

Gerunds and infinitives

English B1

What this topic teaches

When a verb acts like a thing – as the subject or object of a sentence – English gives it one of two costumes : the **gerund** (*swimming*) or the **infinitive** (*to swim*).

- *I enjoy **swimming**.* / *I want **to swim**.*
- Chinese uses the same verb form everywhere: , – no costume change at all. English forces a choice, and the **first verb** picks the costume.
- △ There is no logic table that covers everything. The costume is chosen by the verb before it, and the lists must be learned. The good news: the lists are short, and the exams reuse them forever.
- Memory hook: every verb has a favourite costume. *enjoy* only wears *-ing*; *want* only wears *to*. They never swap, like two stubborn grandpas.

The gerund family: verb + -ing

These verbs take the gerund: **enjoy, finish, mind, avoid, keep, practise, suggest, imagine, miss.**

- *I enjoy **reading**.* *Have you finished **eating**?* *We practised **speaking**.*
- *Would you mind **opening** the window?* – the politest request in Britain.
- As a subject, the gerund works alone: ***Swimming** is fun.* ***Learning** English is a journey , not a sprint.*

The infinitive family: verb + to

These verbs take *to + base*: **want, decide, hope, plan, promise, learn, afford, agree, refuse.**

- *I want **to go**.* *She decided **to study** medicine.* *We agreed **to meet** at five.*
- *He promised **to call**.* *I can't afford **to buy** it.* (The classic student condition.)
- △ After *to*, the base form: *to swim*, never “*to swimming*”.

The meaning-changers

A few verbs accept **both** costumes – and the meaning changes. These are the exam's favourites.

Verb	+ -ing	+ to-infinitive
stop	stop the activity: <i>I stopped smoking.</i>	stop in order to: <i>I stopped to buy water.</i>
remember	a memory of the past: <i>I remember meeting her.</i>	don't forget the task: <i>Remember to call her!</i>
try	an experiment: <i>Try adding salt.</i>	an effort: <i>Try to finish on time.</i>

- *I stopped smoking* = no more cigarettes. *I stopped to smoke* = I paused my walk in order to smoke. Opposite meanings, one costume apart. Choose with care; your lungs are listening.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **Chinese has no costume split.** *Wǒ xǐhuan yóuyǒng* works for everything, so “*I enjoy to swim*” sneaks in. *enjoy* only wears *-ing*: *I enjoy **swimming**.*
- △ **Two verbs need the costume between them.** “*I want go*” × → *I want **to go**.* The *to* is the bridge.
- △ **suggest never takes to.** “*She suggested to leave early*” × → *She suggested **leaving** early.* A famous exception, and exams know it.
- △ **After prepositions, always -ing.** *interested **in learning**, good **at swimming**, thank you **for coming**.* A preposition is a preposition; the gerund follows it like a shadow.

Say it aloud

Make five true sentences about your life, one per family.

- I enjoy watching films. I have finished pretending otherwise.
- I want to travel. I am learning to cook. I can't afford to do both this month.
- I remember meeting my best friend. I must remember to message them today.
- Try adding one English sentence to your diary tonight. Try to keep it going for a week.

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. *I enjoy _____ (swim).* – **swimming**. *enjoy* only wears *-ing*.
2. *She decided _____ (study) medicine.* – **to study**. *decide* only wears *to*.
3. *I stopped _____ (buy) water on the way.* – **to buy**. Stopped in order to; the walk paused for the water.
4. *“She suggested to leave early.”* – $\times \rightarrow$ **suggested leaving**. *suggest* never takes *to*.
5. *I’m interested in _____ (learn) Japanese.* – **learning**. After a preposition, always *-ing*.