

Gerund vs infinitive

CEFR B1-B2 · 20 questions · A4 / US Letter

Verb plus -ing or verb plus to: the pattern lists, and the verbs where meaning flips.

The rule

The two forms and their jobs

- Gerund: verb plus -ing, used like a noun. "Reading helps me relax."
- Infinitive: to plus the base verb. "I decided to read the book."
- Both can be the subject: "Swimming is fun", "To swim in that lake is dangerous". The gerund is far more common as a subject.
- The choice usually belongs to the first verb, not to the second: enjoy takes -ing, decide takes to.

Verbs that take the gerund (-ing)

- enjoy, finish, avoid, suggest, mind, keep, practise, admit, consider, risk, deny, imagine, recommend.
- "I enjoy cooking." "She avoided answering the question." "They suggested going by train."
- Any preposition takes the gerund: "good at drawing", "interested in learning", "before leaving", "instead of waiting".
- Fixed phrases with a preposition take the gerund too: look forward to, be used to, get used to, object to.

Verbs that take the infinitive (to + verb)

- want, need, decide, hope, plan, promise, agree, offer, refuse, learn, afford, manage, choose, expect.
- "I want to help." "He promised to call." "We cannot afford to wait."
- After adjectives, use the infinitive: "happy to help", "ready to leave", "easy to use".
- After too and enough, use the infinitive: "too tired to cook", "old enough to drive".

Verb plus object plus to

- Some verbs name the person first, then use to: want, ask, tell, advise, invite, remind, expect, allow, persuade, encourage.
- "She wants me to help." Not "She wants that I help."
- "They asked us to wait." "He reminded me to lock the door."
- With make, let and help, the to disappears: "She made me laugh", "Let me go", "Help me carry this".

Both forms, different meaning

- Stop smoking: end the habit. Stop to smoke: pause in order to smoke.
- Remember locking the door: have a memory of the action. Remember to lock the door: do not forget to do it.

- Forget meeting her: not remember a past event. Forget to meet her: fail to do the task.
- Try pushing the button: experiment with a method. Try to push the button: make an effort, which may fail.
- Go on talking: continue the same activity. Go on to talk about: move to a new topic. Like and love take both with almost no change.

Questions

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

1. I enjoy ___ in the sea.

2. She decided ___ the job offer.

3. They suggested ___ a taxi.

4. We hope ___ you again soon.

5. He finished ___ the emails at nine.

6. I am interested in ___ Japanese.

7. She promised ___ me a postcard.

8. Please remember ___ the door when you leave.

9. I remember ___ the door, so do not worry.

10. He stopped ___ two years ago.

11. We stopped ___ a coffee on the way home.

12. She avoided ___ my question.

13. I cannot afford ___ a new car this year.

14. They invited us ___ with them.

15. My parents made me ___ the piano every day.

16. Do you mind ___ the window?

17. I am looking forward to ___ from you.

18. He refused ___ the offer.

19. Try ___ the button again. Maybe it works now.

20. We plan ___ a house next year.

Answer key

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1. **swimming** — Enjoy takes the gerund: enjoy swimming.
2. **to accept** — Decide takes the infinitive: decided to accept.
3. **taking** — Suggest takes the gerund: suggested taking.
4. **to see** — Hope takes the infinitive: hope to see.
5. **writing** — Finish takes the gerund: finished writing.
6. **learning** — After a preposition, use the gerund: interested in learning.
7. **to send** — Promise takes the infinitive: promised to send.
8. **to lock** — Remember to lock means do not forget to do it later. Remember locking would mean a memory of having locked it.
9. **locking** — Remember doing means have a memory of the action.
10. **smoking** — Stop doing something means end the activity. Stop to smoke would mean pause in order to smoke.
11. **to have** — Stop to do something expresses purpose: we paused in order to have a coffee.
12. **answering** — Avoid takes the gerund: avoided answering.
13. **to buy** — Afford takes the infinitive: afford to buy.
14. **to stay** — Invite follows the verb plus object plus to pattern: invited us to stay.
15. **practise** — Make plus object takes the base verb without to: made me practise.
16. **closing** — Mind takes the gerund: mind closing.
17. **hearing** — "To" in look forward to is a preposition, so the verb after it takes -ing.
18. **to accept** — Refuse takes the infinitive: refused to accept.
19. **pressing** — Try doing means experiment with a method. Try to press suggests effort that might fail.
20. **to buy** — Plan takes the infinitive: plan to buy.