PHRASES

INFINITIVE PHRASES

1. Simple Infinitives

A. Form

Infinitives with 'to' can be the subject, object or complement of a verb.

To give is better than **to receive**. Everyone loves **to win**.

I tried **not to look** at the accident.

An infinitive can have its own subject, introduced with 'for':

For evil to succeed it is only necessary for the good to do nothing.

In informal English we sometimes put an adverb between 'to' and the infinitive. This is known as 'split infinitive', and we usually avoid it in formal English by putting the adverb in another position:

The doctor started **to carefully remove** the bandages. (Informal)

The doctor started **to remove** the bandages **carefully**. (Formal)

There are also perfect, continuous and passive forms of the infinitive.

B. Infinitives of purpose and result

We can use an infinitive to describe the purpose or reason for an action:

Cover the turkey in silver foil **to keep** the meat moist.

To stop the train, pull the lever downwards.

We use 'for' before the infinitive when the subject of the infinitive is different from the subject of the sentence:

We bought a cage **for John to keep his hamster in**.

In more formal English we can use 'in order to' or 'so as + infinitive of purpose':

Interest rates have been raised **in order to reduce** inflationary pressures.

We have removed the warning signs **so as not to alarm** members of the public.

The infinitive can also describe a result or something surprising, especially with 'only' and verbs such as find, discover, and realize:

They queued for hours at the box office **only to discover** that the show was sold out.

We also use infinitives after 'too' and 'enough' to talk about results:

That blue outfit was **too informal to wear** to the reception.

There isn't **enough food to go** around, I'm afraid.

C. Infinitives after adjectives and nouns

Many adjectives, especially those describing feelings, can be followed by to + infinitives:

We're **thrilled to welcome** this year's prizewinner onto the podium.

The Bensons are **lucky to be having** such good weather.

Adjective + to + infinitive: able/unable, afraid, anxious, ashamed, bound, careful, certain, crazy, curious, due, eager, fit, happy, impossible, likely, lucky, pleased, right, shocked, stupid, sure, surprised, thrilled, welcome, wrong

Many nouns can be followed by to + infinitive:

She's finally made a **decision to leave**. Clare would be a **fool to marry** him.

Noun + to + infinitive: attempt, bid, decision, desire, incentive, need, nuisance, opportunity, place, pleasure, reason, time, wish

We can use a noun + to + infinitive after 'there is/are' and 'have (got)' to express an obligation:

Don't disturb me; I've got a **report to write** this evening.

2. Verbs followed by infinitives

A. Verb + infinitive

Certain verbs can be followed by an infinitive, but not by an –ing form:

She'**s decided to apply** for the job.

Some of these verbs can also have an object before the infinitive (marked * below):

He doesn't really **expect her to pass** the exam.

Verb + infinitive: afford, agree, aim, appear, arrange, ask*, attempt, beg*, campaign, care, choose*, consent, dare*, decide, demand, deserve, expect*, fail, fight, forget, guarantee, happen, help*, hesitate, hope, intend*, long, manage, need*, neglect, offer, pause, plan, prepare, pretend, promise, propose, prove, refuse, seem, swear, tend, threaten, trouble*, try, undertake, vow, wait, want*, wish*, yearn

Verb + object + to + infinitive: advise, allow, cause, command, compel, encourage, forbid, force, get, instruct, invite, leave, oblige, order, permit, persuade, recommend, remind, request, teach, tell, tempt, urge, warn

B. Verb + -ing form/ infinitive

Some verbs can be followed by an –ing form or an infinitive, with no difference in meaning:

I can't stand **to see / seeing** animals in pain.

Verb + -ing form or infinitive: attempt, begin, bother, can't bear, can't stand, cease, continue, deserve, fear, hate, intend, like (= enjoy), love, prefer, start

We usually avoid putting two infinitives or two –ing forms together:

He wanted **to start to take** lessons. (Wrong)

He wanted **to start taking** lessons. (Right)

We use to + infinitive after would like, would love and would hate:

When we get there, I **would like taking** a nap. (Wrong)

When we get there, I **would like to take** a nap. (Right)

When 'like' means 'think something is a good idea', we only use the infinitive. Compare:

I **like going / to go** to the gym. It's so relaxing. (=I enjoy visiting it.)

