The Infinitive and the Infinitive Phrase

Infinitives

An **infinitive** is a verb form that can be used as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb. Most infinitives begin with **to**.

- **NOUN**  
  To paint is his only ambition. [The infinitive To paint is the subject of the verb is.]
  The puppy only wants to play. [The infinitive to play is the direct object of the verb wants.]
  His dream was to fly. [The infinitive to fly is the predicate nominative of the verb was.]

- **ADJECTIVE**  
  She’s the swimmer to watch. [The infinitive to watch modifies the noun swimmer.]
  The one to ask is he. [The infinitive to ask modifies the pronoun one.]

- **ADVERB**  
  To exit, simply press the escape key. [The infinitive To exit modifies the verb press.]
  It is easy to find. [The infinitive to find modifies the adjective easy.]

**NOTE**  
To can also be used as a preposition.

**EXAMPLE**  
She went to the store to shop. [The first to is followed by a noun, store, so it is being used as a preposition. The second to is followed by a verb form, shop, so it is being used as part of an infinitive.]

**EXERCISE A**  
Underline the infinitive in each of the following sentences.

**Examples**

1. The right to vote is very valuable. [To is followed by the verb vote. To vote is the infinitive.]
2. To succeed, you must work very hard. [To is followed by the verb succeed. To succeed is the infinitive.]

1. I tried to call but the line was busy. [Is to followed by a verb?]
2. Their only goal is to excel. [Is to followed by a verb?]
3. Is this dresser very heavy to lift?
4. Here is the number to call.
5. To finish will be a relief.
6. Did you agree with the decision to go?
7. This case will not be easy to solve.
8. To fly, the wings must create more lift.
9. Michael is learning to type.

10. Jason already went to the cafeteria to eat.

## Infinitive Phrases

**5h.** An **infinitive phrase** consists of an infinitive together with its modifiers and complements. The entire phrase may be used as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb.

- **NOUN** She always wants **to be sure.** [The infinitive to be is completed by the predicate adjective sure. The infinitive phrase is used as the direct object of the verb wants.]

- **ADJECTIVE** This would be a perfect time **to start a club.** [The infinitive to start is completed by the direct object club. The infinitive phrase modifies the noun time.]

- **ADVERB** We gathered in the park **to clean up after the Founders’ Day picnic.** [The infinitive to clean is modified by the adverb up and by the adverb phrase after the Founders’ Day picnic. The infinitive phrase modifies the verb gathered.]

### Exercise B

Underline the infinitive phrase in each of the following sentences.

**Examples** 1. To type well requires steady practice. [To is followed by the verb type. Type is modified by the adverb well. The infinitive phrase is To type well.]

2. We need a ramp **to get wheelchairs into the auditorium.** [To is followed by the verb get. Get is completed by the direct object wheelchairs and is modified by the adverb phrase into the auditorium. The infinitive phrase is to get wheelchairs into the auditorium.]

11. To eat nutritious meals and snacks is important to good health. [Is To followed by a verb? What words modify or complete that verb?]

12. You’re too smart to fall for that old joke! [Is to followed by a verb? What words modify that verb?]

13. They had planned to practice all weekend.

14. Right now, your major goal is to do well in school.

15. Actually, the equation is simple to solve without a calculator.

16. Try to use more colors and shapes.

17. We need some community service projects to put in our portfolios.

18. The solution was to exit the program and reboot.

19. I’m so sorry to be late for our appointment.

20. Do you really need to play basketball at six o’clock in the morning, Toby?