

to-infinitive or ing-form?

1. Introduction

Some verbs are followed by a *to*-infinitive, and some by an *ing*-form.

Harriet decided to have a party.
'to decide' takes a *to*-infinitive.

Harriet suggested having a party.
'to suggest' takes an *ing*-form.

Laura started to paint/painting a picture.

A few verbs take either a *to*-infinitive or an *ing*-form.

2. *to*-infinitive or *ing*-form?

These verbs are followed by a ***to*-infinitive**:

agree, aim (= intend), appear, arrange, ask, attempt, beg, can't afford¹, can't wait², choose, claim, decide, demand, desire, expect, fail, guarantee, happen, help, hope, learn, manage, offer, plan, prepare, pretend, promise, prove, refuse, seem, tend, threaten, turn out, undertake³, want, wish, would like, would love

These verbs are followed by an ***ing*-form**:

admit, avoid, can't face⁴, can't help⁵, can't resist, can't stand⁶, carry on, consider, delay, deny, detest, dislike, enjoy, excuse, fancy, finish, give up, imagine, include, involve, justify, keep (on), mention, mind, miss, postpone, practise, put off, quit, resent⁷, risk, save, suggest, tolerate

These verbs are followed by **either a *to*-infinitive or an *ing*-form**:

begin, bother⁸, continue, hate, intend, like, love, prefer, propose (= intend), start

These verbs are followed by **either a *to*-infinitive or an *ing*-form** depending on **the meaning of the statement**⁸:

remember, forget, regret, try, mean, stop, go on, need

3. Can't wait and fancy

If you **can't wait** to do something, you are eager to do it.

I can't wait to see the photos you took. (I'm eager/impatient to see the photos.)

If you **fancy** doing something, you want to do it.

Do you fancy going out for a meal? (Would you like to go out for a meal?) Fancy is informal.

¹ can't afford = you should not do sth, because it will cause problems for you if you do

² can't wait = sb is very excited about sth or very keen to do it

³ to undertake = to agree or promise that you will do sth

⁴ can't face = feel unable/unwilling to deal with sth

⁵ can't help = it is impossible to prevent or avoid sth

⁶ can't stand = especially in negative sentences and questions to emphasize that you do not like sth/sb

⁷ to resent = to feel bitter or angry about sth (especially because you felt it's unfair)

⁸ to bother = to spend time and/or energy doing sth

4. Happen, turn out and prove

We use **prove to** or **turn out to** when experience shows what something is like.

In the end our forecast proved to be correct.

Finding Harriet's house turned out to be very difficult.

Note the meaning of **happen to**.

I happened to see Sarah in town. (I saw Sarah by chance in town.)

5. Two forms together

We can sometimes use more than one *to*-infinitive or *ing*-form together.

The government decided to refuse to give in to the terrorists.

I want to avoid hurting anyone's feelings.

The man denied threatening to kill a policeman.