Because of my weight problem I **like to go** to the gym at least twice a week. (= I think this is a good idea.)

C. Verb + -ing form or infinitive

Some verbs can be followed by an –ing form or by to + infinitive, but there is a difference in meaning:

verb	+ ing form	+ to + infinitive
Forget/remember	=forget/remember an earlier action: Do you **remember going** to school for the first time? I'll never **forget meeting** him.	=forget/remember to do a future action: I must **remember to set** my alarm clock tonight. Don't **forget to lock** the door.
Go on	=continue: They **went on playing** despite the bad weather.	=change to another action: After opening the hospital the Prince **went on to meet** the staff.
mean	=involves or will result in: This new job **means living** abroad.	=intend to do something: The builders **mean to finish** by Friday.
regret	=feel sorrow about the past: I really **regret getting** that tattoo when I was 18.	=announce bad news: We **regret to inform** you of delays in today's service.
stop	=finish an action: They **stopped making** fax machines about ten years ago.	=finish one action to do another one: We **stopped to get** petrol.
try	=do something to see what will happen: **Try using** a screwdriver to get the lid off.	=make an effort to do something difficult: We **tried to get** tickets but the show was sold out.

D. Sense verbs

Sense verbs can be followed by an object + -ing form when we are describing an action in progress or an action that is repeated.

As I walked past the church, I **heard someone playing** Handel's 'Messiah' on the organ. (The person was in the middle of playing when I walked past.)

I **saw a young mother slapping** her child. (She slapped him several times.)

These verbs can be followed by an object + infinitive (without to) when we are describing a single action or the action is complete:

I **saw a young mother slap** her child in the supermarket. (She slapped once.)

Last week I **heard them play** the fifth symphony. (I heard the complete symphony.)

We use to + infinitive after a passive sense verb:

The young mother was **seen to slap** her child.

3. Infinitive Phrases: Form and Use

A. Active and passive infinitives

We can use the following forms of the verb in infinitive phrases:

	Active infinitive	Passive infinitive
Simple	(not) to mend	(not) to be mended
Continuous	(not) to be mending	(not) to be being mended
Perfect	(not) to have mended	(not) to have been mended

Infinitive phrases can be active or passive, but they do not show tense. The time reference is shown by the context or by the tense of the verb in the main clause:

The tax bill **will be** the first item **to be debated** in the next parliament. (Future)

Their proposal **was** the first one **to be debated** at yesterday's planning meeting. (Past)

But we can use the perfect infinitive for an event that happened before the main clause:

Not to have acted sooner is his greatest regret. (= He regrets he didn't act sooner.)

Her greatest claim to fame is **to have been chosen** for the last Olympic squad. (= She is famous now because she was chosen.)

B. Subjects and complements

An infinitive phrase can act as the subject or complement of the verb be:

To reach the top is their aim. (Subject) Their aim is **to reach the top**. (Subject complement)

We use 'for' with an infinitive phrase if the subject of the infinitive is not the same as the subject of the sentence:

Their aim is **for the team to win**.

An infinitive phrase can be the subject or complement of a sentence:

To find her so distressed took him by surprise. (Subject)

His ambition is **to become president**. (Subject complement)

He told me **to ask for an appointment**. (Direct object)

She advised me on **how to pass the exam**. (Object of preposition)

Sentences with an infinitive phrase as their subject can sound rather formal. We usually prefer impersonal 'it' or an –ing form:

It is difficult **to keep up a friendship**. **Keeping up a friendship** is difficult.

4. Types of infinitive phrases

A. Defining phrases (Functioning as adjectives)

We can often replace a relative clause after a superlative, an ordinal number (e.g. first), or one, next, last and only, with an infinitive phrase:

The youngest person **that entered the programme** was just fourteen.

The youngest person **to enter the programme** was just fourteen. (Adjective modifying 'person')

The window seat is usually the first one **which is taken**.

