

Catenative verbs

The following lists do not consider marginal, semi- or pure modal auxiliary verbs.

Verbs followed by the *to*-infinitive

In nearly all cases, the use of the *to*-infinitive signals that the event represented by the main verb takes place before that represented by the following verb(s). In other words, the use is prospective rather than retrospective. This is not an absolute rule but is certainly the way to bet.

For example, if one says:

I agreed to come

then the agreeing clearly precedes the coming.

This rule of thumb applies even when the following action is unfulfilled as in, e.g.:

I declined to go with them

because even here, the declining precedes the not going.

The following are the most common of these verbs with some notes where necessary.

Verb	Example	Notes
advise	<i>He advised me to try</i>	This verb is almost invariably used with a direct object.
afford	<i>We can afford to buy the car</i>	Almost invariably with <i>can</i> . This verb takes a noun as a direct object but not a gerund so we allow: <i>We can afford a new car</i> but not <i>*We can afford going on holiday</i>
agree	<i>They agreed to differ</i>	In AmE usage, this verb is transitive and that is becoming common in BrE, too so we allow also: <i>We agreed the plan.</i> However, like <i>afford</i> , a gerund as the object is not allowed.
aim	<i>We aim to take a winter holiday</i>	This is akin to <i>We are going to take a winter holiday</i> and is a prospective use.
allow	<i>I allowed him to go</i>	The verb <i>let</i> takes the bare infinitive (see below). This verb has a non-catenative use and allows a gerund as the direct object, e.g.: <i>Do they allow fishing here?</i>
appear	<i>She appeared to agree</i>	This verb is also copular as in, e.g., <i>She appeared agreeable.</i>
apply	<i>They applied to leave</i>	This verb is intransitive so no direct object is allowed.
arrange	<i>They arranged to arrive early</i>	This verb is transitive and often followed by a gerund as the object as in, e.g. <i>The hotel arranged parking for us.</i>

ask	<i>John asked to leave</i>	This is a transitive verb and allows any number of direct objects, some of which, such as permission are verbal nouns. It cannot, however, take a gerund as its direct object.
attempt	<i>She attempted to interrupt</i>	Compare <i>try</i> (below) which varies in meaning.
be bound	<i>She is bound to disagree</i>	This is a marginal modal verb expressing likelihood usually, but can express obligation as in, e.g.: <i>I am bound by my promise.</i>
beg	<i>I beg to differ</i>	Formal use and collocation is limited to a few verbs (<i>disagree, deny</i> etc.).
begin	<i>It began to rain</i>	Also possible with the <i>-ing</i> form with no change in meaning.
care	<i>Would you care to dance?</i>	This verb is nearly always used in the negative or in questions only: i.e., non-assertive uses.
cease	<i>I ceased to argue</i>	The verb <i>stop</i> catenates with an <i>-ing</i> form. With the infinitive, the interpretation of <i>stop plus to</i> is <i>in order to</i> . This is not the case here and <i>I ceased to look at the map</i> does not mean the same as <i>I stopped to look at the map</i> We allow an <i>-ing</i> form as a direct object with this verb e.g.: <i>I ceased arguing</i>
chance	<i>I chanced to meet him in the hotel bar</i>	Formal use.
choose	<i>I chose to stay silent</i>	This verb is transitive and often followed by a gerund as the object as in, e.g. <i>We chose flying over taking the train</i>
condescend	<i>They condescended to talk to me</i>	Compare <i>deign</i> . This verb can be used (rarely) in the negative: <i>She condescended not to complain.</i>
consent	<i>Do you consent to pay the money?</i>	This verb is transitive and may be followed by a gerund as the object as in, e.g. <i>We consented to his practising the piano in the evenings</i>
contrive	<i>He contrived to get lost somehow</i>	Compare <i>manage</i> .
continue	<i>He continued to complain</i>	Also possible with the <i>-ing</i> form with no change in meaning.
dare	<i>I dared to ask why</i>	This is a semi-modal verb.

