

Chapter Twenty

Infinitive Mode

Infinitives are verbs that are *not defined* or *confined* to specific subjects. Rather than saying “He did x” or “You there, do x”, the infinitive merely states the notion of the verb. The infinitive itself does not stipulate a subject for its action (though other words in the context may). In English we form infinitives by putting *to* in front of verbs: “I want *to read* Plato in Greek.”

Morphology of imperatives

Voice. Inasmuch as people need to use phrases that mean *to do* things, *to experience* things, and *to have things done to them* by others, you will not be surprised that Greek developed active, middle, and passive infinitives in order to state such notions.

Aspect. A **base** (e.g., die) can be expressed in infinitive mode in all three aspects. I.e., Greek can say *to die-event* (to fall over dead), *to die-process* (to go through the process of dying), *to die-resultant state* (to have died and so be dead). So, infinitives are built from the same five **stems** that you encountered in the imperative.

Future Time. For reasons that I will explain below (under “Indirect Discourse”), Greek sometimes has need of infinitives that communicate futurity. So, infinitives can also be made from the two future stems (**future active stem** and **future passive stem**).

Forms of the Infinitive

Infinitive markers. Infinitives are wonderfully easy to recognize. They consist of one of three generic infinitive markers added to a **verb stem**, whose significance with regard to aspect and voice (and future time) is the same as in all other modes. The three infinitive markers are

Active: -ειν (originally εεν) or -(ε)ναι

Middle/Passive: -σθαι

The following charts show all the infinitive forms for your reference. Notice how easy the various forms are to recognize and understand. You will immediately notice that the infinitives consist of the **verb stem** + infinitive ending, joined by the theme vowel you have already seen in the indicative and imperative.

Forms of the Infinitive

	Active	Middle	Passive
Event: SA active/middle WA passive	λαβ <u>εῖν</u>	λαβ <u>έσθαι</u>	ληθ <u>ῆναι</u>
Event: WA active/middle SA passive	γράφ <u>αι</u> [γραφ/ <u>ναι</u>]	γράφ <u>ασθαι</u>	γραφ <u>ῆναι</u>
Event: Athematic SA	γνώ <u>ναι</u>	γνώ <u>σθαι</u>	γνωσ <u>ῆναι</u>
Event: Kappa-aorist	δο <u>έναι</u> <i>Attic:</i> δοῦναι	δό <u>σθαι</u>	δοθ <u>ῆναι</u>
Process: Thematic	λαμβάν <u>ειν</u>	λαμβάν <u>εσθαι</u>	
Process: Athematic	διδό <u>ναι</u>	διδό <u>σθαι</u>	
Resultant-State: κ/ aspect marker	δεδο <u>κέναι</u>	δεδο <u>σθαι</u>	
Resultant-State: '/ aspect marker	τετρο <u>φέναι</u>	τετράφθαι [τετραπ/ <u>σθαι</u>]	
Resultant-State: ο/ aspect marker	λελοι <u>πέναι</u>	λελειφθαι [λελειπ/ <u>σθαι</u>]	
Future-event: /σ/ future marker	δώ <u>σειν</u>	δώ <u>σεσθαι</u>	δοθή <u>σεσθαι</u>
Future-event: /εσ/ future marker	φανέ <u>ειν</u> [φ <u>αν</u> /εσ/ <u>ειν</u>] <i>Attic:</i> φανεῖν	φανέ <u>εσθαι</u> <i>Attic:</i> φανεῖσθαι	φανή <u>σεσθαι</u>

Uses of infinitives

Complementary Infinitives. Both in Greek and English, infinitives often *complete* another verb.

She *wants* to go to Greece.

You *are able* to read Greek.

It *is necessary* to study hard.

The following verbs are frequently completed by infinitives.

- δεῖ, χρῆ, ἀνάγκη [ἐστίν]—all of which mean “it is necessary” in varying fashions.
- βούλομαι, ἐθέλω (“I want”) and other verbs of wanting, hoping, commanding.
- δύναμαι (I am able), δυνατόν [ἐστίν] (it is possible); ἀδύνατον [ἐστίν] (it is impossible) and other expressions of capability or incapability.

Articular Infinitives. In English we can turn verbs into a nouns (meaning *the act of doing x*) by adding *-ing* to them. We call such verbal-nouns **gerunds**. By nature gerunds are singular. They can serve virtually any function that any other noun can:

- **Swimming** [subject] is good exercise.
- Most people enjoy **eating** [direct object].
- A child’s experience of **reading** [object of preposition] helps shape her imagination.

Greek doesn’t have gerunds. Instead it uses infinitives, which it *converts to nouns by introducing them with the neuter singular article τό in the appropriate case*. So, when you encounter a Greek sentence that seems to say (for example) “The **to run** is good exercise,” you should remember that it means “*Running* is good exercise.” Similarly “The king’s fear of the **to die** drove him mad” means “The king’s fear of *dying*...”

Indirect Speech. The terms **Direct Speech** and **Direct Discourse** refer to the sort of *verbatim* reporting of speech or thought that is set in quotation marks in modern written English. **Indirect Speech** or **Indirect Discourse**, on the other hand, is the *non-verbatim* reporting of someone’s words or thoughts that is not set in quotations in written English. Most indirect speech in English is introduced by the **conjunction that** and uses an *indicative verb*.

- He says **that** *he wants* to run for President.
- She insists **that** *she never signed* that document.

Similarly to English usage, Greek can use the **conjunctions ὅτι or ὥς (that)**, followed by an *indicative verb*, to express indirect discourse.

English also allows us to express indirect speech *with infinitives rather than a that clause*. In English this option is limited to a very few specific verbs.

