

# The infinitive

The infinitive is the base form of a verb. Examples are: *write, run, break, read, walk etc.*

The infinitive may be preceded by the marker *to*. It is then called the *to*-infinitive.

Examples of *to*-infinitives are given below:

I want to go.

Birds love to sing.

To err is human.

He refused to go.

Uses of the infinitive

The infinitive can be the subject of a verb.

To err is human; to forgive divine.

To find fault with others is easy.

In sentence 1, the infinitive *to err* is the subject of the verb *is*. In sentence 2, the infinitive phrase *to find fault with others* is the subject of the verb *is*.

As the object of the verb

The infinitive can be the object of a verb. Study the following examples.

He wants to go.

She likes to sing.

In sentence 1, the infinitive *to go* is the object of the verb *wants*. Similarly in sentence 2, the infinitive *to sing* is the object of the verb *likes*.

As subject complements

The infinitive can also be used as the complement of the subject. Study the following sentences:

The mistake she made was to get his attention.

The best thing to do now is to retreat.

In sentence 1, the infinitive *to get* is the complement of the subject *mistake*. In sentence 2, the infinitive *to retreat* is the complement of the subject *thing*.

As an adjective qualifying a noun

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The infinitive can function like an adjective.

That was a place to visit.

It is time to go.

Here the infinitives to visit and to go function like adjectives modifying the nouns place and time.

The forms of the infinitive

The infinitive has the following forms:

Simple present

*Active: to write; passive: to be written*

Present perfect

*Active: to have written; passive: to have been written*

Present continuous

*Active: to be writing; no passive form*

Present perfect continuous

*Active: to have been writing; no passive form*