decide	<i>We decided to go</i>	Compare <i>go</i> .
decline	<i>I decline to comment</i>	No negative use.
deign	<i>She deigned to invite them</i>	Formal use (compare the synonymous <i>condescend</i>). The difference is that this verb cannot be used in the negative: <i>*She deigned not to argue.</i>
demand	<i>I demand to come</i>	Often in passive clauses: <i>I demand to be heard.</i>
deserve	<i>She deserves to win</i>	This verb is transitive and may be followed by a gerund or other noun as the object as in, e.g. <i>She deserved congratulating / congratulation</i> Here the subject of the sentence is not doing the congratulating so the gerund form is acceptable.
determine	<i>I determined to go</i>	This is a formal use. Frequently the participle adjective is used as in, e.g., <i>I am determined to go.</i>
encourage	<i>She encouraged me to ask</i>	The verb is also used with a gerund as the direct object, e.g.: <i>She doesn't encourage smoking in the hotel.</i> The verb is always transitive so very often split from the next by the direct object (see below).
endeavour	<i>I endeavoured to help</i>	Compare <i>try</i> which can also be followed by the <i>-ing</i> form. This verb cannot.
elect	<i>She elected to stay</i>	
expect	<i>Mary expected to fail</i>	This verb is transitive and may be followed by a gerund as the object as in, e.g. <i>She expected travelling would be difficult at the weekend</i> and by a simple noun: <i>She expected rain.</i>
fail	<i>Mary failed to win</i>	
forbid	<i>I have forbidden him to come</i>	This also works with the gerund as a direct object in, e.g. <i>I forbid smoking here</i> Again, the verb is always transitive so split from the next verb by the direct object (see below for the passive use).
forget	<i>I forgot to say thanks</i>	See below for the changed meaning with the <i>-ing</i> form.
happen	<i>I happened to see her</i>	This is also considered a marginal modal auxiliary verb.

hasten	<i>I hasten to add</i>	This is now almost confined to the set expression with <i>to add</i> or <i>to say</i> .
help	<i>I helped to finish the work</i>	The bare infinitive can also be used as in, e.g. <i>Can you help finish?</i> See also below for <i>can't help</i> plus the gerund.
hesitate	<i>I hesitate to complain</i>	
hope	<i>I hope to see you there</i>	
instruct	<i>She instructed them to wait</i>	This verb is almost invariably used with a direct object.
intend	<i>I intend to see him today</i>	More rarely, this verb is followed by an <i>-ing</i> form with no change in meaning.
invite	<i>I was invited to speak</i>	This verb is almost invariably used with a direct object and frequently in the passive voice.
learn	<i>I learnt to swim at school</i>	
long	<i>I long to see her again</i>	
manage	<i>They managed to arrive on time</i>	
mean	<i>I meant to ask but forgot</i>	Here the verb means <i>intend</i> but it can be followed by an <i>-ing</i> form when the meaning alters to <i>involve</i> .
move	<i>I move to adjourn</i>	A rare and formal meaning.
need	<i>I need to leave soon</i>	This is a semi-modal verb expressing obligation.
neglect	<i>I neglected to tell her</i>	This verb is transitive and may be followed by a gerund as the object as in, e.g. <i>She neglected watching the children</i> or by a simple noun: <i>She neglected her duty.</i>
oblige	<i>She was obliged to do the work</i>	This verb is invariably used with a direct object and frequently in the passive voice.
offer	<i>I offered to help</i>	
omit	<i>I omitted to ask that question</i>	This verb is transitive and often takes an object gerund or noun phrase such as: <i>I omitted painting the doors</i> <i>She omitted the attachment</i>
order	<i>He ordered me to leave</i>	These verbs are invariably used with a direct object and frequently in the passive voice.
permit	<i>John was permitted to stay</i>	
persuade	<i>I persuaded her to pay</i>	
plan	<i>I planned to go</i>	Compare <i>intend</i> and <i>mean</i> .
prepare	<i>I prepared to travel</i>	

