

USING –ING WORDS AND INFINITIVES

Infinitives and –ing words are common in the English language. Sometimes we use words ending with **-ing** as nouns, e.g., **Parking is difficult at UWA**. At other times they are part of a verb, e.g., **I am sitting at my desk**. This Survival Guide focuses on the use of –ing words as nouns.

TIP

You may ask: “What is an **infinitive**”? In English it takes the form **to + a verb**, e.g., **to be, to study, to do**.

Sometimes it’s difficult to work out whether to use an –ing ending or an infinitive after a verb. This Guide provides information and examples to help you decide.

Verbs + -ing

Some verbs can be followed by an –ing word but not by an infinitive. Below are some that are often found in academic writing, but there are many others.

admit	avoid
consider	involve
justify	mention
practise	prevent
recommend	suggest

Some examples

We **justified stopping** the experiment on ethical grounds.

My supervisor **recommended reading** more journal articles.

I **avoided plagiarising** by referencing correctly.

We **suggest continuing** the experiment using different plants.

I **practised using** the new equipment for over an hour.

Verbs + infinitive

Some verbs can be followed by an infinitive but not by an –ing form. Below are some that are often found in academic writing, but there are many others.

agree	aim
attempt	decide
manage	offer
propose	prove
seem	tend

Some examples

We **agreed to repeat** the experiment at a different time of day.

I **aim to show** that human habitation has led to the loss of that particular species.

The philanthropist **offered to pay** her university fees for three years.

Our initial experiments **seem to indicate** our hypothesis was wrong.

I **tend to like** writing better than reading.

Did you know?

Some verbs can be followed by an **infinitive or -ing** and there is **NO difference in meaning**, e.g., *attempt, begin, cease, continue, hate, intend, love, prefer, start*:

*I'm going to **continue to do/doing** this essay even though it's difficult.*

*We **intend to go/going** to a conference overseas this year.*

*I **prefer to do/doing** my experiments in the morning.*

Did you know?

Other verbs can be followed by an **infinitive or -ing** but they have **different meanings**, as shown in the table below.

TIP

In formal writing, it is best not to **split** your infinitives. This means ensuring the verb always follows directly after the 'to', as shown above in bold. A split infinitive looks like this: In formal writing, it is best to not **split** your infinitives.

verb	+ing	infinitive
forget/ remember	= forget/remember an earlier action: <i>I remember locking the lab door.</i>	=forget/remember to do a future action: <i>Don't forget to lock the lab door.</i>
go on	= continue: <i>I went on answering questions even though I was hungry.</i>	= to change to another action: <i>After giving my presentation, I went on to answer questions.</i>
mean	= will result in: <i>This new job means moving to Sydney.</i>	= intend to do something: <i>I mean to finish my thesis by July this year.</i>
regret	= feel sorry about the past: <i>I regret not studying harder in first year.</i>	= announce bad news: <i>I regret to inform you that you have failed.</i>
stop	= finish an action: <i>The company stopped making cars last year.</i>	= finish an action to do another: <i>We stopped to watch the protesters.</i>
try	= do something to see what will happen: <i>Try using a different type of cereal for your experiment.</i>	= make an effort to do something difficult: <i>We tried to alter the meeting time but we couldn't.</i>

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