- The man *claims to be* Napoleon = The man *claims that he is* Napoleon.
- The court *judged the killer to be* insane = The court *judged that the killer was* insane.

In Greek this latter use of the **infinitive** (without **ὅτι or ὥς**) in *non-verbatim* reporting of someone’s words or thoughts—can be used *with virtually any verb of speaking or thinking* and so occurs much more commonly in Greek than in English.

Time in infinitives

Inherently infinitives carry no notion of **time**, but do carry a clear notion of **aspect**. That is why I have urged you to recognize the aspect markers and to distinguish infinitives as **process** rather than **present**, as **event** rather than aorist, and as **resultant-state** rather than perfect. So, in most uses (complementary and articular, for instance) the infinitive carries no notion of time.

Indirect speech, however, requires a speaker to indicate time—not actual time, but time relative to the verb that introduces the indirect speech. If someone reports a general's speech about the enemy's defeat, we need to know whether the general said that the enemy *had already* been defeated (**past** at the time of the general's statement), that they *were in the process of* being defeated (**present** at the time of his statement), or that they *were about to* be defeated (**future** at the time of the statement). This picture is further complicated because the general's speech can itself be either past, present, or future.

Greek negotiates this complexity using the aspectual significance of its infinitives. *The absolute time of the speech is indicated by the indicative verb that introduces the indirect discourse* ("He says," "He said," "He will say"). The infinitive includes aspectual significance that we English speakers must translate into a time indicator.

Relative present process in indirect discourse. Greek uses the **process** (= present) infinitive in indirect discourse to report action that is **in process at the time of the statement**. So, the process infinitive naturally communicates **relative present time**.

- He **claims** the enemy to process-lose = He **claims** **that** the enemy **are in the process of losing** <at the time of his speech>.
- He **claimed** the enemy to process-lose = He **claimed** **that** the enemy **were in the process of losing** <at the time of his speech>.
- He **will** claim the enemy to process-lose = He **will** claim **that** the enemy **are in the process of losing** <at the time of his speech>.

Relative present state in indirect discourse. The resultant-state (perfect) infinitive also communicates relative present time. It differs from the process infinitive in that it reports not a process, but **a condition that is current at the time of the statement**: The process infinitive reports that a *process* is ongoing at the time of the main verb; the resultant-state infinitive reports that a *condition* or *state* is in place at the time of the statement. The process infinitive, that is, reports that the enemy *is in the process of losing*. The resultant-state infinitive reports that they *are in the state of being losers*.

- He **claims** the enemy to resultant-state-lose the battle. = He **claims** **that** the enemy **are** the losers in the battle. (They **are** in that state at the time of the claim.)
- He **claimed** the enemy to resultant-state-lose the battle. = He **claimed** **that** the enemy **were** the losers in the battle. (They **were** in that state at the time of the claim.)
- He **will** claim the enemy to resultant-state-lose the battle. = He **will** claim **that** the enemy are the losers in the battle. (They **will be** in that state at the time of the claim.)

Relative past time in indirect discourse. The event (aorist) infinitive in indirect discourse reports action that is already **a completed event at the time of the statement**. So, the event infinitive naturally communicates relative past time.

- He **claims** the enemy to event-lose the battle = He **claims** **that** the enemy **lost** the battle. (The enemy's defeat is a **completed event at the time of his claim**.)
- Yesterday he **claimed** the enemy to event-lose the battle = Yesterday he **claimed** **that** the enemy **had lost** the battle. (Again, the enemy's defeat was **complete at the time of his claim**.)
- Tomorrow he **will** claim the enemy to event-lose the battle = Tomorrow he **will** claim **that** the enemy **lost** the battle. (Yet again, the event aspect infinitive communicates a claim that the enemy's defeat **will be complete at the time of the claim** <tomorrow> even if the battle remains at issue today.)

Relative future time in indirect discourse. Only the **future stems** include a time indicator, and so only the future infinitive actually specifies a sense of time. The future infinitive in indirect discourse reports an event that is anticipated (i.e., in the future) at the time of the statement. So, the future infinitive indicates relative **future** time:

- He **claims** the enemy to future-lose the battle = He **claims** that the enemy **will** lose tomorrow. (The event is still in the future at the time of the claim.)
- Yesterday he **claimed** the enemy to future-lose the battle = He **claimed** yesterday that the enemy **would/will** lose the battle. (The event was still in the future at the time of the claim.)
- Tomorrow he **will** claim the enemy to future-lose the battle = Tomorrow he **will** claim that the enemy **will** lose the battle. (The event will still be in the future at the time of the claim.)

Indicating the “subject” of an infinitive.

Sometimes the subject of the main verb in a sentence continues to be understood as the “subject” of the infinitive.

- I want to go to Greece. (i.e., I want for *myself* to go to Greece.)
- He claims to be Napoleon (i.e., that he is *himself* Napoleon.)

In Greek as in English, there is no need to specify the subject of the infinitive in such a case. It is understood to be the same as that of the main verb.

Often, though, the infinitive needs a different “subject.”

- I want *my students* to go to Greece.
- The psychiatrist judged *the killer* to be insane.

When an infinitive (no matter what its use) needs a “subject” *different from that of the main verb in the clause*, the “subject” of the infinitive is set in the **accusative** case.

What now?

Choose ten verbs from the principal parts list and construct all their infinitives by adding the appropriate infinitive ending to the appropriate **stem**.

Review the uses of the infinitive, make sure you understand them, and commit them to memory.

Am I ready to proceed?

When you can check off the following, you are ready to move on to the next chapter.

- I understand how to form the infinitives in all three **aspects**, all three voices, and in **future time**.
- I understand what each of these infinitive forms means.
- I understand and have committed to memory the uses of the infinitive.