Section 9  infinitives and -ing forms

page 115

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.

Structures after adjectives and nouns can also be problematic:
*glad of arriving
*difficulty to understand

Pronunciation: to is normally unstressed, and pronounced /tə/ before a consonant.
The ‘Pronunciation for grammar’ exercises will help students who have trouble perceiving the form in fast speech.

possible further activities

The quotations are simply intended to introduce examples of the various structures dealt with in the following pages. Students can just read them and move on. Alternatively, they might like to look on a quotations website for interesting or amusing quotations including, for example, “to play” and “playing”.

page 116

language notes

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

An asterisk (*) indicates an incorrect form or use.
possible further activities

More basic practice  Say 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’
‘You shouldn’t’ – ‘talk’
‘We must’ – ‘talk’
‘Don’t’ – ‘talk’
‘We need’ – ‘to talk’
Change the students’ verb from time to time.

Why not …?  Ask students for their suggestions for your next holiday, beginning ‘Why not …?’

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”

page 118

possible further activities

More basic practice  Say the beginnings of sentences, using the verbs from Exercise 1. Students have to add ‘to play tennis’ or ‘playing tennis’ as quickly as possible.
For example:
‘I’ve decided’ – ‘to play tennis’
‘I expect’ – ‘to play tennis’
‘I’ve finished’ – ‘playing tennis’
‘I’ve given up’ – ‘playing tennis’
‘I hope’ – ‘to play tennis’
Change the students’ verb from time to time.

➔ Section 9 continues
**Mime**  Students (individually or in groups) mime things that they have given up doing. The rest of the class have to guess what they are miming. (‘You’ve given up smoking.’) If they have trouble thinking of ideas, give out cards. For example:

- smoking, playing cards, singing, skiing, watching TV, dancing, playing football

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

**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 …).

**Loves and hates**  Students write things they love doing and things they hate doing. What are the most and least popular activities?

**Predicting loves and hates**  Students work in pairs and say what they think their partners love and hate doing. (‘I think you love reading novels. I think you hate walking in the rain.’) Their partners tell them whether they are right or not.

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**page 119**

**possible further activities**

**Without …ing: true or not?**  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.

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

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**page 120**

**possible further activities**

**Progressive infinitives**  What would students like to be doing right now?

**Passive infinitives**  Tell students to put the following situations in order: which do they want most during life, which do they want least?

- to be admired
- to be understood
- to be loved
- to be talked about
- to be ignored
- to be forgotten
- to be remembered
- to be criticised
- to be feared

What are the majority preferences in the class?
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”.

page 121

possible further activities

Vocabulary expansion: periods of history  Ask students when they would like to have lived. Help with the vocabulary used for historical periods. (“I would like to have lived in Classical Greece / in Ancient China / during the 18th century / the Renaissance / the Russian revolution / the 1960s …”).

page 122

possible further activities

Personalisation  Get students to write one or more completions for each of the following sentences:
- I’ve never …, but I’d like to.
- I’ve never …, and I don’t want to.

Two-part exchanges  Put students into pairs and give each pair a card containing one of the following answers:
- I’d like to.
- I hope to.
- I used to.
- I don’t want to.
- I don’t need to.
- I’ll try to.
- I forgot to.
- I’ve forgotten how to.
- I can’t afford to.
- I’d love to.
- I expect to.

Give students a few minutes to prepare a two-part exchange (question and answer, invitation and answer, …), using the answers on their cards. Then students perform their exchanges in turn.

page 123

possible further activities

Students’ opinions  Get students to complete one or more of the following sentences:
- …ing too much is bad for you.
- …ing is good for you.
- …ing is hard work.
- …ing makes you tired.
- …ing is better than …ing.

Least favourite activities  Tell students to write down their three or more least favourite activities. Help with vocabulary if necessary.
- My least favourite activities are …ing, …ing and …ing.

What are the most common least favourite activities in the class?

➔ Section 9 continues
possible further activities

Quick revision  Say the beginnings of sentences, using the verbs from Exercise 1. Students have to add ‘to go out’ or ‘going out’ as quickly as possible. For example:

- ‘I’ve agreed’ – ‘to go out’
- ‘I can’t face’ – ‘going out’
- ‘I want to avoid’ – ‘going out’
- ‘I failed’ – ‘to go out’
- ‘I don’t feel like’ – ‘going out’

Change the students’ verb from time to time.

Pretending  Students mime being an animal or a machine. The class watch and say ‘You’re pretending to be a …’.

