

Verbs + infinitive

English is a language with a few rules, a lot of exceptions and areas inbetween, where there are some guidelines, but where things change on a case-by-case basis.

Verb patterns are one example of this latter area of the language. A verb pattern is defined as the interaction of verbs that come after each other in a sentence. Unlike in some languages, where the form of the second verb is always the same (like in French, where the second verb is always in the infinitive), the form of the second verb in English can vary. Here is a list of the various forms two verbs can take in an English sentence:

- ✓ Verb + to infinitive
- ✓ Verb + object + to infinitive
- ✓ Verb + object + base form (infinitive without 'to')
- ✓ Verb + base form
- ✓ Verb + gerund

The first logical question one would ask is, given the various forms the second verb in a sentence can take, how does a language learner (or, indeed, a native speaker) know which pattern he or she should use? The answer is that it depends strictly on what the first verb of the sentence is.

This leads us to a second logical question: is there any rule (semantic or morphological) that would help us determine what form will follow a given first verb? The answer to this question is, quite simply, no. One must learn which pattern follows each different verb. The good news is that there aren't that many different verbs that tend to be followed by a second verb (only a couple of dozen).

The bad news, however, is that some verbs can be followed by one of two different verb patterns, in particular the gerund and the infinitive. In addition, depending on the verb, there are cases where the different verb patterns indicate different meanings, and cases where different verb patterns do not translate any discernible difference in meaning. Hence, in addition to the verb patterns above, we should look at the ones below:

- ✓ Verb + to infinitive **or** gerund (same meaning)
- ✓ Verb + to infinitive **or** gerund (different meaning)

Next are the most common verbs whose meaning change in function of the verb pattern.

Forget

1. Ronan Farrow never **forgot to** do his homework. (verb + infinitive)
2. Jane told her husband to **forget going** to Belize on holiday, because they didn't have enough money. (verb + gerund)

In sentence **1**, the object of the verb (homework) is an obligation. In sentence **2**, 'forget + gerund' is used when the verb/action comes before chronologically the 1st verb, or informally to forbid someone from doing something.

Remember

1. The firefighters **remembered to start** some artificial fires around the redwoods, in order to protect them from invasive species. (verb + infinitive)
2. Ronan Farrow **remembers meeting** with President Obama for the first time. (verb + gerund)

In sentence **1**, we are again talking about an obligation. In the second sentence, we are talking about an event, without any implication of obligation.

Stop

1. Ronan and Mia **stopped speaking** to Woody Allen. (verb + gerund)
2. While driving through Belize, we would often **stop to get out** of the car and look at the scenery. (verb + infinitive)

In sentence **1**, the subject ceases to do the activity in the second verb (in this case, speaking). In sentence **2**, the subject ceases to do another activity in order to do the activity in the second verb (in this case, getting out of the car). In other words, the second verb is the action that the subject starts to do, after ceasing another activity (in this case, driving).

Try

1. From a young age, Ronan Farrow has **tried to make** an impact in the world.
2. When you're in Belize, **try eating** their oven-roasted Cayo chicken; you may like it!

In sentence **1**, the second verb is the object of an effort: Ronan has made an effort to change the world. In sentence **2**, the second verb is an experience to be engaged in, usually for the sake of discovery. No particular effort is implied.

Regret

1. Madonna doesn't **regret causing** many scandals throughout her career.
2. The fire department **regrets to inform** you that, due to the threat of wildfires, you will have to evacuate your homes for the next 48 hours.

In sentence **1**, the subject feels no regret about the action in the second verb; the action itself took place in the past. In sentence **2**, the second action is always some form of communication (including writing, calling, telling), and is a means of softening bad news for the person we are speaking to.

EXERCISE 1 Verb pattern

Find and underline the two verbs (verb + base form) that form the verb patterns in the sentences below.

Example: Unfortunately, experts say that the effects of climate change will continue to worsen, leading to ever greater and more devastating wildfires.

- 1/ However, climate change also threatens California's redwoods in other ways, specifically by changing the frequency of fog, from which they absorb moisture, and by causing coastal erosion, a result of rising sea levels that could see them topple into the ocean in the future.
- 2/ Ronan Farrow said he "desperately wanted to make his own mark on some level".
- 3/ After spending two years in Kabul, Islamabad and Washington, Farrow began working for Secretary Clinton on a program aimed at engaging young people in more than 40 countries.
- 4/ She soon began dating a member of a band called Breakfast Club, who helped her get a job as a showgirl in Paris, through which she discovered her enjoyment of musical performance. (two different verb patterns)
- 5/ While working on the Weinstein exposé, he was forced to move out of his Manhattan apartment because of threats against him.

EXERCISE 2 Fill in the blanks

Fill in the blanks below with the verb in parentheses in the correct form. There is sometimes more than one correct answer.

- 1/ The underbrush started _____ (burn) almost immediately.
- 2/ Madonna learned _____ (dance) at an early age.
- 3/ Ronan wanted _____ (shine) a spotlight on systems of sexual exploitation in Hollywood.
- 4/ Vacationers in Belize usually enjoy _____ (travel) all around the country, rather than _____ (stay) in only one spot.
- 5/ Holbrooke suggested _____ (join) him in Pakistan.



"Henry, I'm beginning to think we're on different career paths."

EXERCISE 3 Gerund or infinitive?



"No fax paper? Okay, you'll have to ride for help!"

Decide whether the second verb should be in the gerund form or in the infinitive form.

- 1/ After dropping out of university, Madonna tried _____ (dance) professionally in New York City, and it worked out well for her.
- 2/ Some fires start when people forget _____ (extinguish) their campfires.
- 3/ Because she is a star, the media have tried _____ (discover) everything they could about Madonna's private life.
- 4/ John was so drunk during his Belize holiday that he didn't remember _____ (do) half the things his girlfriend said he did.
- 5/ Ronan Farrow stopped _____ (work) on the Weinstein case in order to focus on writing his new book.