

# Infinitive or *ing*-Form?

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In English, when one verb follows another, the second verb can either be the *-ing* form or the *to* infinitive. It depends on the first verb.

All the verbs in this summary marked \* can also normally be followed by a *that* clause with the same meaning. See Section 7.

Note that in the following “*infinitive*” always refers to the **bare verb** without *to*. If the *to* is needed, we will always explicitly mention it.

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## 1 Verb + *to* Infinitive

### 1.1 Verb + *to* Infinitive: Never with Object

( <i>can't</i> ) <i>afford</i>	* <i>agree</i>	<i>aim</i>	<i>appear</i>	* <i>arrange</i>	<i>attempt</i>
<i>choose</i>	* <i>decide</i>	* <i>demand</i>	<i>deserve</i>	<i>fail</i>	* <i>hope</i>
<i>learn</i>	<i>manage</i>	<i>neglect</i>	<i>offer</i>	<i>omit</i>	<i>ought</i>
<i>plan</i>	<i>prepare</i>	* <i>pretend</i>	* <i>promise</i>	<i>refuse</i>	<i>seem</i>
<i>tend</i>	* <i>threaten</i>	( <i>can't</i> ) <i>wait</i>	* <i>wish</i>		

#### Examples:

- *If you **decide to add** nuts...*
- *Don't **expect to have** much cake left.*

Notice how the negative is formed:

- *If you **decide not to ice** it...*

**Remark 1.** Note the usage of *promise*:

- *I **promise you** something.*
- *I **promise to do** something.*
- *I **promise (you) (that) I will do** something.*
- But **not**: ~~*I **promise you to do** something.*~~

**Remark 2.** Modal verbs are normally only with *infinitive* without *to*, see Section 2. The exception is the special modal verb *ought*:

- *He **ought to tell** his boss about it.*

Being a modal verb, the negation *not* applies to the verb directly:

- *He **ought not to go**.*

Note that *to* is required both in affirmative and negative statements.

Reserve *ought* for expressing obligation, duty, or necessity, and use *should* for expressing suitability or appropriateness.

## 1.2 Verb + *to* Infinitive: Always with Object

<i>dare</i>	<i>encourage</i>	<i>force</i>	<i>invite</i>	<i>order</i>	<i>persuade</i>
<i>remind</i>	<i>teach</i>	<i>tell</i>	<i>warn</i>		

### Examples:

- Her father **taught her to play tennis**.
- The teacher **reminded the children to bring** their swimming things.

**Remark 3.** *Dare* has two fundamentally different meanings. With object it means “defy or challenge someone to do something”:

- She was **daring him to disagree**.

In this form it always is verb + *to* infinitive.

Without object it means “have the courage to do something” and can look verb + *to* infinitive or verb + infinitive (without *to*) depending on the situation:

- Everyone in the office complains that he smells awful, but nobody **dares (to) mention** it to him.
- I'd never **dare (to) talk** to my mother like that.
- I wouldn't **dare have** a party in my flat in case the neighbors complained. (Do not use *to* here!)
- I **dare not/don't dare think** how much it's going to cost. (Do not use *to* here!)
- A story she **dares not write down**.

Rule of thumb: Do not put *to* after *wouldn't dare*, *don't dare* or *dare not* (*not* refers to *dare*), otherwise both are possible. Be careful about the negation: if the *not* refers to *dare*, then don't put *to*, if the *not* refers to the verb, then do put a *to*:

- An incident he **dares not tell** anyone (about). = he is afraid to talk about it
- An incident he **dares not to tell** anyone. = he has the courage to refuse to talk about it

### 1.3 Verb + *to* Infinitive: Sometimes with Object

<i>ask</i>	<i>*assume</i>	<i>beg</i>	<i>*expect</i>	<i>help</i>	<i>*intend</i>
<i>*request</i>	<i>want</i>				

#### Examples:

- *We expected to be late.*  $\iff$  *We expected Tom to be late.*
- *We wanted to stay longer.*  $\iff$  *We wanted them to stay longer.*

**Remark 4.** *Help* can be followed by the infinitive with or without *to*.

- *We helped them (to) start their car.*

But note that *can't help* can be followed by the *-ing* form, but then has a different meaning (see Section 4.3).

**Remark 5.** *Would like*, *would prefer*, *would hate*, and *would love* are also followed by the *to* infinitive. See Remark 10.