press	<i>I pressed him to help</i>	This verb is invariably used with a direct object and frequently in the passive voice.
pretend	<i>They pretended to work</i>	
proceed	<i>I proceeded to start at once</i>	Formal use. Unlike the synonymous <i>start</i> and <i>begin</i> , it cannot catenate with a an <i>-ing</i> form.
promise	<i>I promise to help</i>	
propose	<i>I propose to go</i>	This is a slightly formal version of <i>plan</i> or <i>intend</i> and the verb can also be used to mean <i>suggest</i> when it is used with an <i>-ing</i> form.
refuse	<i>I refuse to help</i>	
remember	<i>I remembered to ask</i>	See below for the changed meaning with the <i>-ing</i> form.
remind	<i>They reminded us to come</i>	This verb is invariably used with a direct object and frequently in the passive voice.
request	<i>She requested them to be quiet</i>	This verb is invariably used with a direct object and frequently in the passive voice. It is quite rare and formal.
resolve	<i>I resolved to wait</i>	
seek	<i>I sought to explain</i>	
seem	<i>She seemed to be happy</i>	Compare <i>appear</i> . This verb is also frequently a copula.
start	<i>She started to eat</i>	This verb can be used, like <i>begin</i> , with an <i>-ing</i> form with no meaning change.
strive	<i>I strove to understand</i>	Formal use.
struggle	<i>The company struggles to survive</i>	
swear	<i>Mary swore to tell the truth</i>	
teach	<i>He taught me to swim</i>	These verbs are invariably used with a direct object and frequently in the passive voice.
tell	<i>I told her to try</i>	
tempt	<i>I was tempted to leave</i>	
tend	<i>They tend to stay up late</i>	This is also considered a marginal modal auxiliary verb.
threaten	<i>They threatened to sue</i>	
trouble	<i>Please don't trouble to drive</i>	This is almost exclusively used in the negative.
try	<i>Try to be more helpful</i>	See below for the changed meaning with an <i>-ing</i> form.
undertake	<i>They undertook to act as agents</i>	
volunteer	<i>John volunteered to help</i>	

wait	<i>I waited to see what she would say</i>	This is sometimes followed by <i>and</i> plus a verb as in, e.g., <i>Wait and see</i> . The form is sometimes prepositional: <i>I waited in order to see what she would do</i> with a subtle change of meaning.
want	<i>I want to go now</i>	
wish	<i>I wish to complain</i>	Formal use. This verb is transitive and may be followed by a gerund as the object as in, e.g. <i>She wished flying were possible</i>
would like	<i>Would you like to come?</i>	By their nature, many structures with <i>would</i> follow this pattern.
The following only catenate in the passive. In the active form, the object is placed between the verb and the non-finite form. Almost all the uses are more formal.		
allow	<i>They were not allowed to come</i>	
ask	<i>She was asked to keep it</i>	
call	<i>They were called to explain</i>	Formal use.
command	<i>I was commanded to stay</i>	
compel	<i>John was compelled to explain</i>	
destine	<i>He was destined to fail</i>	It is often difficult to distinguish this use from a predicative participle adjective.
encourage	<i>They were encouraged to come</i>	This is non-catenative when the participle adjective is used: <i>The were encouraged by the result.</i>
entitle	<i>I am not entitled to complain</i>	
forbid	<i>I was forbidden to enter</i>	Actively, this verb is also used with the gerund as a direct object.
force	<i>She was forced to work late</i>	
instruct	<i>I was instructed to remain</i>	
intend	<i>They were intended to have the money</i>	See above for the verb used in a slightly different sense.
invite	<i>She was invited to attend</i>	
move	<i>I was moved to complain</i>	The sense here is different from the example of <i>move</i> above.
order	<i>They were ordered to appear</i>	
permit	<i>They were permitted to enter</i>	

press	<i>She was pressed to respond</i>	
prohibit	<i>She was prohibited to come</i>	This is an unusual use and the preferred form is the prepositional phrase with <i>from</i> + a gerund.
request	<i>You are requested to leave</i>	
require	<i>She is required to remain</i>	
teach	<i>I was taught to swim</i>	
tell	<i>They were told to stay</i>	This verb is transitive and may be followed by a gerund as the object as in, e.g. <i>She was told staying another day was possible</i>
tempt	<i>I was tempted to go</i>	Arguably, this is a participle adjective use of the verb form.

