

CHAPTER 43

Gerunds, Infinitives,
and Participles

PARTICIPLES 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.)



43b 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

BOX 43-1 SUMMARY



Verbs and expressions that must be followed by gerunds

acknowledge	detest	mind
admit	discuss	object to
advise	dislike	postpone
anticipate	dream about	practice
appreciate	enjoy	put off
avoid	escape	quit
cannot bear	evade	recall
cannot help	favor	recommend
cannot resist	finish	regret
complain about	give up	resent
consider	have trouble	resist
consist of	imagine	risk
contemplate	include	suggest
defer from	insist on	talk about
delay	keep (on)	tolerate
deny	mention	understand

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 tired of
be committed to	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.

BOX 43-2 SUMMARY



Verbs and expressions that must be followed by infinitives

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

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 verbals 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. 

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.*

With try

The verb *try* followed by an infinitive means “make an effort”: *I tried to find your jacket*. Followed by a gerund, *try* means “experiment with”: *I tried jogging but found it too difficult*.

43e Why is the meaning unchanged whether a gerund or an infinitive follows sense verbs?

Sense VERBS include words such as *see, notice, hear, observe, watch, feel, listen to, and look at*. The meaning of these verbs is usually not affected by whether a GERUND or an INFINITIVE follows as the OBJECT. *I saw the water rise* and *I saw the water rising* both have the same meaning in American English.

EXERCISE 43-1 Write the correct form of the verbal object (either a gerund or an infinitive) for each verb in parentheses. For help, consult 43b through 43e.

EXAMPLE People like (think) to think that they have a good memory, but everybody shows signs of forgetfulness from time to time.

1. Think about (ride) _____ the railroad to work on a rainy Monday morning.
2. The comfortable reclining seats let passengers (take) _____ a relaxing nap on the way to work.
3. Because of the rain, commuters are forced (bring) _____ an umbrella and a raincoat, along with their usual traveling items.
4. Once they reach their destination, passengers forget that they need their umbrellas and raincoats (walk) _____ the few blocks to work.
5. (Step) _____ out into the rain makes the passengers suddenly realize that they've left their umbrellas and raincoats on the train, which has already left the station.
6. However, they need not be angry about (lose) _____ the forgotten item.
7. Many railroads have lost-and-found offices that help (reunite) _____ the rightful owners with their lost possessions.
8. After losing a possession, passengers tend (call) _____ the lost-and-found office in search of the missing article.
9. Some commuters even acknowledge (leave) _____ gifts, false teeth, wooden legs, and bicycles aboard the train.
10. Most times, people can claim their possessions either by (answer) _____ a few questions to ensure proper ownership or by (identify) _____ the lost item.

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

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
 annoyed, annoying
 appalled, appalling
 bored, boring
 confused, confusing
 depressed, depressing
 disgusted, disgusting
 fascinated, fascinating

frightened, frightening
 insulted, insulting
 offended, offending
 overwhelmed, overwhelming
 pleased, pleasing
 reassured, reassuring
 satisfied, satisfying
 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.

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

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.]