Section 9  infinitives and -ing forms

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language notes

English uses -ing forms not only as parts of verbs (e.g. It's raining) and as adjectives (e.g. a falling leaf), but also rather like nouns, as subjects or objects (e.g. Smoking is dangerous; I've given up smoking). In the first kind of use, -ing forms are often called ‘present participles’; in the noun-like use, they are often called ‘gerunds’. In the Oxford English Grammar Course, we prefer the term ‘-ing form’ in most cases.

Noun-like uses of -ing forms may correspond to infinitives in other languages. Consequently, students may take some time to learn which of the two is used in one situation or another, and may need a lot of practice before they can make the right choice spontaneously:
(*)To smoke is bad for you.
*She went out without to say anything.

The main problem is the case where one verb is followed by another (e.g. I want to dance; I enjoy dancing). There are no good rules to tell students whether a particular verb is followed by an infinitive or an -ing form, and students have to learn the correct structure on a case-by-case basis. Typical mistakes:
*It has stopped to rain.
*I hope seeing you soon.

possible further activities

Text  The text on this page is simply intended to introduce examples of the various structures dealt with in the following pages. Students can simply read it and move on; or they can go through it more slowly, identifying the different uses of -ing forms and infinitives; or it can be left until later and used as a revision activity.

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language notes

Beginners may have trouble knowing whether or not to put to with an infinitive (the mother-tongue equivalent of, for example, to work may be a single word):
*I don’t want work tomorrow.

possible further activities

More practice  Extend Exercises 1 and 2 by saying the beginnings of sentences; students have to add ‘talk’ or ‘to talk’ as quickly as possible. For example:
‘I want’ – ‘to talk’
‘Can I’ – ‘talk’
‘It’s nice’ – ‘to talk’
‘She doesn’t’ – ‘talk’
‘He hopes’ – ‘to talk’
‘It’s important’ – ‘to talk’
‘We must’ – ‘talk’
‘Don’t’ – ‘talk’
‘We need’ – ‘to talk’
Change the students’ verb from time to time.

An asterisk (*) indicates an incorrect form or use.  ➔ Section 9 continues
**Negative infinitives**  Get students to complete this sentence in as many ways as they can think of:

It's important not to … during the English lessons.

**Internet**  Ask students to find one or more interesting sentences on the internet beginning "It's stupid not to …".

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**Language notes**

The infinitive of purpose corresponds to a structure with a preposition in some languages:

*I got up early for (to) send …

**Possible further activities**

**People's purposes**  Ask students if they can complete each of the following sentences in three or more ways:

- People learn English to …
- People go to Britain / the US to …
- People don't go to Britain / the US to …

**Students' purposes**  Students write sentences saying why they once went to a particular place. ('I went to Scotland last year to visit my sister."

**Tools**  Get students to extend Exercise 3 and learn some more vocabulary at the same time by writing more sentences on the pattern 'You use (a) … to …'. Supply vocabulary as necessary.

**Internet**  Ask students to look for interesting sentences on the internet beginning "I came/ went to (place name) to …"

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**Possible further activities**

**Mime**  Students (individually or in groups) mime things that they want to do. The rest of the class have to guess what they are miming. ('You want to eat.') If they have trouble thinking of ideas, give out cards. For example:

- You want to eat.
- You want to drink.
- You want to go to sleep.
- You want to play cards.
- You want to sing.
- You want to play tennis.
- You want to go skiing.
- You want to go swimming.
- You want to watch TV.

**Personalisation**  Ask students to write five or more true sentences about themselves, using some of the verbs that are followed by infinitives in the texts.

**Lies**  Ask students to write five or more sentences about themselves, but one sentence must be untrue. The other students have to decide which it is.

➔ Section 9 continues
possible further activities

**Mime**  Students show, by mime, that they want other students to do things. (This can be done in groups, or as a chain activity, or as a whole class activity.) The other students say what they have understood (‘You want me/us to stand up / sing / go to sleep …’), and then either say ‘OK’ and do the action, or refuse (‘Sorry, I don’t want to.’).

