

# Lesson: Gerunds and Infinitives

**Overview:** Gerunds and infinitives are both ways to turn verbs into other parts of speech in a sentence. When you make a gerund, you take a verb and add *-ing* to it. When you make an infinitive, you put the word *to* before a verb. When you do this, the words function as a different part of speech (noun, adjective or adverb) in the sentence. For example:

verb: ski                                      We ski every year on his birthday.

gerund: skiing                              I love skiing.

infinitive: to ski                              I want to ski.

Many times, gerunds and infinitives function as nouns. It is easier to imagine gerunds and infinitives as nouns if you think of the word that comes after the verb in the sentence as an object, or if you replace the object with a pronoun.

I love *skiing*. → I love *it*.

I want *to ski*. → I want *it*.

## Gerunds

Gerunds usually function as nouns in sentences. While it is technically true that they can be adjectives (like in the sentence “I dove into the swimming pool.” – in this case *swimming* is a gerund used as an adjective), it is more important for improving your English to learn how gerunds can be used as nouns. Here are some ways in which gerunds are used as nouns in sentences:

1. **At the beginning of a sentence**

*Smoking* is bad for your health. → *It* is bad for your health.

2. **As a subject complement**

My favorite hobby is *sewing*. → My favorite hobby is *that*.

3. **After prepositions**

I am against *smoking*. → I am against *it*.

4. **After some verbs**

I avoid *smoking*. → I avoid *it*.

This is usually the point where English learners get a little frustrated. After some verbs??? Which verbs? Why not all verbs? Don't worry. We will address this concern a little later.

## Gerunds vs. Everything Else

Just to be clear, a verb that has -ing on the end is not always a gerund. Unfortunately, we add -ing to verbs a lot in the English language. Here are some cases when a verb + ing does not make it into a gerund.

I am **speaking** to my father. In this case, **speaking** is not a gerund, it is part of a verb tense.

He is **terrifying**. In this case, **terrifying** is not a gerund, it is an adjective.

I don't have any **running** water. In this case, **running** is not a gerund, it is a present participle.

## Infinitives

You create an infinitive by adding to before a verb. Infinitives commonly act as nouns, adjectives and adverbs in sentences. Here is an example for each:

I expect **to win!** (noun)

There are lots of people **to meet**. (adjective)

I went to the store **to buy** some eggs. (adverb)

Here are some useful ways to use infinitives:

- 1. After nouns that they modify**  
I have a lot of things *to do*.
- 2. To explain why something happened**  
I spoke to you *to find out* what the problem was.
- 3. After adjectives**  
I would be happy *to look* for you.
- 4. After relative pronouns**  
I don't know who *to call* in an emergency.
- 5. After certain verbs**  
I learned *to spell* in school.

## After Certain Verbs

If we look online for lists of verbs that take a gerund or an infinitive, we will quickly get overwhelmed. In reality, English speakers don't really think about gerunds and infinitives all that much. Rather, we should try to learn them naturally by listening to and speaking English. For example, most English language know that "I want to eat lunch." sounds good and "I want eating lunch." sounds wrong. That being said, there are a few very common problems learners have with gerunds and infinitives that we should learn.

## 10 Common Problems

### 1. avoid + gerund

What language learners say...	What you should say...
I avoid to speak in class. ✗	I avoid speaking in class. ✓

### 2. consider + gerund

What language learners say...	What you should say...
I considered to go there. ✗	I considered going there. ✓

### 3. look forward to + gerund

What language learners say...	What you should say...
I look forward to meet you. ✗	I look forward to meeting you. ✓

### 4. used to + bare infinitive

What language learners say...	What you should say...
I used to living in New York. ✗	I used to live in New York. ✓

### 5. be used to + gerund

What language learners say...	What you should say...
I am used to speak in English. ✗	I am used to speaking in English. ✓

### 6. get used to + gerund

What language learners say...	What you should say...
I got used to wake up at 6 a.m. ✗	I got used to waking up at 6 a.m. ✓

7. stop + gerund, stop + infinitive
8. suggest + gerund
9. recommend + gerund
10. not mind + gerund