Gerunds, Infinitives, and Participles

Participle forms are verb forms (see 8b). A verb’s -ing form is its present participle. The -ed form of a regular verb is its past participle; irregular verbs form their past participles in various ways (for example, bend, bent; eat, eaten; think, thought—for a complete list, see Box 8-4 in section 8d). Participles can function as adjectives (a smiling face, a closed book).

A verb’s -ing form can also function as a noun (Sneezing spreads colds), which is called a gerund. Another verb form, the infinitive, can also function as a noun. An infinitive is a verb’s simple or base form, usually preceded by the word to (We want everyone to smile). Verb forms—participles, gerunds, and infinitives—functioning as nouns or modifiers are called verbals, as explained in section 7d.

This chapter can help you make the right choices among verbals. Section 43a discusses gerunds and infinitives used as subjects. Section 43b discusses verbs that are followed by gerunds, not infinitives. Section 43c discusses verbs that are followed by infinitives, not gerunds. Section 43d discusses meaning changes that depend on whether certain verbs are followed by a gerund or by an infinitive. Section 43e explains that meaning does not change for certain sense verbs no matter whether they are followed by a gerund or an infinitive. Section 43f discusses differences in meaning between the present participle form and the past participle form of some modifiers.

43a How can I use gerunds and infinitives as subjects?

Gerunds are used more commonly than infinitives as subjects. Sometimes, however, either is acceptable.

Choosing the right health club is important.
To choose the right health club is important.

⚠️ Alert: When a gerund or an infinitive is used alone as a subject, it is singular and requires a singular verb. When two or more gerunds or infinitives create a compound subject, they require a plural verb. (See 7k and 10d.)⚠️
When do I use a gerund, not an infinitive, as an object?

Some verbs must be followed by gerunds used as direct objects. Other verbs must be followed by infinitives. Still other verbs can be followed by either a gerund or an infinitive. See Box 43-1:

Yuri considered calling [not to call] the mayor.
He was having trouble getting [not to get] a work permit.
Yuri's boss recommended taking [not to take] an interpreter to the permit agency.

**Gerund after go**

The word go is usually followed by an infinitive: We can go to see [not go seeing] a movie tonight. Sometimes, however, go is followed by a gerund in

Verbs and expressions that must be followed by gerunds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledge</th>
<th>Detest</th>
<th>Mind</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admit</td>
<td>Discuss</td>
<td>Object to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advise</td>
<td>Dislike</td>
<td>Postpone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipate</td>
<td>Dream about</td>
<td>Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciate</td>
<td>Enjoy</td>
<td>Put off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid</td>
<td>Escape</td>
<td>Quit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot bear</td>
<td>Evade</td>
<td>Recall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot help</td>
<td>Favor</td>
<td>Recommend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot resist</td>
<td>Finish</td>
<td>Regret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complain about</td>
<td>Give up</td>
<td>Resent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider</td>
<td>Have trouble</td>
<td>Resist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consist of</td>
<td>Imagine</td>
<td>Risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemplate</td>
<td>Include</td>
<td>Suggest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defend from</td>
<td>Insist on</td>
<td>Talk about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delay</td>
<td>Keep (on)</td>
<td>Tolerate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deny</td>
<td>Mention</td>
<td>Understand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
phrases such as go swimming, go fishing, go shopping, and go driving: I will go shopping [not go to shop] after work.

**Gerund after be + complement + preposition**

Many common expressions use a form of the verb be plus a complement plus a preposition. In such expressions, use a gerund, not an infinitive, after the preposition. Here is a list of some of the most frequently used expressions in this pattern.

**SELECTED EXPRESSIONS USING BE + COMPLEMENT + PREPOSITION**

- be (get) accustomed to
- be interested in
- be angry about
- be prepared for
- be bored with
- be responsible for
- be capable of
- be (get) used to
- be excited about
- be worried about

We are excited about voting [not to vote] in the next presidential election. Who will be responsible for locating [not to locate] our polling place?

**ALERT:** Always use a gerund, not an infinitive, as the object of a preposition. Be especially careful when the word to is functioning as a preposition in a phrasal verb (see 42c): We are committed to changing [not to change] the rules.