**People’s wishes**  Students extend Exercise 5 to other people. They write sentences using the pattern ‘X wants/wanted Y (not) to …’. (‘My mother wants my father to stop work.’ ‘The government wants people to pay more tax.’) Help with vocabulary.

language notes

Look out for the common mistake: *‘Is important to …* etc instead of *It’s important to …*.

possible further activities

**Exercise 4**  This is a useful basis for a simple class discussion, and it gives you a chance to find out how great the differences are between your view of language learning and your students’ views. Students say what they think; they see how much they agree or disagree with each other; you give your own opinions (which may be very different from theirs, and from ours). Show that you take their views seriously, however wrong you may consider them to be: students are more ready to listen to you if they can see that you are ready to listen to them.

**What is important?**  Individually or in groups, students choose an activity that they know something about, and then write a few sentences about it, using the structures from Exercise 4 (*It’s important to …* etc). Help with vocabulary. Possibilities (if they need suggestions): a sport; studying; dressing well; getting on with people; driving; bringing up children; learning a musical instrument.

possible further activities

**Personalisation**  Get students to write one or more sentences commenting on things they have done in their lives, starting: ‘I was right/wrong/crazy/stupid to …’

**Internet**  Get students to find one or more sentences on the internet beginning in the same way (or beginning “We were right …” etc).

possible further activities

**‘Old enough to …’**  Building on Exercise 1, get students to write about two or three similar regulations in their own country/countries. A good way to start is ‘At (age) you are old enough to …’.

**Personalisation**  If there is no risk of feelings being hurt, get students to write three or more sentences about themselves beginning:

- I’m old enough to …
- I’m not old enough to …
- I’m not too old to …
- I’m too old to …
possible further activities

'Something to …’ Say the following words (for example), and get students to describe them by saying ‘something to …’.

‘a book’ – ‘something to read’
‘a chair’ – ‘something to sit on’ (students may have to get used to the position of the preposition in this structure)
‘a cup of coffee’ ‘a sandwich’ ‘a bed’ ‘a toy’ ‘a film’ ‘a piano’

Things to do Tell the students some things that you have to do tonight / this week / …, using the structure noun + infinitive. For example:

‘I’ve got some letters to write. I’ve got some homework to correct. I’ve got some phone calls to make / some clothes to wash / a book to read / ….’

Students tell you if they have the same things to do; and what other things they have to do.

('I haven’t got any letters to write. I’ve got some people to see.’)

The poem It’s best if students just read this, and perhaps listen to you read it aloud. Give any explanations that are necessary, and let students give you any reactions they have, but don’t turn it into an exercise. Reading is enough here. Not all texts have to have questions! But if you and the students really like the poem, after you read it to them, you could get the class to read it aloud with you in chorus.

possible further activities

Comparing ideas In Exercise 1, students may not all have the same answer to some of the questions. See who answered what to items 4–8. In Exercise 2, get students to tell each other their sentences. In Exercise 3, students can compare their order of interest with each other’s or yours.

Writing notices Each student writes a notice, using ‘NO’ with a noun or -ing form, to stop people doing something (in the classroom, in the town, in the country, …).

Finding notices If students are in an English-speaking country, get them to look for notices beginning ‘NO’. If not, get them to look for notices that can be translated into English ‘NO’ notices. Who can find the most before the next lesson?

Internet Get students to find one or more sentences each containing the expression “is easier than” and at least one -ing form.

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possible further activities

Personalisation (adjective + -ing) Students write one or more sentences saying what they are tired of doing/being/having, one or more saying what they dream of doing/being/having, and one or more saying what they are thinking of doing one day.

Personalisation (preposition + -ing) Tell students to complete (truthfully or not) the sentence ‘I never spend a day without …ing’. They say their sentences; the class decide whether they are lying or not.

➔ Section 9 continues
possible further activities

Actions  This is a good activity for a class that has been sitting still for too long. Tell them to start, keep and then stop doing things. Teach some new vocabulary as necessary. For example:

‘Start walking; keep walking; stop walking. Start waving; keep waving; stop waving.’

Students can take a turn giving instructions to others (groups or the whole class); or to you!

Some possible actions (depending on what kind of students you have): walking, waving, running, jumping, singing, writing, thinking, scratching, coughing. If you use mime, lots of other actions are possible (smoking, drinking, eating, driving …).

Likes and dislikes  Extend Exercise 5 by getting students to compare notes. What are the most and least popular activities?

Predicting likes and dislikes  Students work in pairs and say what they think their partners have answered in Exercise 5. (‘I think you like reading novels. I think you hate walking in the rain.’) Their partners tell them whether they are right or not.