

Gerunds and infinitives as subjects

The subject of a sentence is usually a noun or a pronoun. But sometimes, to-infinitives and -ing forms are also used as subjects.

Study the examples given below.

Swimming is a good exercise.

Here the -ing form 'swimming' acts as the subject of the verb 'is'.

More examples are given below.

Smoking is injurious to health.

Singing gives me great pleasure.

Telling lies can get you into deep trouble.

Collecting stamps is his hobby.

Driving very fast on a busy road may lead to an accident.

In each of the following sentences, the subject is an -ing form.

A to-infinitive can also act as the subject of a verb.

Study the example sentences given below.

To err is human.

To give advice is easy.

To follow this advice may be difficult.

To swim in that sea may be dangerous.

To drive very fast here is not advisable.

Now study the examples given below. They show another kind of subject a sentence can have.

What you say is not true.

Where the police have taken him is not known.

Why even good people suffer in this world is a great mystery.

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As you can see, the subject in each of these sentences is not a word or a phrase, but a group of words which itself looks like a sentence. A group of words of this kind is called a clause. Here the clause functions as a noun and therefore it is called a noun clause.