GERUNDS AND INFINITIVES

Or the third worst nightmare for EFL learners, after prepositions and determiners.

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GERUND / V-ING
**GERUND AS SUBJECT, OBJECT OR COMPLEMENT OF SENTENCE/CLAUSE**

*Walking* makes me hungry. (subject)

(?)To walk makes me hungry → extremely formal, mainly used in legal texts)

Rob’s given up *smoking*. (object)

Joe’s fave pastime is

\[
\begin{cases}
\text{doing nothing.} \\
\text{do nothing.} \\
\text{to do nothing.}
\end{cases}
\]

Complement of sentence/clause.  
All three are possible, -ING being the default, most common option.
GERUND AFTER PREPOSITIONS

Are you interested in going to the cinema tonight?
Why do you insist on going to the cinema tonight?
Why do you object to going to the cinema tonight?

‘to’ particle: followed by infinitive, i.e. I want to come, I expect to pass...
‘to’ preposition, like all prepositions, followed by –ING.
HOW TO KNOW WHEN ‘TO’ IS A PREPOSITION

‘to’ will be a preposition when it is possible to put a noun phrase after it and the sentence keeps being grammatically correct.

I look forward to hearing from you \(\rightarrow\) I look forward to your answer.

I object to going to the cinema tonight \(\rightarrow\) I object to this activity.

I have got used to drinking coffee in the morning \(\rightarrow\) I have got used to coffee in the morning (I didn’t use to drink that before).

I am used to drinking coffee in the morning \(\rightarrow\) I’m used to coffee (rather than tea) in the morning.

In addition to putting potatoes, some people put onion in a Spanish omelet \(\rightarrow\) In addition to potatoes, some people put onion in a Spanish omelet.
GERUND AFTER CERTAIN VERBS

Examples: admit, adore, advise, appreciate, avoid, can’t help, can’t stand, consider, delay, deny, detest, dislike, enjoy, feel like, finish, imagine, involve, keep, mind, miss, postpone, practise, prevent, somebody, resist, risk, suggest...

I like the countryside but I miss living in the city.

We planted that tree to prevent people looking into our House from the street.

Not is placed before the gerund to make it negative.

e.g. It’s hard to imagine not having a mobile phone.

Some verbs can be followed by a that-clause:

I miss that I don’t live in the city any more.
GERUND AFTER SOME EXPRESSIONS

• Have difficulty/problems/trouble: I have difficulty hearing you.

• It’s/ there’s no use – there’s no point (in) (és inútil, no té sentit):

  It’s no use/There’s no point (in) getting up early to work if you spend hours browsing your social networks instead.

• It’s (not) worth (paga la pena): It’s worth getting up early in the morning for a fresh start.

• spend time/hours...: It’s no use/There’s no point (in) getting up early to work if you spend long hours browsing your social networks instead.

• It’s a waste of time/money: It’s a waste of time/ money watching teleshopping programs.
IF THE SUBJECTS OF THE MAIN VERB AND THE GERUND ARE DIFFERENT...

- I miss cooking so often, = I miss that I don’t cook so often now.

- I miss him cooking. = I miss John cooking.

- I miss his cooking. = I miss John’s cooking.

I miss that John cooked.
‘TO’ INFINITIVE

‘to’ as a particle
To say why you do something.

We gave the children some sweets in order to / so as to / to keep them quiet.
‘TO’ INFinitive After certain adjectives

F.ex.: (it is/was) difficult, easy, essential, important, lovely, (un)necessary, (im)possible, (un)usual, wonderful, (I am/She will be, etc.) delighted, disappointed, (un)happy, (un)lucky, sad, surprised...

We’re sad to hear you can’t come, it would’ve been wonderful to see you again.

Notice how we specify different subjects.

It is difficult to hear the speech. (something generalized, nobody can hear it properly).

It is difficult for me to hear the speech. (I can’t hear it because I’m too far, or I have hearing problems or...)
‘TO’ INFINITIVE AFTER CERTAIN NOUNS

F.ex. ability, chance, decision, failure, idea, opportunity, plan, refusal, right, way.

Notice how we specify different subjects.