Verbs followed by the gerund (-ing form)

These verbs consistently refer to past experience or to a retrospective view of events.

For example, if one says:

She admitted stealing the money

it is clear that the admission follows the theft and in, e.g.:

I hate standing in a queue

the clear implication is that the speaker has experience of standing in a queue and hates it. Compare:

I would hate to hurt his feelings

which is clearly a prospective use and the verb catenates with the infinitive.

This is an unreliable rule of thumb and there are many exceptions.

The other aid to memory is that the majority of verbs used with a gerund can just as easily (often more naturally) be followed by a direct noun object. As a gerund is often described as a verbal noun, this is unsurprising.

Not listed here are phrasal and prepositional verbs because, with rare exceptions they are always followed by the gerund.

Verb	Example	Notes
acknowledge	<i>They acknowledged making a mistake</i>	
admit	<i>They admitted stealing the money</i>	
adore	<i>I just adore watching them</i>	
advise	<i>They advised waiting a little</i>	This appears to break the prospective rule but, arguably, is a verb which can take a nominalised clause as the direct object.
appreciate	<i>I appreciate receiving the help</i>	

avoid	<i>I can't avoid thinking about it</i>	Compare the use of <i>help</i> in this meaning.
can't bear	<i>I can't bear talking to him</i>	Confined to negative and interrogative uses (i.e., non-assertive forms).
complete	<i>They have completed repairing the car</i>	Arguably, a case of the gerund as a nominal object. Compare: <i>They have completed the repairs.</i>
consider	<i>I considered taking the car</i>	These are prospective and break the 'rule'. However, the uses are all, arguably, with the gerund used as
defer	<i>I deferred making a decision</i>	the direct object. Compare: <i>I considered the offer</i> <i>I deferred my decision</i>
delay	<i>We should not delay opening</i>	<i>We delayed the celebration.</i>
deny	<i>I deny taking the money</i>	
detest	<i>I detest queuing for things</i>	Arguably, with all three of these verbs the <i>-ing</i> form is a gerund and can be replaced by any other noun so we can
dislike	<i>She dislikes arguing with people</i>	have: <i>I detest avocado</i> <i>I dislike bananas</i> <i>She enjoys her food</i>
dread	<i>I dread meeting his mother</i>	but in, e.g.: <i>I dislike arguing with him</i>
enjoy	<i>They enjoy learning French</i>	we have a catenative structure. The verb <i>dread</i> appears to break the prospective rule but the feeling is based on some previous knowledge or experience. (There is a prospective use of <i>dislike</i> which predictably takes the <i>to</i> -infinitive form as in, e.g.: <i>I dislike to have to tell you that ...</i>)
entail	<i>The work entails rewriting the program</i>	Arguably, a case of the gerund as a nominal object. Compare: <i>The work entails a lot of expense.</i>
escape	<i>He escaped being called up</i>	
fancy	<i>I fancy seeing a film</i>	This is a prospective use and breaks the 'rule' although it is arguably premised on seeing films before. It is also arguably a verb which takes a nominalised object or a simple noun as in: <i>I fancy some lunch.</i>
favour	<i>She favoured waiting a little</i>	This appears to break the prospective rule but, arguably, is a verb which can take a nominalised clause as the direct object. Compare: <i>She favoured the restaurant in the market place.</i>

