

Verbs and expressions: further information



The situation has started **improving** so we intend **to employ** more staff.

Some verbs can be followed only by the gerund or infinitive.

A few others can be followed by both with no difference in meaning. For example:

| | Gerund | Infinitive |
|----------|---|---|
| begin | We'll begin working on this next week. | We'll begin to work on this next week. |
| continue | They continued discussing it. | They continued to discuss it. |
| intend | We intend writing a detailed report. | We intend to write a detailed report. |
| start | She started writing the report. | She started to write the report. |

With these verbs it doesn't matter which one we choose but we do not use gerunds with continuous tenses:

It's starting raining. ❌ It's starting **to rain**.

He's been intending fixing that for weeks. ❌ He's been intending **to fix** that for weeks. ✅

And:

She agreed to continue **working** in this team.
sounds better than
She agreed to continue **to work** in this team.



They stopped **painting** the walls **to have** a break.

Some verbs can take either the gerund or infinitive with a difference in meaning.

| Verb | Meaning | Examples |
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| dread | <p>'Dread' means to anticipate something with worry or fear. It is usually used with the gerund. In the present simple, it can also be followed by the infinitive of verbs such as 'think' or 'consider' to mean that we're so worried that we don't even want to think about it.</p> | <p>I dread going to work every Monday. I always dreaded having lunch with him. I dread to consider what will happen when he finds out! I dread to think how she'll react.</p> |
| like | <p>With the gerund, the focus is on enjoying an activity or having fun.</p> <p>The infinitive can also be used to talk about enjoyment but it has another purpose - because it's the right or the most suitable thing - there is a sense of some benefit.</p> | <p>I like sitting in my garden in the evening. I like swimming.</p> <p>I like to swim every Friday. [this is the best time for me] I like to go to the dentist once a year. [because it's good for my health] I don't like to call colleagues at the weekend.</p> |
| regret | <p>'Regret' is commonly followed by the gerund; it means to feel unhappy about something that happened in the past and maybe wish it hadn't happened. In formal English, we use the present simple form of 'regret' + verbs such as 'inform', 'tell', 'say' and 'announce' to mean that we are sorry we have to give this information.</p> | <p>I regret taking this job. She regretted getting married so young.</p> <p>I regret to inform you that your application for the post of supervisor has not been successful. We regret to announce the cancellation of the 09.52 train to London Victoria.</p> |
| remember | <p>We use the gerund to talk about the memory of doing something. We often use this structure to reminisce.</p> <p>We also use it to confirm or question whether something happened. We use the infinitive to mean that we did or didn't forget to do something that had to be done or to remind someone to do something.</p> | <p>I remember walking to school when I was a child. Do you remember swimming in that lake?</p> <p>I remember discussing it but I don't remember receiving confirmation - I'll check. [maybe I received confirmation] I remembered to email him. Remember to call him this afternoon, won't you?</p> |

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| <p>forget</p> | <p>We use the gerund to talk about the memory of doing something but not in the same way as 'remember'. e.g. 'I sometimes forget that I've fed the cat and I give him more food' or 'I forgot I'd already emailed him.'</p> <p>We use the infinitive to mean that we didn't do something that had to be done or to remind someone to do something.</p> | <p>I'll never forget seeing the sea for the first time. How could you forget meeting him? - it was only last week!</p> <p>I forgot to email him. Don't forget to call him this afternoon, will you?</p> |
| <p>stop</p> | <p>With the gerund, it means to end an activity.</p> <p>The infinitive is used with the meaning 'in order to'. It suggests that a previous activity is stopped in order to start something different.</p> <p>The previous activity may or may not be mentioned. For this reason, it's possible to have a gerund and an infinitive together in the same sentence.</p> | <p>He stopped smoking when he was thirty. She never stops talking about him. Shall we stop working on this for now? We were walking down the High Street and stopped to buy a newspaper.</p> <p>We stopped (preparing the presentation) to focus on the report.</p> <p>They stopped working to have a coffee.</p> |

try

With the gerund, there is a suggestion of experimenting with one or more activity, sometimes in order to achieve something else later. It's sometimes used to give advice.

When we use the infinitive, 'try' means 'attempt' - we may or may not succeed in doing what we 'try to do'.

[You might hear the gerund used for 'attempts' e.g. "I can knit scarves but I'm going to try knitting a jumper next" but, if in doubt, follow the rules.] This difference can be confusing because both are about achieving something but 'try' + infinitive is used to talk about a final hoped-for result whereas 'try' + gerund is used to talk about methods used in order to achieve a final result.

After leaving university, she tried **teaching** and then journalism but wasn't happy with either of these.

If you're having trouble sleeping, try **having** hot milk at bedtime and **avoiding** caffeine.

She tried **to get** a job in a big IT company but she didn't have enough experience. [She failed to get the job.]

I'm going to try **to finish** this report by the end of the week. [I may or may not succeed.]

We tried **to boost** sales of our product and we succeeded. We wanted to boost sales so we tried **advertising** on TV and **giving** bulk discounts - we found these successful.