What’s the best way to get to the station? (for everybody, in regular conditions).
What’s the best way for me to get to the station? (for this particular person or situation, for exemple, I don’t have a car, I am limping, it is raining...)
‘TO’ INFINITIVE AFTER CERTAIN VERBS -1

F.ex.: afford, agree, appear, arrange, attempt, choose, decide, demand, deserve, hesitate, hope, learn, manage, offer, prepare, promise, pretend, refuse, seem, threaten...

*not* is placed before the infinitive to make it negative.

Jodie called to her son but he pretended not to hear her.
Some verbs require a direct object, e.g., advise, allow, enable, encourage, force, invite, order, persuadí, recommend, remind, teach, tell, warn...

She has persuaded him to go to the opera with her.
Some verbs can be used either with or without a direct object, e.g., ask, expect, help*, need, want, would like, would love, would hate, would prefer...

she wants to buy a new coat and she wants me to go with her.

‘help’ can also be used with an infinitive without ‘to’: Please, help (me) (to) do this.
We use it after:

- Modal verbs

  You can go to the party, but you must be home early.

- After help, let, make, would rather, had better.

  I had better go – it’s very late, I’d rather stay here, though.

Notice the negative form:

  I had better not go yet – I would rather not miss the end of the speech.
‘make’ and ‘let’ are followed by a direct object. Notice the passive voice, which takes a ‘to’ or changes completely.

a) My parents made me go to school even in July! (active)
   I was made to go to school even in July! (passive)

b) My parents let me do whatever I wanted in August. (active)
   I was allowed to do whatever I wanted in August. (passive)
GERUND OR ‘TO’ INFINITIVE
‘BEGIN’, ‘START’ AND ‘CONTINUE’

‘begin’, ‘start’ and ‘continue’ can be followed by either a gerund or infinitive with ‘to’, without any difference in meaning.

He continued writing/to write until his hand began aching/ to ache.

The gerund is not usually used after a progressive form of these verbs to avoid cacophony.

   It’s starting to rain.

(?)It’s starting raining.
Either ‘to’ infinitive or gerund can also be used after hate, like, love and prefer with no change in meaning.

I prefer doing the shopping myself / I prefer to do it myself.

However, there might be a slight change in meaning with ‘to’.

I like doing the shopping myself. = I enjoy doing the shopping myself.

I like to do the shopping myself rather than buy online. = It’s a habit or a preference.
‘REMEMBER’, ‘FORGET’ → BEFORE OR AFTER

Gerund: actions occurring before these verbs.

- I remember reading an article. → I remember that I read it.
- I forgot reading the article! → I didn’t remember that I read it.

‘to’ infinitive: actions occurring after these verbs.

- I remembered to read the article → I had to read it and I didn’t forget to read it.
- I forgot to read the article. → I didn’t read it although I had to.
Gerund: no longer doing something.

- I stopped buying that magazine because I didn’t like it any more.

‘to’ infinitive: interrupt one activity to do another.

- I stopped (in order) to buy a magazine on my way home.
Gerund: continue doing something.

• I went on buying that magazine because I loved it so much!

‘to’ infinitive: do something after doing something else.

• After reading that magazine, I went on to read a book.
‘MEAN’

Gerund: ‘involve’

• If you travel by plane, that means getting to the airport well in advance.

‘to’ infinitive: to have the intention, to intend.

• I didn’t mean to hurt you, it was an accident.
If your laptop is running slowly, try restarting it (and see if the problem gets solved).

You must try to study more to get better results (even if you don’t like it or if it takes a long time).
‘NEED’

Gerund: ‘passive meaning’
• The kitchen needs cleaning (= it needs to be cleaned, not necessarily by the speaker)

‘to’ infinitive: active meaning.
• We need to clean the kitchen before we start cooking. (we need it ourselves)
‘REGRET’

Gerund: the regrets relate to something in the past

• I regret not studying harder when I was younger (= I should have studied harder.)

‘to’ infinitive: when giving a bad piece of news

• I regret to tell you that you have failed. (there is no regret as such on behalf of the speaker; it’s a modulating expression).
‘SEE’ & ‘HEAR’

Gerund: the action is unfinished

• I can **hear** people **yelling** in the apartment above ours. They are probably having a party.
• I **see** you **doing** homework still!

‘to’ infinitive: the action is finished

• I could **hear** a glass **break** and then it all went silent.
• I **saw** him **do** his homework and then leave.