

# 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*)