

Verb constructions

In English, when two verbs come together (when a second verb is dependent on a preceding verb), the second verb can be:

- an infinitive (with or without the preposition 'to')
- a gerund ('-ing')
- part of a clause beginning with 'that ...', 'if ...', and so on

Some verbs can take only one of these forms; others can take two or three forms. For example:

You must go.

He wants to go.

Try to go tomorrow.

Try going tomorrow.

We've decided on going next week.

We've decided to go next week.

We've decided that we'll go next week.

There is no logical reason for many of these verb constructions, so there is no easy way of learning them. But there are some groups of similar verbs that you may be able to memorize.

1 The following verbs are followed by an **infinitive without 'to'**:

can	could	may	might	must
should	will	would	had better	would rather

2 The following verbs already contain *to*, and are followed by an **infinitive**:

have to	ought to	*used to
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* The verb *used to*, describing a habitual past action, which is followed by an infinitive, is not the same as the adjective *used to* in the expression 'I am used to ...' meaning 'I am accustomed to ...', which is followed by a gerund.

3 The verbs **make** and **let** are followed by an **infinitive without 'to'**:

- to make someone do something
- to let someone do something

The verb **help** can be followed by an **infinitive with or without 'to'**:

She helped me do it. *She helped me to do it.*

4 In the **passive** form, the verbs **allow**, **enable** and **permit** are followed by an **infinitive with 'to'**:

You are not allowed to do that.

In the **active** form, if the verbs **allow**, **enable** and **permit** are followed by another verb, they require an **object** (a noun or pronoun) plus an **infinitive with 'to'**.

- To allow/enable/permit someone to do something:
This will allow us to expand into South East Asia.
This will enable the company to raise more capital.
This will permit them to be more competitive in their retail operations.

5 You **forget**, **remember**, and **regret doing** something in the past.

You **forget**, **remember**, and **regret to do** something that has to be done.

I remember doing that in the first year at university.

Did you remember to phone him this morning?

No, I forgot to make a note of his number.

I regret to inform you that you're fired!

6 Some English verbs are always followed by a preposition if used in a long clause.

For example:

I apologize. *I apologize for being late.*

I insist. *I insist on being consulted.*

If you do not know the preposition, it is impossible to use the verb correctly. On the other hand, if you *do* know a verb + preposition construction, you can be sure that if it is followed by a second verb, this will be a gerund.

These verbs are followed by a **preposition and a gerund**:

abstain from + <i>-ing</i>	*accuse of	apologize for
approve of	assist in	‡believe in
*blame for	‡complain about	concentrate on
‡confess to	consist of / in	contribute to
cope with	‡decide on / against	*deter from
*discourage from	*dissuade from	dream of / about
indulge in	enquire about	insist on
joke about	look forward to	object to
participate in	persist in	*prevent from
profit from	*prohibit from	protest about / against
*punish for	refrain from	rely on
*save from	succeed in	*suspect of
*warn about	worry about	

* These verbs usually have the construction:

verb – person or pronoun (someone) – preposition – gerund
(e.g. to accuse someone of doing something)

‡ These verbs can also be followed by a ‘that ...’ clause (without the preposition).

The verb *decide* can also be followed by an infinitive with ‘to’.

It is necessary to distinguish between verbs followed by an infinitive with ‘to’ (*I want to go; I expect to win*), and the verbal forms above which themselves include the preposition ‘to’ (and are therefore followed by a gerund).

7 Some adjectives, usually used with the verb **to be**, are also followed by a **preposition and a gerund**. These include:

accustomed to	annoyed about	ashamed of	aware of
capable of	doubtful about	fed up with	fond of
frightened of	guilty of	interested in	keen on
proud of	responsible for	serious about	tired of
used to			

8 The following verbs concerned with future **plans and desires** are followed by an **infinitive with ‘to’** (*I want to go*):

aim	expect	hope	intend
mean *	plan	want	would like

* If *mean* has the sense of *involve* it is followed by a gerund, e.g. *This will mean moving to a new house*.

9 The verbs **like**, **love** and **hate** can be followed by either an infinitive with ‘to’ or a gerund. Other verbs concerning **likes and dislikes** are usually followed by a **gerund**:

adore	can’t stand	detest	dislike
enjoy	fancy	feel like	loathe

- 10 Many verbs involving encouraging or forcing another person to do something take the **infinitive with 'to'**:

cause	command	compel	convince	encourage
force	incite	induce	inspire	oblige
order	persuade	tempt	urge	

However, equivalent negative verbs are often followed by a preposition and a gerund:

to deter, discourage, dissuade someone from doing something

- 11 The following verbs are difficult to classify into meaningful groups. These verbs are followed by an **infinitive with 'to'**:

*advise	afford	‡agree	appear	‡arrange
*ask	attempt	be able	*bribe	*challenge
‡claim	‡demand	fail	‡guarantee	hesitate
invite	manage	offer	promise	refuse
seem	stay	struggle	*teach (how)	*tell (how)
tend	*train (how)	‡understand (how)		undertake
volunteer	‡wish	wonder (how)		

These verbs are followed by a **gerund**:

acknowledge	‡admit (to)	avoid	cannot help
carry on	‡consider	contemplate	count on
defer	delay	deny	finish
give up	‡imagine	involve	keep on
‡mind	miss	practise	postpone
put off	resist	‡risk	suggest

* Indicates that the construction is often 'to (verb) someone to (infinitive) something'.

‡ Indicates that the verb can also be followed by a 'that ...' clause.

These verbs can be followed by **either an infinitive with 'to' or by a gerund**:

begin	continue	forbid	hate
like	love	*need	prefer
propose	recommend	start	‡stop

* *I need to repair this. The car needs repairing.*

‡ *You can stop doing something in order to do something else.*

He stopped smoking last summer.

He stopped [writing] to look up a word in the dictionary.