

Verbs followed by gerunds and infinitives

Some verbs and adjectives can be followed by either an -ing form or an infinitive. In some cases there is a difference of meaning.

Here is a list of verbs that can have different meanings depending on whether they are followed by a gerund or an infinitive.

See, watch and hear

These verbs can be used with an -ing form to talk about paying attention to events that are already going on.

I heard her singing a lovely song.

I watched them playing in the ground.

Infinitives usually refer to complete events which are seen / heard from beginning to end.

I once heard him give a speech on the ill-effects of globalization.

Note that these verbs are followed by infinitive without to.

Mean

When mean means 'intend', it is followed by an infinitive.

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you.

Mean can also be used to talk about doing something to have a certain result. In this case, it is followed by an -ing form.

If you want to win, it will mean working hard.

Begin and start

These verbs can be followed by an -ing form or an infinitive. There is usually no difference of meaning.

She started working at sixteen. OR She started to work at sixteen.

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Infinitives are preferred after progressive forms of begin and start.

I'm beginning to understand her. (NOT I'm beginning understanding her.)

Be accustomed to, be committed to, can't bear

Accustomed and committed take the preposition to. They can be followed by either an infinitive or an -ing form.

I'm not accustomed to working under pressure. OR I'm not accustomed to work under pressure.

We are committed to providing excellent customer service. OR We are committed to provide excellent customer service.

I can't bear seeing her in pain. OR I can't bear to see her in pain.