

Understanding the use of infinitives

The infinitive is the base form of the verb. Examples are: *write, bring, take, make, sing, dance* etc. The infinitive usually takes the preposition 'to' with it. Examples are: *to write, to bring, to take, to make, to sing, to dance* etc.

When the infinitive is used with the preposition 'to' it is called the 'to-infinitive'.

The 'to-infinitive' is a non-finite verb. That means its form does not change when the number or person or the subject changes.

Study the examples given below.

I want to go.

She wants to go.

They wanted to go.

We will want to go.

As you can see, the infinitive form 'to go' remains the same even when the subject or tense changes.

Although the infinitive is formed by putting 'to' before the verb, it does not act as a verb. In fact, an infinitive serves the same purpose as a noun. It can act as the subject or object of the verb.

Infinitive as the subject of the sentence

The infinitive can act as the subject of the verb. Study the examples given below.

To err is human.

To make mistakes is easy.

To wait for people who would never turn up made him angry.

Infinitive as Object of a Verb

The infinitive can act as the object of a verb.

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He needs to concentrate on his studies.

We want to open new stores in Europe.

I hope to hear from you.

Note that some verbs cannot be followed by infinitives. They require gerunds (-ing forms). As there are no rules regarding this, you have to study which verbs take infinitives and which verbs take gerunds.

Infinitive as Subject Complement

The infinitive can also act as a subject complement.

A subject complement is a word or phrase that says something about the subject. Subject complements are common after the linking word 'be'.

The most important thing is to remain optimistic.