**43c When do I use an infinitive, not a gerund, as an object?**

Box 43-2 on the next page lists selected common verbs and expressions that must be followed by infinitives, not gerunds, as objects.

She wanted to go [not wanted going] to the lecture.  
Only three people decided to question [not decided questioning] the speaker.

**Infinitive after be + complement**

Gerunds are common in constructions that use a form of the verb be plus a complement and a preposition (see 43b). However, use an infinitive, not a gerund, when be plus a complement is not followed by a preposition.

We are eager to go [not going] camping.  
I am ready to sleep [not sleeping] in a tent.
When do I use an infinitive, not a gerund, as an object?

**BOX 43-2 SUMMARY**

Verbs and expressions that must be followed by infinitives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>afford to</th>
<th>consent to</th>
<th>intend to</th>
<th>promise to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agree to</td>
<td>decide to</td>
<td>know how to</td>
<td>refuse to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aim to</td>
<td>decline to</td>
<td>learn to</td>
<td>require to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appear to</td>
<td>demand to</td>
<td>like to</td>
<td>seem to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arrange to</td>
<td>deserve to</td>
<td>manage to</td>
<td>struggle to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ask to</td>
<td>do not care to</td>
<td>mean to</td>
<td>tend to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attempt to</td>
<td>expect to</td>
<td>need to</td>
<td>threaten to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be left to</td>
<td>fail to</td>
<td>offer to</td>
<td>volunteer to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beg to</td>
<td>force to</td>
<td>plan to</td>
<td>vote to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cannot afford to</td>
<td>give permission to</td>
<td>prefer to</td>
<td>wait to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>care to</td>
<td>hesitate to</td>
<td>prepare to</td>
<td>want to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>claim to</td>
<td>hope to</td>
<td>pretend to</td>
<td>would like to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Infinitive to indicate purpose**

Use an infinitive in expressions that indicate purpose: *I read a book to learn more about Mayan culture.* This sentence means “I read a book for the purpose of learning more about Mayan culture.” *To learn* delivers the idea of purpose more concisely (see Chapter 16) than expressions such as *so that I can* or *in order to*.

**Infinitive with the first, the last, the one**

Use an infinitive after the expressions *the first, the last, and the one*: *Nina is the first to arrive* [not arriving] and *the last to leave* [not leaving] every day. *She’s always the one to do the most.*

**Unmarked infinitives**

Infinitives used without the word *to* are called **unmarked infinitives**, or sometimes **bare infinitives**. An unmarked infinitive may be hard to recognize because it is not preceded by *to*. Some common verbs followed by unmarked
infinitives are feel, have, hear, let, listen to, look at, make (meaning “compel”), notice, see, and watch.

Please let me take [not to take] you to lunch. [unmarked infinitive]
I want to take you to lunch. [marked infinitive]

The verb help can be followed by a marked or an unmarked infinitive. Either is correct: Help me put [or to put] this box in the car.

** ALERT:** Be careful to use parallel structure (see Chapter 18) correctly when you use two or more gerunds or infinitives after verbs. If two or more verbal objects follow one verb, put the verbal objects into the same form.

**NO** We went sailing and to scuba dive.

**YES** We went sailing and scuba diving.

Conversely, if you are using verbal objects with compound predicates, be sure to use the kind of verbal that each verb requires.

**NO** We enjoyed scuba diving but do not plan sailing again. [Enjoyed requires a gerund object, and plan requires an infinitive object; see Boxes 43-1 and 43-2 in this chapter.]

**YES** We enjoyed scuba diving but do not plan to sail again.

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**43d How does meaning change when certain verbs are followed by a gerund or an infinitive?**

**With stop**

The verb stop followed by a gerund means “finish, quit.” Stop followed by an infinitive means “interrupt one activity to begin another.”

We stopped eating. [We finished our meal.]
We stopped to eat. [We stopped another activity, such as driving, in order to eat.]

**With remember and forget**

The verb remember followed by an infinitive means “not to forget to do something”: I must remember to talk with Isa. Remember followed by a gerund means “recall a memory”: I remember talking in my sleep last night.

The verb forget followed by an infinitive means “fail to do something”: If you forget to put a stamp on that letter, it will be returned. Forget followed by a gerund means “do something and not recall it”: I forget having put the stamps in the refrigerator.
43f How do I choose between -ing and -ed forms for adjectives?