The window seat is usually the first one **to be taken**.

Linda was the only one **who stayed for the whole performance**.

Linda was the only one **to stay for the whole performance**.

We usually don't use an infinitive phrase to replace relative clauses containing modal verbs, because the meaning would not be clear:

He's the only player to save the team from defeat. (Wrong)

He's the only player **who might save the team from defeat**. (Right)

B. Purpose and result phrases (Functioning as adverbs)

We often use an infinitive phrase to describe a deliberate purpose or aim. This is the infinitive of purpose:

Davy took a year out **to see the world and broaden his experience of life**. (Why?)

We can use an infinitive phrase to describe something unexpected, especially with 'only':

He returned to the field **to find the army in retreat**.

Eliza rejoined her friends, **only to discover that Mr. Darcy had left**.

APPOSITIVE PHRASE

What is an appositive?

An **appositive** is a **noun** that immediately follows and renames another noun in order to clarify or classify it.

Why are appositives used?

Appositives are used to reduce wordiness, add detail, and add **syntactic** variety to a sentence.

My teacher is a tough grader. Mrs. Green is a tough grader.

My teacher *Mrs. Green* is a tough grader.

How can I identify an appositive?

Appositives immediately follow a noun; an appositive will always help to identify the noun. The appositive can be:

1. One or two words, often including a name: Ms. Wood, *Sally's teacher*, assigned a research project.
2. Three or four words, often including some detail: Ms. Wood, *Sally's fifth grade teacher,* assigned a research project.
3. Four or more words, often including extensive detail: Ms. Wood, *Sally's favorite teacher in the school,* assigned a research project.

The previous examples show how an appositive can come after a noun it renames. However, appositives can also stand as the **introductory** phrase of a sentence before the noun it renames to add sentence variety.

1. After a noun: Ms. Wood, *Sally's favorite teacher in high school,* is friendly and approachable.
2. Before a noun: *Sally's favorite teacher in high school,* Ms. Wood is friendly and approachable.

Similarly, an appositive can be found as a phrase at the end of a sentence.

 Martha ate lunch at Chili's, *her favorite restaurant on the weekends.*
 My uncle was staying at the Holiday Inn, *the most affordable hotel in the neighborhood.*

How do I test for an appositive?

To test to see if an appositive is needed, replace the appositive with the noun being modified. The sentence should make sense if you substitute the appositive for the noun or noun phrase.

 Without substitution: Ms. Wood, *Sally's favorite teacher in the school,* is friendly and approachable.
 With substitution: *Sally's favorite teacher in the school* is friendly and approachable.

How do I punctuate appositives?

Appositives may or may not be crucial to identify the noun or noun phrase.
If an appositive is necessary to understand the identity of the noun or noun phrase that is being modified, the appositive is **restrictive**. Restrictive appositives are not set off with commas.
Mark's teacher *John Smith* served in the army.
If we removed the appositive, we would understand that Mark's teacher served in the army, but the sentence loses clarity. Without the appositive, we are unsure which of Mark's teachers is being referred to. Therefore, this appositive is **restrictive** and has no commas.

If an appositive is unnecessary to understand the identity of the noun or noun phrase it is identifying, it is **nonrestrictive**. Nonrestrictive appositives are set off with commas.

Fred's biology teacher, *Ted Jones*, served in the navy.

If we removed the appositive, we would still understand that Fred's biology teacher served in the navy. Although the appositive adds detail to the sentence, the audience already understands which specific teacher is being referred to; including the name is unnecessary. Therefore, this appositive is **nonrestrictive.**

Absolute Phrases

Introduction

An absolute phrase is a group of words that modifies an independent clause as a whole. Its etymology is from the Latin, "free, loosen, unrestricted".

An absolute is made up of a noun and its modifiers (which frequently, but not always, include a participle or participial phrase). An absolute may precede, follow, or interrupt the main clause:

- *Their slender bodies sleek and black against the orange sky,* the storks circled high above us.
- The storks circled high above us, *their slender bodies sleek and black against the orange sky.*
- The storks, *their slender bodies sleek and black against the orange sky,* circled high above us.

