

THE INFINITIVE PHRASE

Recognize an infinitive phrase when you find one.

An infinitive phrase will begin with an **infinitive** (TO + SIMPLE FORM OF THE VERB). It will include one or more **objects** and/or **modifiers**.

Here are examples:

To smash a spider

To kick the ball past the dazed goalie

To lick the grease from his shiny fingers despite the disapproving glances of his girlfriend Gloria

Infinitive phrases can function as **nouns**, **adjectives**, or **adverbs**.

Read these examples:

To finish her shift without spilling another hot pizza into a customer's lap is Michelle's only goal tonight.

To finish her shift without spilling another hot pizza into a customer's lap = noun (**subject** of the **linking verb is**).

Lakesha hopes **to win the approval of her mother** by switching her major from fine arts to pre-med.

To win the approval of her mother = noun (**direct object** for the **action verb hopes**).

The best way **to survive Professor Peterson's boring history class** is to stab your thigh with a sharp pencil if you catch yourself drifting off.

To survive Professor Peterson's boring history class = adjective (modifying **way**).

Kelvin, an aspiring comic book artist, is taking Anatomy and Physiology this semester **to understand the interplay of muscle and bone in the human body**.

To understand the interplay of muscle and bone in the human body = adverb (explaining *why* Kelvin is taking the class).

Punctuate an infinitive phrase correctly.

When an infinitive phrase introduces a **main clause**, separate the two sentence components with a **comma**.

Here is the pattern:

Infinitive Phrase + , + **Main Clause** .

Read this example:

To avoid burning another bag of popcorn, Brendan pressed his nose against the microwave door, sniffing suspiciously.

When an infinitive phrase breaks the flow of a main clause, use a comma both before and after the **interrupter**.

Here is the pattern:

Start of the Main Clause + , + **Infinitive Phrase as Interrupter** + , +
End of the Main Clause .

Read this example:

Those basketball shoes, **to be perfectly honest**, do not complement the suit you are planning to wear to the interview.

When an infinitive phrase concludes a main clause, you need no punctuation to connect the two sentence parts.

This is the pattern:

Main Clause + ∅ + **Infinitive Phrase** .

Read this example:

Janice and her friends went to the mall **to flirt with the cute guys who congregate at the food court.**

