

Infinitives

WHAT IS AN INFINITIVE?

An infinitive is a verbal which functions as a noun, adjective, or adverb. It takes the form of **to + the verb** in its simplest form (i.e. “to go”). The infinitive expresses an action or a state of being because it is formed from a verb.

For example: *to walk*

WHAT IS AN INFINITIVE PHRASE?

An infinitive phrase is a phrase that begins with an infinitive (to + the verb) and includes objects or modifiers. For example: *to walk to the store*

Functions of Infinitives

Noun

An infinitive can function as a *noun* in a sentence. The following are some examples:

To go to the mall seemed like a waste of time.

(Here, the infinitive phrase “to go to the mall” is a noun that functions as the subject of the sentence.)

The children needed to eat.

(Here, the infinitive “to eat” is a noun that functions as the direct object of the sentence.)

Mark’s idea was to go to the movies tomorrow.

(Here, the infinitive phrase “to go to the movies” is a noun that functions as the subject complement of the sentence.)

An infinitive can also function as an *adjective* or *adverb* in a sentence. The following are some examples:

Adjective

She did not have the ability to speak.

(Here, the infinitive “to speak” functions as an adjective, modifying the noun “ability.”)

Adverb

The professor teaches English 101 to help students write.

(Here, the infinitive phrase “to help students write” functions as an adverb, answering the question “why?”)

Note: Be careful not to confuse *infinitive phrases* with *prepositional phrases*. While some prepositional phrases begin with “to,” they are followed by a noun or pronoun. For infinitive phrases, the “to” is ALWAYS immediately followed by a verb.

For example: to drive (*infinitive*) to the car (*prepositional phrase*)