An absolute allows us to move from a description of a *whole* person, place, or thing to one aspect or part. Note that in traditional grammar, absolutes (or *nominative absolutes*) are often more narrowly defined as "noun phrases...combined with participles". The term *absolute* (borrowed from Latin grammar) is rarely used by contemporary linguists.

ABSOLUTE PHRASE

Usually (but not always, as we shall see), an absolute phrase (also called a nominative absolute) is a group of words consisting of a **noun** or **pronoun** and a **participle** as well as any related **modifiers**. Absolute phrases do not directly connect to or modify any specific word in the rest of the sentence; instead, they modify the entire sentence, adding information. They are always treated as **parenthetical elements** and are set off from the rest of the sentence with a comma or a pair of commas (sometimes by a dash or pair of

dashes). Notice that absolute phrases contain a **subject** (which is often modified by a participle), but not a true **finite verb**.

- **Their reputation as winners secured by victory**, the New York Liberty charged into the semifinals.
- **The season nearly finished**, Rebecca Lobo and Sophie Witherspoon emerged as true leaders.
- The two superstars signed autographs into the night, **their faces beaming happily.**

When the participle of an absolute phrase is a form of *to be*, such as *being* or *having been*, the participle is often left out but understood.

- **The season [being] over**, they were mobbed by fans in Times Square.
- **[Having been] Stars all their adult lives**, they seemed used to the attention.

Another kind of absolute phrase is found after a modified noun; it adds a focusing detail or point of focus to the idea of the main clause. This kind of absolute phrase can take the form of a prepositional phrase, an adjective phrase, or a noun phrase.

- The old firefighter stood over the smoking ruins, **his senses alert to any sign of another flare-up**.
- His subordinates, **their faces sweat-streaked and smudged with ash**, leaned heavily against the fire truck.
- They knew all too well how all their hard work could be undone — **in an instant**.

It is not unusual for the information supplied in the absolute phrase to be the most important element in the sentence. In fact, in descriptive prose, the telling details will often be wrapped into a sentence in the form of an absolute phrase:

- Coach Nykesha strolled onto the court, **her arms akimbo and a large silver whistle clenched between her teeth**.
- The new recruits stood in one corner of the gym, **their uniforms stiff and ill fitting, their faces betraying their anxiety.**

The noun of an absolute phrase can be modified by an *adjective*.

Their shoes *muddy*, the children were not allowed into the house.

The noun of an absolute phrase can be modified by a *past participle*.

His keys *lost*, Bobby searched his apartment frantically.
Its wings *spread*, the eagle circled above the lake.

The noun of an absolute phrase can be modified by a *past participial phrase*.

Her house *destroyed by a tornado*, Valentina moved in with her sister.
His baby daughter *calmed by a bottle*, Jamal continued to clean the kitchen.

The noun of an absolute phrase can be modified by a *present participle*.

Its tires *screeching*, the car came to a stop before crashing.
His heart *racing*, Ryan asked Sophia to marry him.

The noun of an absolute phrase can be modified by a *present participial phrase*.

Their son *walking across the stage*, Joel and Latoya applauded proudly.
Confetti *fluttering to the ground*, the crowed celebrated the New Year.

The noun of an absolute phrase can be modified by a *prepositional phrase*.

Her mother *at work*, Eliza let herself into the apartment.
His car *in the shop*, Keith took the bus to work.

As the above examples show, absolute phrases that are followed by commas come at the beginning of a sentence.

An absolute phrase that is surrounded by commas can also come after the subject of the clause.

Joel and Latoya, *their son walking across the stage*, applauded proudly.
Ryan, his heart racing, asked Sophia to marry him.
The eagle, *its wings spread*, circled above the lake.

An absolute phrase that is preceded by a comma can also come at the end of the clause.

Joel and Latoya applauded proudly, *their son walking across the stage*.
Ryan asked Sophia to marry him, *his heart racing*.

The eagle circled above the lake, *its wings spread*.

