

Verbs followed by infinitives without to

The verbs hear, see, notice and watch can be followed by object + infinitive without to or object + -ing form.

I heard him go down the stairs.

I watched him cross the road.

I saw her light the lamp.

We heard her scream.

I watched them play in the garden.

There is a difference between the infinitive and the -ing form. The infinitive suggests that we see or hear the whole of an action or event. An -ing form, on the other hand, suggests that we hear or see an action in progress.

A progressive form can suggest repetition.

I saw her throwing stones at the dog.

Only -ing forms can be used after can see, can hear, can smell etc.

I could smell something burning.

I could hear her crying.

We cannot use possessive forms with -ing forms after these verbs.

I saw Mary lighting the lamp. (NOT I saw Mary's lighting the lamp.)

Look at

Look at can be followed by an object + -ing form. In American English, object + infinitive is also possible.

Look at him eating!

Look at him eat!