

Infinitives and Split Infinitives

An infinitive is a verbal, which is a word derived from a verb that functions as another part of speech such as a noun, adjective, or adverb. More specifically, an infinitive is a verbal formed by placing “to” in front of a root verb: “to think,” “to read,” “to believe,” etc.

In a sentence, an infinitive can function as a subject, direct object, subject complement, adjective, or adverb.

- **To err** is human. (Subject)
- She desperately wanted **to believe**. (direct object)
- His calling is **to write**. (subject complement)
- Today is the day **to begin**. (adjective)
- He provided evidence **to prove** his point. (adverb)

Note that each example above contains a verb other than the infinitive and that an infinitive will never receive conjugation, meaning it will never end in an “ing” or “ed.”

A split infinitive occurs when a word or phrase—usually an adverb—comes between the “to” and the base verb that forms that infinitive.

- **To boldly go** where no man has gone before.
- He decided **to conscientiously object**.
- She tried **to directly address** their concerns.
- You should try **to whenever possible exercise**.

Most often, you can simply move the troublesome word or phrase to another position in the sentence to avoid creating a split infinitive.

- **To go boldly** where no man has gone before.
- He decided **to object conscientiously**.
- She tried **to address** their concerns *directly*.
- You should try **to exercise whenever possible**.

Most serious grammarians agree that splitting an infinitive is actually fine so long as only a single adverb or adverbial phrase is doing the splitting and doing so avoids a more stilted phrasing. Still, enough readers believe splitting an infinitive is a grammatical error that you would do best to avoid them in formal writing.

On occasion, however, you may simply not be able to split an infinitive, and, if after moving the offending word or phrase everywhere else in the sentence, you still cannot make the sentence work or mean exactly what you want, feel free to intentionally split that infinitive.

- We expect our applications **to more than double** this year.