Examples and Observations

The **absolute phrase** that adds a focusing detail is especially common in fiction writing, much more common than in expository writing... In the following passages, all from works of fiction, some have a participle as the post-noun modifier...; however, you'll also see some with noun phrases, others with prepositional phrases.

- There was no bus in sight and Julian, *his hands still jammed in his pockets and his head thrust forward*, scowled down the empty street. (Flannery O'Connor, "Everything That Rises Must Converge")
- Silently they ambled down Tenth Street until they reached a stone bench that jutted from the sidewalk near the curb. They stopped there and sat down, *their backs to the eyes of the two men in white smocks who were watching them*. (Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*)
- The man stood laughing, *his weapons at his hips*. (Stephen Crane, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky")
- To his right the valley continued in its sleepy beauty, mute and understated, *its wildest autumn colors blunted by the distance*, placid as water color by an artist who mixed all his colors with brown. (Joyce Carol Oates, "The Secret Marriage")

A second style of absolute phrase, rather than focusing on a detail, explains a cause or condition:

- *Our car having developed engine trouble*, we stopped for the night at a roadside rest area.
- We decided to have our picnic, *the weather being warm and clear*.

The first example could be rewritten as a *because*- or *when*- clause:

- *When our car developed engine trouble*, we stopped...
- Or *Because our car developed engine trouble*, we stopped...

The absolute allows the writer to include the information without the explicitness of the complete clause; the absolute, then, can be thought of as containing both meanings, both *when* and *because*. The absolute about the weather in the second example suggests an attendant condition rather than a cause.

Nominative Absolutes

- Nominative absolutes are related to nonfinite verb phrases... They consist of a subject noun phrase followed by some part of the predicate: either a participle form of the main verb or a complement or modifier of the main verb. . . . [C]omplements and modifiers may take almost any form...
- Absolutes have traditionally been called *nominative* because the absolute construction begins with a noun phrase as its headword. Nevertheless, they function adverbially as sentence modifiers. Some [absolutes] explain reasons or conditions for the action described in the main clause; others... describe the manner in which the action of the main clause is performed.

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

Prepositions

Introduction

A. Basic information

A preposition describes the relationship between two or more things. It can link nouns, verbs or adjectives before the preposition with a noun or pronoun after it:

Now, let's move **to** item six **on** the agenda.

Be careful. The hem of your dress is dragging **along** the floor.

John's got an appraisal tomorrow. He's really anxious **about** it.

Prepositions can be one word only, e.g. of, throughout, or more words, e.g. because of:

We got fewer dollars this week **because of** the drop in the exchange rate.

B. Prepositions and adverbs

There is no difference in form between prepositions and many adverbs, but there is a difference in use: a preposition has an object but an adverb does not. Compare:

Did you ever travel **before the war**, Dad? (preposition)

I have a strange feeling that I've been here **before**. (adverb)

We can modify prepositions with adverbs (the adverbs in the example are in bold):

The bank is **almost** at the end of the street, **just** before the traffic lights.

Meaning and use

A. Position

Vertical relationships: above, after, below, beneath, down, on, on top of, over, under, underneath, up

Is the position of Managing Editor **above** or **below** that of Editorial Director?

The clouds hung low **over** the hills.

Horizontal relationships: against, along, alongside, around, at, beside, between, by, in, near, next to, on, on the left/right of

The film premiere this year will take place **at** Leicester Square **in** London.

Warehouses were built **alongside** the motorway.

Facing relationships: across, after, before, behind, facing, in front of, opposite, over

Christopher is really **behind** his brother in terms of academic development.

Karen's nephew appears **in front of** the magistrates this afternoon.

B. Movement and direction

Vertical movement: down (to), off, on, onto, over, up (to)

The burglar leapt **over** the garden fence as he ran away from us.

Passing movement: across, along, down, over, past, through, up

You can spend a pleasant afternoon strolling **along** the canals in Amsterdam.

I was startled by a huge bird that flew **pas**t my window this afternoon.

Movement in one direction: around, at, away from, down, down to, from, into, onto, out of, to, towards, up, up to

The scientist moved quietly **towards** the group of grazing animals.

A system of charges has been introduced **into** the Health Service.

