

The infinitive

The infinitive is the base form of a verb. Examples are: *write, run, break, read, walk etc.*

The infinitive may be preceded by the marker *to*. It is then called the *to*-infinitive.

Examples of *to*-infinitives are given below:

I want to go.

Birds love to sing.

To err is human.

He refused to go.

Uses of the infinitive

The infinitive can be the subject of a verb.

To err is human; to forgive divine.

To find fault with others is easy.

In sentence 1, the infinitive *to err* is the subject of the verb *is*. In sentence 2, the infinitive phrase *to find fault with others* is the subject of the verb *is*.

As the object of the verb

The infinitive can be the object of a verb. Study the following examples.

He wants to go.

She likes to sing.

In sentence 1, the infinitive *to go* is the object of the verb *wants*. Similarly in sentence 2, the infinitive *to sing* is the object of the verb *likes*.

As subject complements

The infinitive can also be used as the complement of the subject. Study the following sentences:

The mistake she made was to get his attention.

The best thing to do now is to retreat.

In sentence 1, the infinitive *to get* is the complement of the subject *mistake*. In sentence 2, the infinitive *to retreat* is the complement of the subject *thing*.

As an adjective qualifying a noun

The infinitive can function like an adjective.

That was a place to visit.

It is time to go.

Here the infinitives *to visit* and *to go* function like adjectives modifying the nouns *place* and *time*.

The forms of the infinitive

The infinitive

The infinitive has the following forms:

Simple present

Active: to write; passive: to be written

Present perfect

Active: to have written; passive: to have been written

Present continuous

Active: to be writing; no passive form

Present perfect continuous

Active: to have been writing; no passive form