finish	<i>They have finished painting the house</i>	Arguably, a case of the gerund as a nominal object. Compare: <i>They have finished the painting.</i>
forget	<i>I forgot meeting her</i>	See above for the changed meaning with the <i>to</i> -infinitive.
hate	<i>I hate teaching</i>	This is a gerund use. For <i>hate</i> + <i>to</i> -infinitives, see below.
can't help	<i>I can't help thinking about it</i>	Usually confined to negative or interrogative (i.e., non-assertive uses).
(can't) imagine	<i>I can't imagine living with her</i>	This is often, but not invariably, used in the negative with <i>can</i> but assertive forms are also seen: <i>I can imagine living here.</i>
imply	<i>It implies spending even more money</i>	This is a prospective use and breaks the 'rule' but, arguably, is a verb which can take a nominalised clause as the direct object. Compare: <i>It implies a good deal of work.</i>
involve	<i>It involves travelling to Russia</i>	This is a prospective use and breaks the 'rule' but, arguably, is a verb which can take a nominalised clause as the direct object. Compare: <i>It involves a lot of expense.</i>
keep	<i>He keeps arguing with me</i>	
leave	<i>I left doing the work till later</i>	This is a prospective use and breaks the 'rule'.
like	<i>I like talking to them</i>	
loathe	<i>She loathes eating out</i>	
love	<i>I love living here</i>	
mention	<i>He didn't mention seeing her</i>	
mind	<i>I don't mind waiting</i>	Usually used on the negative or, + <i>would</i> , in questions.
miss	<i>I miss working with them</i>	
practise	<i>She is practising playing the piano</i>	Often the verb takes a direct noun object: <i>She is practising the flute.</i>
prefer	<i>I prefer eating late</i>	This can be used with the <i>to</i> -infinitive with little change in meaning (see below).
quit	<i>I have quit smoking</i>	Mostly AmE usage and, arguably, the use of the gerund as a direct object: <i>She has quit her job.</i>
recall	<i>I recall seeing him</i>	Compare <i>remember</i> .
recollect	<i>I recollect asking</i>	

recommend	<i>I recommend asking her</i>	This is a prospective use and breaks the 'rule' but, arguably, is a verb which can take a nominalised clause as the direct object. Compare: <i>She recommended the restaurant in the market place.</i>
regret	<i>I regret asking her</i>	See below for the changed meaning with a <i>to</i> -infinitive.
remember	<i>I remembered meeting her</i>	See above for the changed meaning with a <i>to</i> -infinitive.
require	<i>I do not require telling twice</i>	
resent	<i>I resent waiting in the cold</i>	
resist	<i>I can't resist laughing at her</i>	Almost always in the negative with <i>can't</i> .
resume	<i>We resumed working at 5</i>	Unlike <i>start</i> and <i>begin</i> , this verb cannot be used with the <i>to</i> -infinitive.
risk	<i>He risked losing everything</i>	
see	<i>I can see knowing for certain is better</i>	
shun	<i>She shunned meeting them</i>	This is a rare use.
(can't) stand	<i>I can't stand walking in the wind</i>	This is almost solely used in the negative and with the modal auxiliary verb.
stop	<i>Please stop talking</i>	This is a prospective use and breaks the 'rule' but, arguably, is a verb which can take a nominalised clause as the direct object. Compare: <i>She stopped her presentation.</i>
suggest	<i>I suggest waiting a little</i>	Like <i>recommend</i> , this verb takes a direct object noun phrase, too: <i>I suggest the fish.</i>
tolerate	<i>I can tolerate working with them</i>	This verb often takes a simple noun direct object: <i>I can't tolerate his behaviour.</i>
try	<i>Try using a heavier hammer</i>	See above for the changed meaning with a <i>to</i> -infinitive.
understand	<i>We understand getting the right price is vital</i>	
want	<i>The window wants cleaning</i>	BrE usage.