**Remark 6.** Unlike the less formal *ask*, *request* usually sounds better when followed by *that*, rather than object + *to* infinitive:

- Better: *We requested that the staff prepare the suites.*  
Awkward: *We requested the staff to prepare the suites.*
- Better: *Hilda requested that he not drive across the lawn.*  
Awkward: *Hilda requested him not to drive across the lawn.*

## 2 Verb + Infinitive

Modal verbs:	<i>can</i>	<i>could</i>	<i>may</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>must</i>
	<i>needn't</i>	<i>shall</i>	<i>should</i>	<i>will</i>	<i>would</i>
Other expressions:	<i>had better</i>	<i>would rather</i>			
	<i>make + object</i>	<i>let + object</i>			
	<i>have + object</i>				
	<i>dare</i> (see Remark 3)				
	<i>help</i> (see Remark 4)				

**Examples:**

- *You **should add** them slowly.*
- *You **needn't include** nuts.*
- ***Let** the cake **cool** for half an hour.*
- *I **made** my sister **help** with the cooking.*
- *I **had** the plumber **repair** the leak.*

**Remark 7.** The passive form of *make* is followed by the *to* infinitive.

- *I **was made to do** my homework.  $\iff$  My father **made me do** my homework.*
- *She **was made to cut** her hair.  $\iff$  I **made her cut** her hair.*

For the only modal verb *ought* that needs a *to*, see Remark 2.

### 3 Verb + *-ing*

<i>*appreciate</i>	<i>avoid</i>	<i>can't face</i>	<i>can't stand</i>	<i>carry on</i>	<i>*confess</i>
<i>*consider</i>	<i>delay</i>	<i>*deny</i>	<i>detest</i>	<i>dislike</i>	<i>enjoy</i>
<i>fancy</i>	<i>feel like</i>	<i>finish</i>	<i>give up</i>	<i>*imagine</i>	<i>involve</i>
<i>keep</i>	<i>keep on</i>	<i>*mention</i>	<i>(not) mind</i>	<i>miss</i>	<i>postpone</i>
<i>practise</i>	<i>put off</i>	<i>quit</i>	<i>risk</i>	<i>resist</i>	<i>*suggest</i>
<i>*admit to</i>	<i>resort to</i>				

**Examples:**

- *I **enjoy making** it.*
- ***Avoid adding** the eggs. . .*
- ***Keep doing** this. . .*
- *I **suggest adding** a little lemon juice. . .*

Notice how the negative is formed:

- *If you **don't leave** immediately, you risk **not catching** your plane.*
- *Can you imagine **not having** a mobile phone nowadays?*

**Remark 8.** *Admit* and *resort* are special cases:<sup>1</sup> they need the preposition *to* before the *-ing*:

- *He admitted to having lied.*
- *After their last horse had died, they resorted to walking.*

## 4 Verbs + *to* Infinitive or *-ing*

### 4.1 No Difference in Meaning

*begin can't bear cease continue hate prefer \*propose start*

**Examples:**

- *Continue adding the flour.*  $\iff$  *Continue to add the flour.*
- *I prefer using apricots.*  $\iff$  *I prefer to use apricots.*
- *I hate making cakes.*  $\iff$  *I hate to make cakes.*

**Remark 9.** Two *-ing* forms do not usually follow each other:

- *I was starting to make a cake when the phone rang.*
- **not:** ~~*I was starting making a cake...*~~

### 4.2 Small Difference in Meaning

*like love*

*Like* + *to* infinitive has a slightly different meaning from *like* + *-ing*:

- *I like to catch the early bus on Mondays.* = this is a good plan or it's a habit, but not necessarily something I enjoy.
- *I like dancing.* = I enjoy it.

<sup>1</sup>In the case of *admit* the *to* is sometimes dropped. Moreover, one can also say *He admitted that he lied.*, see Section 7.

The same remark holds also true for *love*.

**Remark 10.** *Like, prefer, hate* and *love* can be followed by the *to* infinitive or *-ing*, but *would like, would prefer, would hate* and *would love* are always followed by the *to* infinitive.

