

# Grammar Reference

## Verb patterns: gerunds and infinitives

### Meaning and use

Gerunds are the **-ing** form of a verb, and infinitives are the **to + base form**. These words can be confusing; they combine the meaning of a verb with the grammar of a noun.

My father asked me **to phone** him. I enjoy **talking** with my father.

So, how is **'to phone'** like a noun? Imagine the first sentence said: *My father asked me a question.* You can see how **a question** and **to phone** have the same grammatical role. Similarly, you could replace **'talking'** with the noun **conversation**.

Using gerunds and infinitives correctly with verbs can be difficult because some verbs go with only the infinitive or only the gerund, and others can go with either one.

I **enjoy going** to the movies. (enjoy + -ing form only)

Jason **wants to visit** a museum on Friday. (want + infinitive form only)

Tony **likes eating** at restaurants. Tony **likes to eat** at restaurants. (like + either -ing or infinitive form)

Another difficulty is that sometimes choosing the infinitive or the gerund will change the meaning of the sentence.

Mary **stopped eating** at six.

(Mary was eating, and at six o'clock, she stopped.)

Mary **stopped to eat** at six.

(Mary was walking home, and at six o'clock she stopped walking and went into a café to eat.)

The best way to learn which verbs take infinitives, gerunds, or both, is to notice them in context when you read, or to consult grammar references. Here are some of the most common verbs:

#### Followed by a gerund (-ing form)

admit, advise, consider, discuss, dislike, dread, enjoy, finish, mind, practise, recommend, suggest

#### Followed by an infinitive

agree, appear, choose, decide, expect, fail, hope, learn, need, refuse, seem, wait, want

#### Followed by either, usually with no change in meaning

begin, continue, hate, like, love, prefer, start

#### Followed by either, with a change in meaning

forget, regret, remember, stop, try

### Form

Gerunds and infinitives can follow verbs in the form **verb + -ing form of the verb** or **verb + infinitive (to + base form of the verb)**.

#### Positive

Theresa **suggested going** to the park.

Ross **decided to go** home instead.

#### Negative

The negative form is **verb + not + gerund/infinitive**.

My grandparents have retired and **enjoy not working**.

Frank **hopes not to travel** over the holidays.

#### Question

What did the doctor **advise taking** for your cold?

Do you **need to do** your laundry this weekend?

#### Take note: 'split' infinitives

A 'split infinitive' has an adverb between **to** and the verb.

It is important **to thoroughly study** for an examination.

His sister seems **to really want** a cat.

Some people think split infinitives are ungrammatical. If you are writing formal English, it is best to avoid using them in your writing.

#### Take note: possessives

Remember that gerunds are types of nouns, so you can use possessive adjectives like *my, your, his, her*, etc.

Do you **mind my going out** for a while?

I **like his planning** our holidays for us.