What is an infinitive?

An infinitive is a verbal that consists of the word “to” plus a verb form. Phrases such as to run, to walk, and to write are examples of infinitives.

Even though an infinitive contains a verb form, infinitives do not function as verbs. Instead, infinitives express intention, desires, or expectations. Depending upon the sentence, infinitives can function as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs.

Here is an example of an infinitive that functions as a noun:

To get equal pay at work is her top priority.

“To get” does not express action here in this example. Rather, “to get” functions as a noun and is the subject of the sentence.

Here is an example of an infinitive that functions as an adjective:

This is the best time to end the relationship.

“To end” describes the best time, and is therefore functioning as an adjective.

Here is an example of an infinitive that functions as an adverb:

He studied all night to prepare for the exam.

“He” is the subject and “studied” is the verb. The infinitive “to prepare” expresses why he is going to study.
What is a split infinitive?

The construction of the infinitive form is to + verb. The error called a split infinitive occurs when a word is placed between the word “to” and the verb. Here are some examples of split infinitives:

To dearly love
To boldly go
To quickly flee
To angrily scream

And here are the corrections.

To love dearly
To go boldly
To flee quickly
To scream angrily

What are infinitive phrases?

Infinitive phrases typically function as nouns. An infinitive phrase is an infinitive followed by an object, complement, or modifier.

Here are a couple examples:

To become more employable is her number one goal in returning to school.

Her objective for spring break is to have more fun with her boyfriend.

In both cases, the infinitive phrases serve to make the infinitive more specific.

What are other issues with infinitives?

Another common issue is confusing infinitive phrases with prepositional phrases.

An infinitive will always use the word “to” followed by a “verb form.”

In a prepositional phrase, the preposition will always be followed by a noun.
Here is the difference:

Infinitive: **She decided** to go to the movies with friends.

Prepositional phrase: **She went** to the movies with friends.

**She** is the subject and **decided** and **went** are the verbs, respectively.

But in the infinitive phrase, “to go” expresses her intention to go a movie, while in the prepositional phrase “to the movies” expresses where she went.

**Are there any tips on avoiding split infinitives?**

Yes!

Think of it like this: Infinitives function singularly. Even though they are made up of two words, they function together in the sentence.

Therefore, the two words used to make an infinitive can never be split apart!