Verbs to express feelings

When we talk about enjoying something or having fun, we are more likely to use a gerund:

I (don't) enjoy **working** for this company. ✓

I (don't) enjoy to work for this company. ✗

| Verb | Meaning | Examples |
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| | | |
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| <p>like</p> | <p>With the gerund, the focus is on enjoying an activity or having fun.</p> <p>The infinitive is also possible for talking about enjoyment but the gerund is more commonly used.</p> <p>However, the infinitive has another purpose - to talk about something we do or aim to do because it's the right or the most suitable thing - there is a sense of some benefit.</p> | <p>I like swimming. I like relaxing in my garden.</p> <p>What do you like to do at weekends? I like to see my friends and go to a restaurant.</p> <p>I like to swim every Friday. [This is the best time for me.] I like to go to the dentist once a year. [Because it's good for my health.] I like to check my emails before I start any other work. I don't like to call colleagues at the weekend.</p> |
| <p>love</p> | <p>The gerund is much more common.</p> <p>There is often extra information with the infinitive.</p> | <p>I love going to the theatre. I love walking.</p> <p>I love to go to the theatre at Christmas. I love to walk in the rain.</p> |
| <p>hate</p> | <p>However, we also use the infinitive with 'I' for another purpose - to express regret about something we have to do now or soon.</p> <p>And, conversationally, with verbs such as 'think' or 'consider' - 'hate' has the meaning of 'dread'.</p> | <p>I hate to bother you but can I borrow a pen? I hate to interrupt their meeting but I need to speak to Bill urgently.</p> <p>I hate to think what will happen when he finds out!</p> |
| <p>prefer</p> | <p>We use the gerund to make a general, universal statement. It can refer to activities we enjoy or any other preference.</p> <p>The infinitive is also possible for general statements but can be used in specific situations too:</p> | <p>I prefer walking to driving. I prefer working in a team.</p> <p>"We can walk or get the bus." "I prefer to walk." "Shall we do this now or later?" "I'd prefer to wait."</p> |

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| <p>can't bear/stand</p> | <p>The gerund is more likely to be used for general statements than the infinitive.</p> <p>The infinitive is possible for general statements but is more likely to be used to express a strong reluctance to do something now or soon.</p> | <p>I can't bear living alone. He can't stand working with her. [Watching a horror film] I can't bear to look - tell me when this scene's finished! He can't bear to tell her the news so I'm going to speak to her instead.</p> |
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Note that when we ask questions about what people like doing, we are unlikely to use one of the stronger verbs but prefer the more neutral 'like':

Do you love going to concerts? ❌
 Do you like **going** to concerts? ✅

Can't you stand working from home? ❌
 Don't you like working from home? ✅

Unless we use a question tag to confirm what we already believe:
 You hate **getting** up early, don't you?

Similar expressions with different meanings

| Expression | Meaning | Examples |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| to be keen on + gerund | to like or enjoy doing [often used in the negative] | I'm not keen on gardening . Bill's not keen on sharing an office with Tim. [They're sharing an office and Bill doesn't like it.] Jo's keen to share an office with Jill. [Jo would really like to share an office with Jill.] |
| to be keen + infinitive | to be enthusiastic about a potential future activity [similar to 'look forward to' but less certain that it will happen] | He's keen to learn a new language. She's keen to visit us in the summer. |
| to be afraid of + gerund | to have a fear of an activity - used for general, universal statements | My sister's afraid of flying. I'm afraid of giving my boss bad news. [always] |
| to be afraid + infinitive | to be afraid or reluctant to do something | I'm afraid to tell him the news - he'll be really angry. [a specific situation] I'd like to apply for the job but I'm afraid to try . |

Need

In the passive, 'need' can be followed by a gerund or an infinitive with the same meaning:

This office needs **cleaning** every morning.

This computer will need **replacing** soon.

The seminar needed **organising** better than that.

This office needs **to be** cleaned every morning.

This computer will need **to be** replaced soon.

The seminar needed **to be** organised better than that.

Expressions with gerunds

Some expressions, including several with 'have', take a gerund. For example:

| Expression + gerund | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| To have a problem/problems/no problem | We had problems installing the new desks. I had no problem finding a hotel. I had difficulty connecting to the conference. |
| To have difficulty/no difficulty | |
| To have a good/great/lovely time etc. | We had a great time skiing in the Alps. We spent all day interviewing candidates. I spend most of my free time cycling or playing tennis. |
| To spend time | |
| To waste time | Don't waste time explaining to him - he never listens. |
| To look forward to | I'm looking forward to working with the new boss. |
| To be/get used to | I was nervous at first but I'm getting used to giving presentations now. |

Gerunds as nouns with possessives

Gerunds, because they are **nouns**, can be used with possessives:

The audience loved **Paul's acting** - he gave a great performance.

It is possible to use a **possessive adjective** or an **object pronoun** - it depends whether the focus is on the subject or the activity. Sometimes, there is very little difference:

She objected to **his smoking** in the house. [emphasis on the 'smoking']

She objected to **him smoking** in the house. [slight emphasis on the person discussed]

But the following sentence is clearly about the person - the speaker may have no objection to smoking generally but isn't happy that her son is doing it.

My son is only 16 and I don't like **him smoking**.

And in this situation, the focus is so clearly on the person that the use of a possessive is incorrect:

I saw **his smoking** in the office. ✘

I saw **him smoking** in the office. ✔

The possessive is also incorrect when the noun is plural, collective or abstract:

William was surprised by **his colleagues' buying** him a gift. ✘

William was surprised by his **colleagues buying** him a gift. ✔

The **crowd's getting** bigger and bigger was quite frightening. ✘

The **crowd getting** bigger and bigger was quite frightening. ✔

It's a question of **quality's being** more important than price. ✘

It's a question of **quality being** more important than price. ✔



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