Gerund or Infinitive?

When one verb follows another, the second takes -ing, to + verb, or the bare verb. The first verb decides.

A2–C1 · Philo & Sophia, Lesson 16

She enjoys riding. · She wants to ride.

GERUND	Sophia (SUBJECT)	enjoys (FIRST VERB)	feeding (VERB + -ING)	the lambs. (OBJECT)
INFINITIVE	Philo (SUBJECT)	wants (FIRST VERB)	to feed (TO + VERB)	the lambs. (OBJECT)

-ing after some verbs and after every preposition
to + verb after other verbs, and to give a purpose
verb + person + to after ask, tell, want, invite…
bare verb after modals, make and let

Which verbs take which?

learn them in groups

verb + -ing

enjoy · finish · mind · avoid · keep · suggest · consider · imagine · practise · miss · risk · deny · admit · give up · carry on · can't stand · can't help · it's worth

*We **finished milking** at six. Do you **mind waiting**?*

verb + to + verb

want · need · decide · hope · plan · promise · agree · refuse · offer · learn · manage · afford · seem · expect · choose · pretend · fail · would like

*Philo **decided to plant** barley. We can't **afford to wait**.*

verb + person + to + verb

ask · tell · want · invite · remind · advise · allow · teach · encourage · warn · expect · would like

*She **taught me to shear** sheep. I **want you to come**.*

either, with little change

like · love · hate · prefer · begin · start · continue · intend

*It **started raining**. / It **started to rain**.*

*But **would like / love / hate / prefer** always take **to**: I'd love to come.*

Not sure? Look the verb up in a learner's dictionary: it shows "+ -ing" or "+ to"

Same verb, new meaning

to looks forward; -ing looks back

	+ to	+ -ing
stop	*He **stopped to rest**. (in order to rest)*	*He **stopped resting**. (no more rest)*
remember	***Remember to lock** the gate. (a job to do)*	*I **remember locking** it. (a memory)*
forget	*I **forgot to feed** them. (didn't do it)*	*I'll never **forget seeing** the foal born.*
try	***Try to lift** it. (make an effort)*	***Try adding** salt. (as an experiment)*

Also: regret to tell you (bad news) / regret selling it (sorry now); go on to do (next) / go on doing (continue)

After prepositions

always -ing

*She's good **at riding**.*

*Thanks **for helping**.*

*Wash your hands **before eating**.*

*I look forward **to seeing** you.* Here **to** is a preposition, so not ~~to see~~.

Also: *be used to, get used to.*

-ing as a subject too: Riding is fun

Purpose

why? to + verb

*I went to market **to sell** eggs.*

*He got up early **to milk** the cows.*

Formal: ***in order to / so as to**.*

Negative: *We left early **so as not to** miss the bus.*

Not ~~for sell~~, not ~~for to sell~~.

for + noun is fine: I went for a walk

Adjectives and too / enough

- adjective + to: *easy **to grow**, happy **to help**, ready **to go***
- *The sack is too heavy **to lift**.*
- *She's old enough **to drive**.*
- **not** goes first: *I tried **not to laugh**.*

No to at all: the bare verb

- After modals: *She can **swim**. You must **go**.*
- make / let + person: *He made us **wait**. Let me **help**.*
- *You'd better **hurry**. I'd rather **stay**. Help me (to) **carry** it.*

Spanish speakers, watch out

- *Montar es divertido* = **Riding** is fun.
- *para vender* = **to** sell, not ~~for sell~~.
- *Quiero que vengas* = I want **you to come**, not ~~want that you come~~.
- *antes de comer* = before **eating**.

Want more?

Sophia explains **To Go, or Going** (Philo & Sophia, Lesson 16).

See also Grammar Guides 16: **Dependent Prepositions**.

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