Taking orders from students  Ask students to make sentences beginning ‘If you happen to go shopping, could you get me …?’

Personalisation  Ask students to complete some or all of these sentences:

- I can’t help …ing.
- I feel like …ing.
- I don’t feel like …ing.
- I always put off …ing.
- I can’t stand people …ing.
- I’ve never succeeded in …ing.

possible further activities

Vocabulary expansion  Students write sentences about what is needed for the activities in Exercise 2, like this:

- To go skating, you need a pair of skates and an ice-rink.

Teach the vocabulary that they need to write about the various activities.

possible further activities

Personalisation  Get students to complete some or all of the following sentences:

- I’ll never forget …ing.
- I’ll always regret (not) …ing.

‘Stop …ing’  Tell students to start doing some continuous activity (drawing, reading, writing, humming, singing, waving, coughing, …). At the same time as they do their activity, they must observe each other. They must go on until you clap your hands. After a minute or so, clap. Students write as many sentences as they can in two minutes about themselves and each other, like this:

- When you clapped, X stopped …ing.

Seeing things happen(ing)  If the classroom overlooks a street (or some other area where things are going on), get the students to look out of the window for a minute or two. They must then write one or more sentences about things they saw happen (completed actions) and one or more about things they saw happening (uncompleted actions). Help with vocabulary if necessary. For example:

- I saw a woman go into the bank.
- I saw a busker playing the saxophone.

➔ Section 9 continues
pages 128–129

language notes

This structure may not have an equivalent in students’ languages. Look out for mistakes like:

*My father wanted that I become a doctor.
*The crisis caused that a lot of businesses closed.

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 6 to other people. They write sentences on 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.

page 130

possible further activities

Personalisation (adjective + infinitive) 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 …’

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

Internet Get students to find one or more sentences on the internet beginning “We were right to” and one or more beginning “We are tired of” (+ -ing form).

page 131

possible further activities

Personalisation Ask students to complete the following sentences:

I have difficulty in …ing.
I don’t have much difficulty in …ing.
I have no difficulty in …ing.

More fears In groups, students invent five more irrational fears and make up names for them ending in ‘phobia’. (‘Fear of teachers: eduphobia.’ ‘Fear of pizzas: pizzaphobia.’)

page 132

possible further activities

Personalisation: 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.’)
‘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’

The text Give students time to read the text; explain vocabulary where necessary. Then tell students to close their books. Read the text aloud, leaving gaps for students to fill in with infinitives, like this:

‘There was so much – ‘to do’
‘… boxes – ‘to unpack’

page 133

possible further activities

Extending Exercise 2 Get students to say or write similar things about another category of people (parents, soldiers, doctors, politicians …). This could be done in groups, with groups comparing their lists when they are ready.

page 134

language notes

Students may find this structure difficult. They must realise that the infinitives after these adjectives mean ‘for people to …’. So we might say for example that a particular kind of fish is ‘good to eat’, but not that it is ‘good to swim’. Students may want to add the unexpressed object:

*This fish is good to eat it.

possible further activities

Extending Exercise 1 Get students to write similar sentences, using the same structures, about other activities, or about people they know.

Extending Exercise 2 What do students feel about the different aspects of English study? Is English easy or difficult to read, to write, to speak, to understand when it’s spoken?

Internet Can students find advertisements on the internet (or elsewhere) like the ones at the bottom of the page, with the words “easy to” or “ready to”?

page 135

possible further activities

Making somebody happy Ask students for suggestions about ways of making one’s partner/children/friend happy, using ‘by …ing’. (‘By buying her flowers.’)

Advice Ask students to complete the following pieces of advice:
Before going to bed …
Before going on holiday …
Before getting an animal …
Before buying a car …

Internet Can they find sentences on the internet like the ones above, giving similar advice?
**Vocabulary expansion: extending Exercise 4** Teach the names of some more things. When students have learnt them, go through the names again; students write what they are for. Like this: ‘a snowplough’ – ‘for clearing snow’. Some suggestions:
a snowplough, a pump, a corkscrew, pliers, a lawnmower, a hammer, a screwdriver,
a drill, a jack, bleach, lipstick, a belt, shampoo, nail varnish

**page 136**

**possible further activities**

*Military service* Many years ago, one of the authors of this book had to do two years’ military service. The first few weeks were tough, because he had to do a lot of things he wasn’t used to. For example, he wasn’t used to ironing his own clothes. Can students suggest other things that were difficult because he wasn’t used to doing them?