

Identifying and Writing Infinitive Phrases

One Skill at a Time Lesson

Teacher Overview

Skills Focus:

Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyze	Evaluate	Create
Close Reading		Grammar		Composition	
Reading Strategies Annotation		Usage Direct/Indirect Objects Phrases Infinitive Prepositional Clauses Dependent/Subordinate			

Materials and Resources

The following are websites that offer students additional practice in identifying and writing infinitive phrases:

- http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_verbals.html
- http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/eduweb/grammar/course/sentence/2_4d.htm
- <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/phrases.htm>

Other lessons in the LTF guides which deal with infinitive phrases are

- Sentence Structure Basics
- Sentence Variations
- The Poetry of Phrases

Lesson Introduction

Infinitive phrases are introduced in the sixth grade, along with prepositional phrases. This lesson uses both literary and rhetorical texts that include many infinitive phrases for students to work with as well as activities that require students to write sentences that include infinitive phrases.

Definitions and Examples

You may want to review direct objects and prepositional phrases before asking students to complete the Middle School Activities.

- List the verbs in stanza one that follow the word “to.”
- Convert the following infinitives from the lines of the poem into the verb of the sentence. For example:

I’ve got the children **to tend** becomes: I tend the children.

<i>Original with infinitive</i>	<i>Revised</i>
I’ve got the children to tend	<i>I tend the children</i>
The clothes to mend	
The floor to mop	
The food to shop	
Then the chicken to fry	
The baby to dry	
I got company to feed	
The garden to weed	
I’ve got the shirts to press	
The tots to dress	
The cane to be cut	

- Read the first stanza aloud in its original form. Then read the revised stanza. Fill in the blanks below to explain the effect of changing the infinitives to verbs.

Angelou uses infinitive phrases in the first stanza of “Woman Work” to _____.
In _____.
the original form, the last word of each line is a _____, _____ emphasizing _____.
_____.
The repetition of _____
_____ calls attention to _____.
In _____.
the revision, the last word of each line is _____, taking the focus away from _____
and placing in on _____.

Middle School Activities:

B.

The following are lines of poetry containing infinitive phrases.

- First underline the infinitive phrase in the line of poetry.
- Then fill in the blanks, substituting your own infinitives and other elements to create your own line of poetry.

1. To see a world in a grain of sand— from “Auguries of Innocence,” William Blake

To _____ a _____ in a _____ of _____ .

2. Three fields to cross till a farm appears –from “Meeting at Night,” Robert Browning

Three _____ to _____ till _____

3. To bend with apples the mossed cottages—trees—from “To Autumn,” John Keats

To _____ with _____ the _____

4. How dull it is to pause, to make an end

To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!

As though to breathe were life!—from “Ulysses,” Alfred, Lord Tennyson

How dull it is to _____ , to _____

To _____ not to _____

As though to _____ were life!

5. To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.—from “Ulysses”

To _____ , to _____ , and not _____

6. The mermaids in the basement

Came out to look at me—Emily Dickinson

The _____ in the _____

Came out to _____ at _____

C.

- Fill in the blanks with infinitive phrases.
- Try to add modifiers such as direct objects and prepositional phrases onto the “to + verb” construction.
- The first one is done as an example.

1. I want to finish this exercise in a few minutes.
infinitive direct object prepositional phrase
 (all parts together create the infinitive phrase)

2. I need to _____
infinitive direct object prepositional phrase

3. I like to _____
infinitive direct object prepositional phrase

4. I have to _____
infinitive direct object prepositional phrase

5. I plan to _____
infinitive direct object prepositional phrase

Notice that in each of these sentences, the infinitive phrase is functioning as the direct object. The infinitive itself can also have a direct object (exercise), as in example #1 above.

- Now complete the sentence using an infinitive phrase as the subject of the sentence.
- The first one has been done for you.
- Try to add direct objects and dependent clauses to your sentences.

1. To love others as you love yourself is a noble lifelong goal.
infinitive d.o. dependent clause

“To love others as you love yourself” is the infinitive phrase functioning as the subject of the sentence. Notice that the infinitive phrase may contain other modifiers such as direct objects and dependent clauses.

2. To _____ is _____ what I want out of life.

3. To _____ is my favorite activity.

3. To _____ is _____ a perfect example of foolish behavior.

4. To _____ is _____ every teenager’s dream.

D.

“To” can be used to introduce both prepositional phrases and infinitive phrases. The difference is that a prepositional phrase contains a preposition and a noun (or pronoun) but NO verb. An infinitive is created with the word “to” plus a VERB. An infinitive phrase may contain a noun but a prepositional phrase never contains a verb.

- Read the following excerpt from Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Speech.
- Phrases from the speech containing the word “to” are highlighted and each is numbered.
- In the activity below the speech, circle the word preposition if the “to” phrase is a prepositional phrase. If the phrase is an infinitive, circle the word infinitive and write the verb from the phrase in the blank.

At this second appearing **to take the oath of the presidential office** (1), there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement, somewhat in detail, of a course **to be pursued** (2), seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention, and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known **to the public** (3) as **to myself** (4); and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging **to all** (5). With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard **to it** (6) is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed **to an impending civil war** (7). All dreaded it—all sought **to avert it** (8). While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether **to saving the Union without war** (9), insurgent agents were in the city seeking **to destroy it without war** (10)—seeking **to dissolve the Union** (11), and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would *make* war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would *accept* war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said “the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether.”

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us **to see the right** (12), let us strive on **to finish the work we are in** (13); **to bind up the nation’s wounds** (14); **to care for him who shall have borne the battle** (15), and for his widow, and his orphan—**to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations** (16).

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------|
| 1. preposition infinitive | _____ |
| | (verb) |
| 2. preposition infinitive | _____ |
| | (verb) |
| 3. preposition infinitive | _____ |
| | (verb) |

- 4. preposition infinitive _____
(verb)
- 5. preposition infinitive _____
(verb)
- 6. preposition infinitive _____
(verb)
- 7. preposition infinitive _____
(verb)
- 8. preposition infinitive _____
(verb)
- 9. preposition infinitive _____
(verb)
- 10. preposition infinitive _____
(verb)
- 11. preposition infinitive _____
(verb)
- 12. preposition infinitive _____
(verb)
- 13. preposition infinitive _____
(verb)
- 14. preposition infinitive _____
(verb)
- 15. preposition infinitive _____
(verb)
- 16. preposition infinitive _____
(verb)

Look again at the last paragraph of the speech. List the infinitives from that paragraph in the blanks below:

to _____, to _____, to _____, to _____, to _____.

What effect do you think Lincoln intended to achieve by using all these infinitives at the end of his speech? What was his purpose?

Write three or four sentences that explain how the infinitives help Lincoln achieve his purpose.