The following only catenate marginally because a possessive determiner (or, informally, an object pronoun) is inserted between the verb and the non-finite form.

excuse	<i>I can't excuse her insulting me</i>	<p>In all these cases, the use of the <i>-ing</i> form may be considered as the gerund acting as a direct object of the verb so we can also encounter, e.g.:</p> <p><i>I can't excuse rudeness</i> <i>Can you explain the problem?</i> <i>Please forgive any mistakes</i> <i>He won't pardon errors</i> <i>That won't prevent the leaks</i> <i>We don't understand the instructions</i></p>
explain	<i>Can you explain their leaving?</i>	
forgive	<i>Please forgive my asking</i>	
pardon	<i>I can't pardon her swearing</i>	
prevent	<i>I cannot prevent your going</i>	
understand	<i>I understand her leaving early</i>	

Verbs followed by either an *-ing* form or *to*-infinitive with no (or very little) change in meaning

There are a few verbs which can be followed by either the *to*-infinitive or a gerund with no change in meaning. Sometimes one form is more common (marked †).

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>intend</i>
<i>I intend going</i>
<i>I intend to go</i>† ■ <i>start</i>
<i>I started to walk</i>†
<i>I started walking</i> ■ <i>bear</i>
<i>I can't bear to listen to rap music</i>
<i>I can't bear listening to rap music</i>† ■ <i>begin</i>
<i>It began to snow</i>†
<i>It began snowing</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>bother</i>
<i>She didn't bother telling me</i>
<i>She didn't bother to tell me</i>† ■ <i>continue</i>
<i>He continued to complain</i>†
<i>He continued complaining</i> ■ <i>like</i>
<i>I like swimming</i>†
<i>I like to swim</i> ■ <i>prefer</i>
<i>I prefer working at home</i>
<i>I prefer to work at home</i> |
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Verbs followed by the either an *-ing* form or *to*-infinitive with a change in meaning

A few polysemous verbs vary in meaning depending on whether they are followed by a gerund or a *to*-infinitive.

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|---|--|
| ■ <i>remember</i>
<i>I remember posting the letter</i>
<i>I remembered to post the letter</i> | ■ <i>try</i>
<i>Try opening a window</i>
<i>Try to open a window</i> |
| ■ <i>forget</i>
<i>I forgot meeting him</i>
<i>I forgot to meet him</i> | ■ <i>mean</i>
<i>I mean to talk to her</i>
<i>It means travelling to London</i> |
| ■ <i>regret</i>
<i>I regret to tell you that you are wrong</i>
<i>I regret telling you that you are wrong</i> | ■ <i>propose</i>
<i>I propose to go to America</i>
<i>I propose going to America</i> |

Verbs followed by *to* and an *-ing* form

A few verbs are followed by *to* plus a gerund, *-ing* form. An alternative analysis is that these are simply examples of the gerund after the preposition *to*.

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|---|--|
| ■ <i>be used</i>
<i>I am used to working late at the office</i> | <i>I object to waiting for you in the rain</i> |
| ■ <i>be accustomed</i>
<i>I am accustomed to walking in the snow</i> | ■ <i>take</i>
<i>I took to playing golf when I retired</i> |
| ■ <i>be up</i>
<i>Are you up to eating something?</i> | ■ <i>be averse</i>
<i>I am averse to eating in smoky restaurants</i> |
| ■ <i>feel up</i>
<i>Do you feel up to walking to town after lunch?</i> | ■ <i>be opposed</i>
<i>I am opposed to taking risks with my money</i> |
| ■ <i>look forward</i>
<i>I look forward to meeting her mother</i> | ■ <i>committed</i>
<i>She is committed to helping them</i> |
| ■ <i>object</i> | |

Verbs followed by a bare infinitive

A few verbs can catenate with the bare infinitive although in one case (*help*) the *to*-infinitive is also possible. Here's the list:

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|--|---|
| ■ <i>let</i>
<i>Don't let go!</i> | ■ <i>hear</i>
<i>I hear tell he's quite rich</i> |
| ■ <i>make</i>
<i>I can make do with almost no money</i> | ■ <i>help</i>
<i>Please help repair the table</i>
The insertion of <i>to</i> is optional. |