Deciding whether to use the -ing form (PRESENT PARTICIPLE) or the -ed form (PAST PARTICIPLE of a regular VERB) as an ADJECTIVE in a specific sentence can be difficult. For example, *I am amused and I am amusing* are both correct.
GERUNDS, INFINITIVES, AND PARTICIPLES

in English, but their meanings are very different. To make the right choice, decide whether the modified noun or pronoun is causing or experiencing what the participle describes.

Use a present participle (-ing ending) to modify a noun or pronoun that is the agent or the cause of the action.

Micah described your interesting plan. [The noun plan causes what its modifier describes—interest; so interesting is correct.]
I find your plan exciting. [The noun plan causes what its modifier describes—excitement; so exciting is correct.]

Use a past participle (-ed ending for regular verbs) to modify a noun or pronoun that experiences or receives whatever the modifier describes.

An interested committee wants to hear your plan. [The noun committee experiences what its modifier describes—interest; so interested is correct.]
Excited by your plan, they called a board meeting. [The pronoun they experiences what its modifier describes—excitement; so excited is correct.]

Here are frequently used participles that convey very different meanings, depending on whether the -ed or the -ing form is used.

amused, amusing frightened, frightening
annoyed, annoying insulted, insulting
appalled, appalling
bored, boring overwhelmed, overwhelming
confused, confusing pleased, pleasing
depressed, depressing reassured, reassuring
disgusted, disgusting satisfied, satisfying
fascinated, fascinating shocked, shocking

EXERCISE 43-2  Choose the correct participle from each pair in parentheses. For help, consult 43f.

EXAMPLE  It can be a (satisfied, satisfying) satisfying experience to learn about the lives of artists.

1. The artist Frida Kahlo led an (interested, interesting) _____ life.
2. When Kahlo was eighteen, (horrified, horrifying) _____ observers saw her (injured, injuring) _____ in a streetcar accident.
3. A (disappointed, disappointing) _____ Kahlo had to abandon her plan to study medicine.
4. Instead, she began to create paintings filled with (disturbed, disturbing) _____ images.
5. Some art critics consider Kahlo’s paintings to be (fascinated, fascinating) _____ works of art, though many people find them (overwhelmed, overwhelming) _____.

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EXERCISE 43-3  Choose the correct participle from each pair in parentheses. For help, consult 43f.

EXAMPLE  Studying popular myths that turn out to be false can be a (fascinated, fascinating) fascinating experience.

1. While doing research for a paper about birds, I discovered some (interested, interesting) _____ information about ostriches.
2. I encountered an (unsettled, unsettling) _____ passage in a book, which said that ostriches do not, in fact, stick their heads into the sand for protection when they feel fear.
3. This myth about (frightened, frightening) _____ ostriches began among the ancient Arabs and has since been passed on by many reputable writers.
4. In reality, an ostrich does not have to do something as useless as bury its head in the sand when a predator approaches, because a (hunted, hunting) _____ ostrich can reach speeds of nearly 35 mph and can thus outrun most other animals.
5. A (threatened, threatening) _____ ostrich can also kick its way out of many dangerous situations with its powerful legs, and with its 8-foot-tall frame, it presents itself as a (frightened, frightening) _____ opponent.

CHAPTER 44
Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Auxiliary verbs are known as helping verbs because adding an auxiliary verb to a main verb helps the main verb convey additional information. The most common auxiliary verbs are forms of be, have, and do. Boxes 8-6 and 8-7 in section 8e list the forms of these three verbs.

Modal auxiliary verbs are one type of auxiliary verb. They include can, could, may, might, should, had better, must, will, would, and others discussed in this chapter. Modals differ from be, have, and do used as auxiliary verbs in the specific ways discussed in Box 44-1 on page 522.

44a  How do I convey ability, necessity, advisability, possibility, and probability with modals?

Conveying ability
The modal can conveys ability now (in the present), and could conveys ability before (in the past). These words deliver the meaning “able to.” For the future, use will be able to.

We can work late tonight. [Can conveys present ability.]
I could work late last night, too. [Could conveys past ability.]