

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

|                 |  |   |
|-----------------|--|---|
| <b>dread</b>    | <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 <b>going</b> to work every Monday. I always dreaded <b>having</b> lunch with him.<br/>I dread <b>to consider</b> what will happen when he finds out!<br/>I dread <b>to think</b> how she'll react.</p>   |
| <b>like</b>     | <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 <b>sitting</b> in my garden in the evening.<br/>I like <b>swimming</b>.</p> <p>I like <b>to swim</b> every Friday. [this is the best time for me]<br/>I like <b>to go</b> to the dentist once a year. [because it's good for my health]<br/>I don't like <b>to call</b> colleagues at the weekend.</p>                                  |
| <b>regret</b>   | <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 <b>taking</b> this job. She regretted <b>getting</b> married so young.</p> <p>I regret <b>to inform</b> you that your application for the post of supervisor has not been successful. We regret <b>to announce</b> the cancellation of the 09.52 train to London Victoria.</p>  |
| <b>remember</b> | <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 <b>walking</b> to school when I was a child. Do you remember <b>swimming</b> in that lake?</p> <p>I remember <b>discussing</b> it but I don't remember <b>receiving</b> confirmation - I'll check. [maybe I received confirmation]<br/>I remembered <b>to email</b> him. Remember <b>to call</b> him this afternoon, won't you?</p> |

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| <p><b>forget</b></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 <b>seeing</b> the sea for the first time.<br/>How could you forget <b>meeting</b> him? - it was only last week!</p> <p>I forgot <b>to email</b> him.<br/>Don't forget <b>to call</b> him this afternoon, will you?</p>  |
| <p><b>stop</b></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 <b>smoking</b> when he was thirty.<br/>She never stops <b>talking</b> about him.<br/>Shall we stop <b>working</b> on this for now?<br/>We were walking down the High Street and stopped <b>to buy</b> a newspaper.</p> <p>We stopped (<b>preparing</b> the presentation) <b>to focus</b> on the report.</p> <p>They stopped <b>working to have</b> a coffee.</p> |

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| <b>try</b> | <p>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.</p> <p>When we use the infinitive, 'try' means 'attempt' - we may or may not succeed in doing what we 'try to do'.</p> <p>[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.</p> | <p>After leaving university, she tried <b>teaching</b> and then journalism but wasn't happy with either of these.</p> <p>If you're having trouble sleeping, try <b>having</b> hot milk at bedtime and <b>avoiding</b> caffeine.</p> <p>She tried <b>to get</b> a job in a big IT company but she didn't have enough experience. [She failed to get the job.]</p> <p>I'm going to try <b>to finish</b> this report by the end of the week. [I may or may not succeed.]</p> <p>We tried <b>to boost</b> sales of our product and we succeeded.<br/>We wanted to boost sales so we tried <b>advertising</b> on TV and <b>giving</b> bulk discounts - we found these successful.</p> |
|------------|---|--|

## 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 |
|------|---------|----------|
|------|---------|----------|

|                      |  |   |
|----------------------|--|---|
| <p><b>like</b></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 <b>swimming</b>.<br/>I like <b>relaxing</b> in my garden.</p> <p>What do you like <b>to do</b> at weekends?<br/>I like <b>to see</b> my friends and <b>go</b> to a restaurant.</p> <p>I like <b>to swim</b> every Friday. [This is the best time for me.]<br/>I like <b>to go</b> to the dentist once a year. [Because it's good for my health.]<br/>I like <b>to check</b> my emails before I start any other work.<br/>I don't like <b>to call</b> colleagues at the weekend.</p> |
| <p><b>love</b></p>   | <p>The gerund is much more common.</p> <p>There is often extra information with the infinitive.</p>  | <p>I love <b>going</b> to the theatre.<br/>I love <b>walking</b>.</p> <p>I love <b>to go</b> to the theatre at Christmas.<br/>I love <b>to walk</b> in the rain.</p>  |
| <p><b>hate</b></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 <b>to bother</b> you but can I borrow a pen?<br/>I hate <b>to interrupt</b> their meeting but I need to speak to Bill urgently.</p> <p>I hate <b>to think</b> what will happen when he finds out!</p>   |
| <p><b>prefer</b></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 <b>walking</b> to driving.<br/>I prefer <b>working</b> in a team.</p> <p>"We can walk or get the bus."<br/>"I prefer <b>to walk</b>."<br/>"Shall we do this now or later?"<br/>"I'd prefer <b>to wait</b>."</p>   |

|                                |  |  |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| <p><b>can't bear/stand</b></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 <b>living</b> alone.<br/>         He can't stand <b>working</b> with her.<br/>         [Watching a horror film] I can't bear <b>to look</b> - tell me when this scene's finished!<br/>         He can't bear <b>to tell</b> her the news so I'm going to speak to her instead.</p> |
|--------------------------------|--|--|

**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 <b>gardening</b> .<br>Bill's not keen on <b>sharing</b> an office with Tim. [They're sharing an office and Bill doesn't like it.]<br>Jo's keen <b>to share</b> 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 <b>to learn</b> a new language.<br>She's keen <b>to visit</b> 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.<br>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 <b>to tell</b> him the news - he'll be really angry. [a specific situation]<br>I'd like to apply for the job but I'm afraid <b>to try</b> .   |

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

Others which include a verb related to location or position also take a gerund. Here are a few examples:

### Expression and 'verb of location' + gerund

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| To sit   | He's sitting in the living room <b>watching</b> TV.   |
| To stand | He stood on the corner <b>talking</b> to his friends. |
| To stay  | I stayed in the office <b>waiting</b> for his call.   |
| To lie   | I lay on the beach <b>reading</b> every afternoon     |

## 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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Last update: 2023/02/14 14:21

