes emphasizing composition. [1. modifies *statistics*; 2. modifies *classes*]

4. The overloaded car gathered speed slowly. [modifies *car*]

5. Gathering my courage, I asked for a temporary loan. [modifies *I*]

In each of the following sentences, underline the participial phrase(s), draw a line to the word(s) modified, and punctuate the sentence correctly. Remember that some sentences may not need punctuation.

6. Starting out as an army officer, Karen's father was frequently transferred.
[modifies *Karen's father*]

7. Mrs. Sears, showing more bravery than wisdom, invited thirty boys and girls to a party. [modifies *Mrs. Sears*]

8. The student left in charge of the class was unable to keep order. [modifies *student*]

9. Applicants must investigate various colleges, learning as much as possible about them before applying for admission. [modifies *applicants*; note that *applying for admission* is a gerund phrase, not a participial phrase]

10. The crying boy, angered by the bully, began to fight. [both modify *boy*]

Rewrite the following sentences (you may need to reword them slightly) with the correct placement and punctuation of the participial phrases.

11. Espousing a conservative point of view the proposal for more spending on federal social programs bothered him.

The opening participial phrase is misplaced because it is intended to modify *him*, not *the proposal*. A possible revision would be: Espousing a conservative point of view, he was bothered by the proposal for more spending on federal social programs.

12. Absorbed in an interesting conversation my scheduled appointment time passed unnoticed.

The opening participial phrase is dangling because it modifies a term that doesn't appear in the sentence: *I*, that is, the person having the conversation. The "scheduled appointment time" couldn't have been "absorbed in an interesting conversation." A possible revision would be: Absorbed in an interesting

conversation, I allowed my scheduled appointment time to pass unnoticed.

Gerund and Infinitive Exercises

1. I had to ask the boys (stop) (ride) their mini-scooters in the corridor.
2. Don't start (try) (learn) algebra before you have finished (learn) (do) simple things in arithmetic.
3. We can't think of (buy) a new house before (sell) the old one.
4. I'd love (have) the opportunity of (meet) you again.
5. Our teacher has promised (help) us (prepare) for next week's test.
6. I hate (get up) early in winter and (get ready) in the dark.
7. If you can't fix that old thing, try (hit) it with a hammer!
8. I saw her (sit) at the bus stop, and I heard her (tell) her friend not to wait for her.
9. Poor Charles! The police suspected him of (try) (sell) stolen bicycles.
10. Can you manage (finish) (pack) these parcels alone?

I. Combine each pair of sentences with a gerund.

1. I don't approve of (it). They spent the students' money.

2. We depended on (it). Tom is able to take care of himself.

3. I hated (it). I had to take this test.

4. He denied (it). He was late for class.

5. Sue was worried by (it). Her husband smokes so much.

II. Fill the correct forms of the verbs below:

1. She hates (walk) _____ along at night.

2. They wanted (make) _____ us (work) _____ all day

without (give) _____ us lunch.

3. We took for him every day, but we keep (miss) _____ him.

III Form sentences using the words in ()s and the sentences given:

1. He doesn't enjoy (drive, night) _____

2. I look forward to (see, you, next week) _____

3. (he, return, money) surprised the police. _____

4. He was finally permitted (leave, country) _____

5. Mrs. Smith lets (children, stay up, late, Saturday night)

6. The child enjoys (listen, fairy tales) _____

7. I expect (see) him soon _____

8. We had (carpenter, build, large cabinet) _____

9. I can't understand (they rejected, advice, their lawyer) _____

10. The teacher made (all poor students, take, test, again) _____

11. They are preparing (go, Africa) _____

12. She is always complaining (have) too much work to do. _____

13. He was warned (not, come home, so late) _____

14. After their quarrel, they stopped (talk, each other) _____

15. (criticize, by anyone) hurts his feelings. _____

Choose one of four options:

1 I am interested _____ your class.

- to take
- to taking
- in taking
- in took

2 They enjoy _____ movies.

- watching
- watch
- to watch
- to watching

3 She refuses _____ to her mother

- listen
- to listening

to listen
listening

4 We agreed _____ together.
working
to work
worked
to working

5 I need _____.
studying
to study
in study
to studying

6 I'm curious _____ to Africa.
about traveling
to travel
traveling
on travel

7 They postponed _____ the game because of rain.
playing
to playing
at play
at playing

8 They want _____ good grades.
getting
to get
to getting

get

9 Michael Jordan is good _____ basketball.

playing

at playing

with playing

in paly

10 I regret not _____ my parents.

hug

with hugging

to hug

hugging

11 The criminal admits _____ the money.

on taking

take

to take

taking

12 Many drivers avoid _____ in traffic.

driving

to drive

to driving

drive

13 The gambler was angry _____ his money.

with lose

to losing

to lose

at losing

14 Good teachers always offer _____ their students.

help

to help

helping

to helping

15 I would like _____ a movie.

to see

seeing

to seeing

see

16 The president wishes _____ violence.

to ending

on ending

ending

to end

17 She is sick _____ in traffic.

of driving

to drive

driving

at driving

18 We feel like _____ pizza.

eat

with eating

to eat

eating

19 We look forward _____ the Olympics.

- at watching
- to watching
- with watch
- watching

20 I am bad _____.

- on ice skating
- at ice skate
- at ice skating
- with ice skating

21 She dislikes _____ junk food.

- to eat
- with eating
- eating
- eat

22 I can't imagine _____ out of an airplane.

- jumping
- at jumping
- to jump
- jump

23 The boss would like _____ more.

- us to work
- we working
- us work
- him working

24 They allowed _____ home early

- him to go

he to go
him going
we to go

25 We invited _____ with us.

him come
them coming
she to come
them to come

26 We resent _____ us.

not helping
her not help
her not helping
they not helping

27 The neighbors are fed up _____ his house.

with him not clean
to him not cleaning
with him not cleaning
at him not to clean

28 The mother won't tolerate _____ up late.

Sara to stay
she staying
Sara staying
her to staying

29 I persuaded _____ the team.

him to join
his to joining

he to join
him to joining

30 She is nervous _____ alone.
about we traveling
with us travel
about us traveling
at us to travel