

Tip #4 **INFINITIVES**

不定詞

Basic Guidelines

Infinitive means “without limit”, and is one of a group of three special word forms called “verbals”:

<u>Verbal Type</u>	<u>Functions</u>	<u>Forms</u>		
1) infinitive (不定詞)	(weak) noun	<u>to</u> + verb <i>to find</i>	(to) verb <i>help (to) do</i>	
2) gerund (動名詞)	(strong) noun	verb- <u>ing</u> <i>finding</i>		
3) participle (分詞)	adjective	verb- <u>ing</u> <i>finding</i> <i>acting</i>	verb- <u>ed</u> <i>found</i> <i>acted</i>	<u>having</u> verb- <u>ed</u> <i>having found</i> <i>having acted</i>

To conquer unknown areas of science is Taro's desire.

“to conquer” = noun (名詞)
and is used as the subject of
the sentence

The desire to conquer unknown areas of science is Taro's.

“to conquer” = adjective (形容詞)
and describes what kind of desire

Taro desires to conquer unknown areas of science.

“to conquer” = a noun phrase
that actually functions to
describe “desire”

Writers too often misuse the infinitive because they were mistaught, or because the concepts were never learned properly. When thinking of the word “infinitive”, associate the word “infinity” “without limitations”. Infinitive use more commonly communicates uncertainty and doubt—though more psychologically—and is often used in situations in which logic and future possibilities are stressed.

The gerund (V-ing 動名詞) —likely mistaught as well—stresses the concept of certainty much more the infinitive, and often refers to things done or finished in the past; thus, things that are known or certain.

In short many writers overuse the infinitive in today’s technical, scientific, and even business writing; and use the gerund too little. For numerous reasons dating back to the 1980s, the gerund has become more and more frequently used for stressing facts or factual-like information.

[to + verb] style

To conquer unknown areas of science is Taro's desire.

more logical
more uncertain
feel unsure action will be done (future)
less persuasive
softer nuance

Taro is strictly adhering to the logical nature of the English language and is telling the reader/listener that he is unsure whether he will be able to conquer even "one unknown area of science" sometime in his future life. Only the future holds the answer.

[verb-ing] style

Conquering unknown areas of science is Hanako's desire.

more emotional
more certain
feel sure action will be done (future)
more persuasive
stronger nuance

Hanako is telling the reader/listener that she will definitely achieve success; that is, she will "conquer at least one unknown area of science" sometime in her future life. There is no doubt in Hanako's mind, and she has the determination that will lead her to success.

1. ORIGINAL

The topic of my current study is to develop a new method for finite element analysis.

1. REVISED

The topic of my current study is developing a new method for finite element analysis.

COMMENTS

The topic of the writer's study or research is already decided: *how to develop a new method for finite element analysis*. The infinitive "to develop" implies that (logically speaking) uncertainty exists as to whether the writer will actually be able to develop a new method or not; that is, whether the writer will succeed or fail. This is perfectly logical because any such success or failure must happen in the future. However, this kind of English lacks the stronger, more emotional persuasive power of the gerund (V-ing) form. Both are good forms of English: just use them to communicate what you really want the reader to understand

2. ORIGINAL

To decipher DNA binding motifs of transcription factors (TFs) is important to predict their target genes and (to) understand their biological roles.

2. REVISED

Deciphering DNA binding motifs of transcription factors (TFs) is important for predicting their target genes and understanding their biological roles.

COMMENTS

If something is truly "important", then uncertainty impedes the writer from communicating the intended message; thus, V-ing style is preferred. If you choose to use the infinitive style for some reason, be careful of parallel grammatical structure: ***To decipher DNA binding motifs of transcription factors (TFs) is important to predict their target genes and to understand their biological roles.***

3. ORIGINAL

In MR development, the energy conversion process from the MMW to a high pressure jet, leading a thrust impulse, is an important issue to improve thrust efficiency.

3. REVISED

In MR development, the energy conversion process from the MMW to a high pressure jet, leading a thrust impulse, is an important issue for improving thrust efficiency.

that + verb present tense →

In MR development, the energy conversion process from the MMW to a high pressure jet, leading a thrust impulse, is an important issue that improves thrust efficiency.

COMMENTS

The “important issue” is making thrust efficiency better. This is certain; there is no doubt in the writer’s mind; thus, V-ing style is preferred.

Notice in the additional revised example how the relative pronoun (關係代名詞) “that” followed by a pure verb form(present tense) provides even more impact.

Another example

This paper proposed a method to obtain quantitative change in muscle activity caused by changes in sensory input conditions.

This paper proposed a method for obtaining quantitative change in muscle activity caused by changes in sensory input conditions.

that + verb present tense →

This paper proposed a method that obtains quantitative change in muscle activity caused by changes in sensory input conditions.

4. ORIGINAL

... was better to stack GaAs ...

4. REVISED

... was better at stacking GaAs ...

COMMENTS

The writer is describing a conclusion concerning a result that has already been achieved; therefore, certainty (V-ing) is preferred, What is more, the V-ing form helps sell your idea!

5. ORIGINAL

Ours is believed to be the first study to assess the association between serum thyroid hormone levels and exposure to pyrethroid insecticides in pregnant females.

5. REVISED

Ours is believed to be the first study assessing the association between serum thyroid hormone levels and exposure to pyrethroid insecticides in pregnant females.

that + verb present tense →

Ours is believed to be the first study that assesses the association between serum thyroid hormone levels and exposure to pyrethroid insecticides in pregnant females.

COMMENTS

Notice in the additional revised example how the relative pronoun (關係代名詞) “that” followed by a pure verb form (present tense) provides even more impact.

6. ORIGINAL

It is essential to define standards or measures, and then to compare the results against anticipated accomplishments.

6. REVISED

Defining standards or measures, and then comparing the results against anticipated accomplishments are essential.

COMMENTS

If “define standards or measures” and “compare the results against anticipated accomplishments” are truly essential, then uncertainty impedes the writer from communicating the intended message; thus, V-ing style is preferred.

Bulleted Text in Presentation Slides

Infinitive Form
*weak beginnings to
bulleted text*

Objectives

- to explore environmental management challenges
- to discover adaptive approach effects on stakeholders
- to investigate local and national planning implications
- to identify stakeholder roles and responsibilities

5

Gerund Form ★
stronger beginning

Objectives

- exploring environmental management challenges
- discovering adaptive approach effects on stakeholders
- investigating local and national planning implications
- identifying stakeholder roles and responsibilities

5

Regular Verb Form ★★
even stronger beginning

Objectives

- explore environmental management challenges
- discover adaptive approach effects on stakeholders
- investigate local and national planning implications
- identify stakeholder roles and responsibilities

5