

# *Verbals*

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Verbals are words that at root have a verb form but no longer function as complete (finite) verbs.

**Infinitives** – *To Run* – function as nouns, adjectives or adverbs

**Participles** – *Running* water; *worn* shoes – function as adjectives

**Gerunds** – *Running* is fun – function as nouns

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Verbals of any sort retain some of their verb heritage, their “verbiness.” Thus they can take objects or complements and they can be modified. Some words coordinate with verbals in ways that are reminiscent of subjects and main verbs.

But more on that later.

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The grand prize winner for verbal complexity is the infinitive or infinitive phrase. The remainder of this presentation explains the ways infinitive phrases can work.

# *Infinitive Phrases*

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An **Infinitive Phrase** is a group of words consisting of an infinitive and the modifier and/or nouns or pronouns that function as the pseudo-subject (actor) or objects (direct, indirect) or complements of the action or state expressed in the infinitive.

Think of them as have all the potential structures of a clause; but they are not clauses.

Sounds like fun, eh?

# *Infinitive Phrases*

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For example:

*To break from class seemed appropriate.*

The infinitive phrase functions as the subject. {to break (infinitive); from class (adverbial prepositional phrase)}

*We wanted to stop quickly.*

The infinitive phrase functions as the direct object of the verb wanted. {to stop (infinitive); quickly (adverb)}

*I have a cigarette to smoke before dinner.*

The infinitive phrase functions as an adjective modifying cigarette. {to smoke (infinitive); before dinner (adverbial prepositional phrase)}

# *Infinitive Phrases*

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*The grammarians shouted to correct the teacher.*

The infinitive phrase modifies the verb *shouted*, telling how or why. {to correct (infinitive); the teacher (direct object of action expressed by the infinitive)}

*Janey agreed to give Zoey a ride.*

The infinitive phrase functions as the direct object of the verb agreed. {to give (infinitive); Zoey (indirect object of action expressed in infinitive); a ride (direct object of action expressed in infinitive)}

# *Infinitive Phrases*

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*The professors asked her to keep some books.*

The infinitive phrase functions as the direct object of the verb asked. {her (actor or “subject” of the infinitive); to keep (infinitive); some books (direct object of action expressed in infinitive)}

*Orange told Abigail to finish the food.*

The infinitive phrase functions as the direct object of the verb told. {Abigail (actor or “subject” of the infinitive); to finish (the infinitive); the food (direct object of action expressed in the infinitive)}

# *Infinitive Phrases*

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Consider these sentences again.

*I have a cigarette to smoke before dinner.*

*The professors asked her to keep some books.*

The cigarette did not do the smoking (I did); the infinitive phrase describes what sort of cigarette. But she (her) did keep the books, not the professors.

Note that the subject of the infinitive is in the object case.

# *Infinitive Phrases*

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*Every Goose wished Butch to be the leader of the flock.*

The infinitive phrase functions as the direct object of the verb wished. {Butch (actor or “subject” of infinitive phrase); to be (infinitive); the leader (subject complement for Butch, via state of being expressed in infinitive); of the flock (adjectival prepositional phrase)}

# *Infinitive Phrases*

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## Actors

When infinitive phrases have an “actor,” they may be roughly characterized as the “subject” of the action or state expressed in the infinitive. Perhaps the denomination “pseudo-subject” is preferable. It is somewhat misleading to use the word “subject” since an infinitive phrase is not a full clause with a subject and a finite, or fully functioning, verb. Also remember that when this actor of an infinitive is a pronoun, it appears in the objective case (*me*, not *I*; *him*, not *he*).

Certain verbs, when they take an infinitive direct object, require an actor for the infinitive phrase; others can't have an actor. Still other verbs can go either way.

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Here are some verbs that take infinitive objects without actors:

agree	intend	promise
begin	learn	refuse
continue	neglect	remember
decide	offer	start
fail	plan	try
hesitate	prefer	
hope	pretend	

# *Infinitive Phrases*

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Most frogs plan to spawn.

We began to leaf through the letters.

Janey offered to buy the chandelier.

He neglected to pay the lawyer.

They promised to laugh aloud.

In all of these examples no actor can come between the main (finite) verb and the infinitive direct-object phrase.

Each of these infinitive phrases answers “what,” but not “why,” “when,” “where,” or “how.”

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Here are some verbs that take infinitive objects with actors:

advise	hire	implore
allow	teach	incite
convince	instruct	appoint
remind	invite	order
encourage	permit	
force	tell	

# *Infinitive Phrases*

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The cats allowed the door to close on the dog.

Their mothers advise them to sleep.

Janey forced Zoey to admit the truth.

We have convinced the dean of the division to grant our request.

Mr. Bob invited Gumby to consider the clues.

In all of these examples an actor is required after the main (finite) verb and before the infinitive direct-object phrase.

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Here are some verbs that use either pattern.

Ask, expect, (would) like, want

I asked to see the fish.

I asked him to show me the fish.

Janey expected her team to win.

Jane expected to win.

Zoey likes to run fast.

Zoey likes her mommy to run fast.

In all of these examples the main verb can take an infinitive object with or without an actor.

# *Infinitive Phrases*

## Here's the kicker:

Some grammarians focus on the entire infinitive phrase (with “subject,” verbal, objects, modifiers, etc. and see it operating as one part of speech:

The cat forced Tom to watch the squirrels.

{the entire phrase acts as a noun. It answers “whom” or “what” and is the direct object of the main clause}

Other grammarians focus on the verbal, object, and modifiers alone:

The dog forced the cats to play games.

{to play games is *adverbial* modifying “forced.”}

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I prefer the first distinction. In most sentences the connection between the agent of an infinitive and the infinitive itself is stronger than any adverbial modification of the infinitive alone.

The potato asked the onion to speak more quietly.

Nevertheless, different grammarians focus on different grammatical relationships. At the very least, we are trying to see the relationships.

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## **Absolute Phrases**

Another sort of verbal phrase is formed with a participle but functions more powerfully than a standard participle. Note the agent of the participle.

**The berries having sweetened, birds flocked to the tree.** *Here we have an absolute phrase: a noun berries attached as though a subject to a past participle having sweetened. The absolute phrase modifies the entire main clause.*

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*This PowerPoint was adapted from various book sources and internet sites including material found at the Purdue On-line Writing Lab.*

*[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_verbals.html#infinitives](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_verbals.html#infinitives)*