C. Time

Point in time: at, in, on

Let's meet at the station (**at**) about six; there's a train **at** ten past.

We can supply the materials (**on**) around Thursday next week.

Before or after: after, before, by, past

Applications must be submitted **before** 30th November. (=on the 29th or earlier)

Applications must be submitted **by** 30th November. (= on the 30th or earlier)

Duration: as from/of, between, during, for, from…till/until/up to, in, inside, since, through (out), until/till, pup, to, within

As of next Monday, we will have to suspend flexible working arrangements **until** further notice.

I'll be staying at the Hilton **from** Friday **to** Monday. (British English)

I'll be staying at the Hilton Friday **through** Monday. (US English)

D. Other meanings

Reason: because of, due to, for, from, out of, owing to, through

The 10.00 service to Bath has ban cancelled **due to/owing to** staff shortage.

Huge numbers of people in the Third World die **from** starvation every day.

Many parents sacrifice their own material wealth **out of** the desire to give their children everything.

The fire started **through** careless disposal of cigarette end.

Means: by, by means of, in, via, with

Negotiations were held **by** phone between the client and his solicitor.

It's a painting **by** van Gogh. He completed it during its stay in Arles.

Purpose: for, towards

I want an opener that can be used **for** opening bottles.

We're saving all of this extra income **towards** a round-the-world trip next year.

Comparison: against, as, beside, between, contrary to, than, (un) like

Look at this year's sales figures **against** last year's; they're so much better.

Speaking **as** a director of the company, I believe we should sell the shares.

Inclusion and exclusion: among, as well as, besides, between, beyond, inside, instead of, out of, outside, under, within, without

The terminals are **among** the biggest single development sites in Europe.

I'm afraid that changes to the curriculum are **beyond/outside/out of** our control.

Exception: apart from, barring, but for, except (for), save

Everyone is invited to the conference dinner, **except (for)/apart from/save** those who have bought 'day' tickets only.

Contrast: despite, for all, in spite of

Despite/in spite of/for all his grand ways, he was really no better off than the rest of us.

Material: from, of, out of, with

ice cream made **from** strawberries

Benefit: for, for the sake of, on behalf of

On behalf of our shareholders, I'd like to thank all of you who voted in favour of the merger.

Reporting: according to

According to many art critics holograms aren't a real art form.

Prepositional Phrases

A. Form

A *prepositional phrase* contains a preposition, a noun or pronoun, and possibly one or more adjectives. Prepositional phrases can function as nouns, adjectives or adverbs within a sentence.

Examples:

My birthday is *on Monday.*

The tree *with the purple blossoms* hangs *over the sidewalk,* sprinkling flowers *along the path*.

In the first example, *on Monday* functions as a noun and serves as a complement. In the second example, *with the purple blossoms* functions as an adjective modifying *tree*, while both *over the sidewalk* and *along the path* function as adverbs modifying *hangs* and *sprinkling,* respectively.

B. Functions

A prepositional phrase will function as an adjective or adverb. As an adjective, the prepositional phrase will answer the question *Which one?*

Read these examples:

The book ***on the bathroom floor*** is swollen from shower steam.

Which book? The one ***on the bathroom floor****!*

The sweet potatoes ***in the vegetable bin*** are green with mold.

Which sweet potatoes? The ones forgotten ***in the vegetable bin****!*

The note ***from Beverly*** confessed that she had eaten the leftover pizza.

Which note? The one ***from Beverly****!*

As an adverb, a prepositional phrase will answer questions such as *How? When?* or *Where?*

Freddy is stiff ***from yesterday's long football practice***.

How did Freddy get stiff? ***From yesterday's long football practice****!*

Before class, Josh begged his friends for a pencil.

When did Josh do his begging? ***Before class****!*

Feeling brave, we tried the Dragon Breath Burritos ***at Tito's Taco Palace***.

Where did we eat the spicy food? ***At Tito's Taco Palace****!*

A prepositional phrase may also function as a noun.

Before breakfast is a good time for a swim. (subject)

The best place for a picnic is **in the park.** (subject complement)

Dr. N. KISSOUM