

Infinitives

The infinitive is the basic form of all verbs:

What seems **to worry** a lot of people nowadays is the speed of technological change. (infinitive with to)

Do you think I could **use** your laptop for a minute? (infinitive without to)

Types of infinitives

There are several types of infinitives:

- simple infinitives:
If you are unable **to access** a particular website, there might **be** a problem with your Internet connection.
- progressive infinitives – (to) be + -ing form:
He seems **to be playing** video games all the time.
Before we know it, robots will **be teaching** our children in schools.
- perfect infinitives – (to) have + past participle:
I meant **to have sent** you a text, but I forgot.
You should **have told** me you wanted an e-reader for your birthday.
- passive infinitives – (to) be + past participle:
It remains **to be seen** whether and how these technological innovations will **be used** in the future.
- combinations (perfect progressive, perfect passive):
He was proven **to have been seeing** the victim before the murder. (perfect progressive infinitive)
We should **have been taught** how to spell without a spell checker. (perfect passive infinitive)

Functions of infinitives

Infinitives after verbs

Some other verbs that are followed by infinitives, e.g. *afford, agree, appear, ask, choose, claim, decide, expect, fail, happen, hope, intend, learn, manage, mean, offer, prepare, promise, refuse, seem, tend, want, wish*:

Tom **appears to be** very knowledgeable about solar installations.
Their child has quickly **learnt to use** social media.

Most modal verbs and verbal phrases are followed by the infinitive without to:

I'm not sure, but Peter **might have fixed** it for you.

Modal verbs that are followed by the infinitive without to: *can, could, may, might, must, needn't, shall, should, will, would*.

Would rather/had better are verbal phrases that are followed by the infinitive without to:

I'd **rather explain** the matter to him when I see him than discuss it over the phone.
You'd **better read** the instructions before you try to install the latest updates.

Some verbs are followed by an object + infinitive:

He **encouraged me to consider** getting the latest plasma TV.
The usher gently **reminded us to switch off** our mobile phones.

Some other common verbs that are followed by an object + infinitive: *advise, allow, ask, beg, cause, enable, expect, persuade, tell, urge, warn*.

Make and let are followed by an object + infinitive without to:

The joke about robot teachers was really funny – it **made everybody laugh**.

My older brother never **lets me use** his devices.

Infinitives in phrases

- after verbs, e.g. to be + infinitive when we talk about future arrangements or rules

The grand opening of the new research centre **is to take** place tomorrow.

You **are not to use** the television set or Smart Board without permission from staff.

- after some adjectives

These adjectives often describe people's feelings and reactions (e.g.: *anxious, curious, determined, eager, excited, glad, happy, pleased, shocked, surprised, thrilled*):
I was **anxious to start** using my new camera right away.
You'll be **shocked to see** how technology has changed our sport.

Other common adjectives that can be followed by infinitives: *careful, certain, difficult, fortunate, likely, lucky, right, stupid, sure, unlikely, wrong*.

- after some nouns

There is no **need to update** this software every time a new product is released.

It was a **nuisance to have** to restart the computer in order to reopen the browser.

Some other nouns that can be followed by infinitives: *advice, attempt, chance, decision, opportunity, permission, pleasure, reason, refusal, request, way, wish*.

- after a superlative or an ordinal number

The meaning is similar to a relative clause with *who, which* or *that*:

Overall, it is the easiest and **the best machine to be found**. (= which can be found)

What's the name of **the oldest device to measure** time? (= which measured)

Ray Tomlinson was **the first to send** an email message. (= who sent)

- to express purpose

We can use the infinitive to show why someone does something. The infinitive can be placed before or after the subject:

I read the manual **to find out** all the settings.

To turn off, you should press and hold the power button.

To indicate purpose in more formal language, we can also use *in order to* or *so as to*:

We all need adequate training **in order to make** the best of the IT equipment.

We request all books be returned early **so as to make sure** none get taken home accidentally.

We also tend to use *in order to* and *so as to* before a negative infinitive:

He kept a diary **in order not to forget** anything that happened during the trip.

My grandmother wants a tablet **so as not to get** behind the times.