

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*.



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