

Gerund after prepositions

CEFR A2-B1 · 20 questions · A4 / US Letter

Every verb after a preposition becomes an -ing form, including after two-word prepositions and the tricky to in look forward to.

The rule

The basic rule

- Preposition + verb = verb + -ing.
- "Good at drawing", "interested in learning", "tired of waiting", "thank you for helping".
- The -ing form is a gerund here: it works like a noun after the preposition.
- Never use the base verb or the to-infinitive after a preposition: "good at draw" and "good at to draw" are both wrong.

Common single-word prepositions

- in: interested in reading, succeed in passing.
- at: good at cooking, bad at remembering names.
- of: afraid of flying, tired of repeating the same thing.
- for: famous for winning, thank you for coming.
- about: excited about starting, worried about failing.
- without: left without saying goodbye.

Two-word prepositions

- instead of: "Let us walk instead of driving."
- in spite of: "She passed in spite of missing classes."
- look forward to: "I look forward to hearing from you."
- be used to and get used to: "I am used to working nights."
- object to: "They object to paying the new tax."

The to trap

- To usually introduces an infinitive: "I want to go."
- In look forward to, be used to and object to, to is a preposition, so the next verb is -ing.
- "I look forward to hearing from you" is correct; "to hear" is a common mistake in emails.
- A useful test: if you can put a noun after to, then to is a preposition and the verb takes -ing.

Before, after and by

- Before and after can be prepositions with -ing: "before leaving", "after eating".

- They can also be conjunctions with a clause: "before I left", "after we ate".
- By + -ing explains how something is done: "You learn by practising."
- On + -ing means as soon as: "On arriving home, she called her mother."

Questions

Write your answer on the line under each question. Check your work with the answer key on the last page.

1. She is good at ___ problems.

2. I am interested in ___ Japanese.

3. He is afraid of ___ in small spaces.

4. Thank you for ___ me with the boxes.

5. We left the party without ___ goodbye.

6. I look forward to ___ from you.

7. She is used to ___ long hours.

8. They objected to ___ the extra fee.

9. After ___ work, he went for a run.

10. You will improve by ___ every day.

11. I am tired of ___ the same question.

12. He is famous for ___ fast.

13. She left without ___ a word.

14. We talked about ___ a new car.

15. On ___ home, she called her mother.

16. He apologised for ___ late.

17. She kept the secret without ___ anyone.

18. I am worried about ___ the exam.

19. Before ___ the house, turn off the lights.

20. They succeeded in ___ the race.

Answer key

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1. **solving** — After the preposition at, the verb takes -ing.
2. **learning** — In is a preposition, so the gerund learning follows.
3. **being** — Of is a preposition and takes the -ing form.
4. **helping** — For is a preposition, so helping is the correct gerund.
5. **saying** — Without is a preposition and needs the -ing form.
6. **hearing** — In look forward to, to is a preposition, so the verb takes -ing.
7. **working** — Be used to takes -ing because to is a preposition here.
8. **paying** — Object to keeps to as a preposition, so the gerund follows.
9. **finishing** — After as a preposition takes the gerund when the subject matches.
10. **reading** — By + -ing explains the method.
11. **answering** — Tired of takes the gerund answering.
12. **driving** — For is a preposition, so driving is correct.
13. **saying** — Without takes the -ing form saying.
14. **buying** — About is a preposition and takes the gerund.
15. **arriving** — On + -ing means as soon as she arrived.
16. **being** — For is a preposition, so being is the gerund.
17. **telling** — Without takes the gerund telling.
18. **failing** — Worried about takes the -ing form.
19. **leaving** — Before as a preposition takes the gerund when the subject is the same.
20. **finishing** — Succeed in takes the gerund finishing.