The infinitive is the most basic form of a verb – for example, ‘to run’ or ‘to eat’. Most of the time, we use a verb in a variety of other forms, but sometimes we can also use it in this basic form. Here are some of the main uses of the infinitive:

**Infinitive as a noun**

Sometimes, the infinitive form of a verb is used not as a normal verb – but as a noun. As a noun, it can be the subject or object of the verb.

- *To err* is human. (the infinitive ‘to err’ is the subject of the verb ‘is’)
- *She likes to run.* (the infinitive ‘to play’ serves as the object of the verb ‘likes’)

**Infinitive to qualify an adjective or a noun**

We can also use the infinitive form after some adjectives and nouns, to give an explanation for the particular adjective or noun. Some of the adjectives are: ‘eager’, ‘happy’, ‘surprised’, etc. The infinitive here helps to give an opinion or explanation to the word.

- *She was happy to see him come home.* (the infinitive ‘to see’ gives an explanation about why she was happy)
- *This is not the time to play.* (the infinitive ‘to play’ gives an opinion of the time that is not suitable for playing)
Infinitive as a complement of a verb

The infinitive can also be the complement of a verb.

- *Her greatest pleasure is to sing.* *(the infinitive ‘to sing’ is the complement of the verb ‘is’)*

Infinitive to show purpose

We can also use infinitives to say why we do something (thus, we use ‘to’ in place of a common phrase ‘in order to’ or the phrases like ‘because I (she, he, we or they) wanted to do something).

- Why do people go to Paris?
  ... because they want to see the Eiffel Tower.
- ... *to see the Eiffel Tower.*

- I went to the library...
  ... because I wanted to get a book.
- ... *to get a book.*

Check out this video on 5 ways to use the infinitive:

**Verb Patterns**

When used after verbs, infinitives and gerunds can replace a noun as the object of a verb. Whether we use a gerund or an infinitive depends on the main verb in the sentence.

a) verb + -ing

After some verbs, we use verb-ing:

- *I enjoy going to the cinema.*
Some other verbs which follow this pattern are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>suggest</th>
<th>like</th>
<th>love</th>
<th>stop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>finish</td>
<td>keep</td>
<td>avoid</td>
<td>hate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mind</td>
<td>enjoy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some other verbs which follow this pattern are:

- I hate listening to rap music.
- It didn’t stop raining all day.

b) to + infinitive

After other verbs, we use to + infinitive:

- We wanted to relax on holiday.
- NOT: We wanted relaxing on holiday.

- We decided to go to Greece.
- NOT: We decided going to Greece.

Some other verbs which follow this pattern are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>choose</th>
<th>forget</th>
<th>help</th>
<th>decide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hope</td>
<td>need</td>
<td>plan</td>
<td>want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promise</td>
<td>try</td>
<td>would like</td>
<td>learn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- We hope to go there again next year.
• *I promised to buy* a present for my sister.

In the negative, we use ‘**not to**…’:

• *We tried not to drink* too much ouzo.

Read more about using gerunds and infinitives in this article:

Verb patterns: Gerund vs Infinitive

See also:

Verbs: the Infinitive