The Infinitive Phrase

Recognize an *infinitive phrase* when you see one.

An infinitive phrase will begin with an infinitive [to + simple form of the verb]. It will include objects and/or modifiers. Here are some 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. Look at these examples:

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

*To finish her shift without spilling another pizza into a customer’s lap* functions as a noun because it is the subject of the sentence.

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* functions as a noun because it is the direct object for the verb *hopes*.

The best way *to survive Dr. Peterson’s boring history lectures* is a sharp pencil to stab in your thigh if you catch yourself drifting off.

*To survive Dr. Peterson’s boring history lectures* functions as an adjective because it modifies *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* functions as an adverb because it explains *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. The pattern looks like this:

**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. The pattern looks like this:

START OF MAIN CLAUSE + , + INTERRUPTER + , + END OF MAIN CLAUSE .

Here is an 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. The pattern looks like this:

MAIN CLAUSE + Ø + MAIN CLAUSE .

Check out this example:

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