- *She would like to go out, but we would prefer to stay in.*

### 4.3 Fundamental Difference in Meaning

\*remember \*forget \*regret try stop mean go on can't help

#### Verb + *to* infinitive

**Remember to check** whether the cake is ready. = an action which will be necessary

**Don't forget to add** the baking powder. = an action which will be necessary

**I regret to inform** you that your application was unsuccessful. = I am sorry to tell you. . .

**Try to ice** the cake quickly. = attempt to do it if you can

**She stopped to have** a rest. = in order to have a rest

**They don't mean to upset** you. = they don't intend to

**He went on to tell** them how to make a different cake. = the next thing he did was to tell them. . .

**I can't help you (to) fix** the car. = I don't know how to fix the car or I don't have the time to fix it (see Remark 4)

#### Verb + *-ing*

**I remember checking** that I had my keys when I left the house. = a memory of a past action

**I'll never forget going** to school on my own for the first time. = a memory of a past action

**We regret sending** our daughter to that school. = we wish we hadn't

**Try adding** nuts as it will improve the flavour. = as an experiment

**Stop beating** when the mixture is pale and fluffy. = finish doing it

**If you go by train that means taking** a taxi to the station. = it involves

**He went on cycling** until he reached the farm. = he continued

**I can't help looking** at you. = I cannot avoid/prevent it

## 5 Verb + Object + *to* Infinitive or No Object + *-ing*

The following verbs are followed by the *to* infinitive when they have an object and by *-ing* when they have no object:

*\*advise allow forbid permit \*recommend*

### Examples:

- *I advise adding nuts.*  $\iff$  *I advise you to add nuts.*
- *They allow using force.*  $\iff$  *They allow us to use force.*
- *I recommend using apricots.*  $\iff$  *I recommend you to use apricots.*

**Remark 11.** Note that the use of *recommend* with object and *to* infinitive sounds a bit awkward to some people. It is more common to use this structure in passive voice:

- *You are recommended to use apricots.*

or to use a *that* clause (where the *that* often is omitted, see Section 7):

- *I recommend (that) you use apricots.*

## 6 Verb + Object + *-ing* or Object + Infinitive (with a Difference in Meaning)

The following verbs always have an object (mainly to do with senses):

*feel hear see watch*

Notice the difference in meaning between verb + *-ing* and verb + infinitive:

- *She felt her passion dwindling away.* = a continuing process over a period of time  
*She felt someone touch her shoulder.* = short completed action
- *She heard her mother singing as she came downstairs.* = continuing action  
*She heard the doorbell ring.* = a short completed action



- *I watched the boys **playing** football.* = an activity continuing over a period of time  
*I watched the boy **kick** the football into the road.* = short completed action
- *They **see** their rights **being** taken away.* = a continuing process over a period of time  
*They **saw** the cat **kill** the mouse.* = short completed action

However, note that *see* also has a third possible usage with *to* + infinitive:

- *I went to **see** Colin to **hand over** the keys.* = purpose of seeing someone/something

## 7 Verb + *that* Clause

We remind the reader that all verbs marked \* in this summary can also be followed by a *that* clause with the same meaning. Often the *that* can also be omitted.

- *I **suggest adding** some lemon juice.* = *I **suggest (that) you add** some lemon juice.*
- *I **recommend using** sultanas and apricots.* = *I **recommend (that) you use** sultanas and apricots.*
- *They **agreed to leave** early.* = *They **agreed (that) they would leave** early.*

## 8 Adjectives

The following adjectives are usually followed by the *to* infinitive:

<i>afraid</i>	<i>cheap</i>	† <i>dangerous</i>	<i>delighted</i>	† <i>difficult</i>	† <i>easy</i>
<i>expensive</i>	<i>happy</i>	<i>impossible</i>	<i>interesting</i>	† <i>nice</i>	<i>pleased</i>
<i>possible</i>	<i>safe</i>	<i>sorry</i>	<i>surprised</i>		

### Examples:

- *I'm **surprised to see** you here.*
- *She is too **cheap to send** me a postcard.* = she is stingy, not generous

The adjectives marked † can sometimes also be followed by *-ing* with the same meaning.

**Examples:**

- *It's **nice meeting** friends after school.  $\iff$  It's **nice to meet** friends after school.*

**Remark 12.** Notice the different ways of using *afraid*:

- *I've always been **afraid of flying**.*
- *Don't be **afraid to say** what you think.*
- *She was **afraid (that)** he might be upset if she told him.*
- *She was **afraid for** her children.*

## 9 Disclaimer

This document is based on several grammar books and my own research in dictionaries, etc. If you find mistakes or other interesting verbs or facts that could be added, I would be delighted to receive your feedback! Write to

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Thanks!

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