

# LESSON 3

## Infinitive

### 3.1. Introduction

The Infinitive is the verbal noun, that is, the name of the verb. The Infinitive expresses Aspect but not Time. The apparent exception is the so-called ‘Future’ Infinitive. As with the ‘Future’ Optative, the ‘Future’ Infinitive may be regarded as expressing an Intentive Aspect rather than Future Time.

### 3.2. Forms

By way of illustrating the Aspect of Infinitives, only Active forms are listed here.

#### Imperfect

---

παύειν                    *to be stopping*

---

#### Perfect

---

πεπαυκέναι            *to have stopped*

---

#### Aorist

---

παῦσαι                    *to stop*

---

#### ‘Future’/Intentive

---

παύσειν                    *to be going to stop*

---

A ‘Future Perfect’ Infinitive form μεμνήσεσθαι (Mid./Pass.) occurs in Homer and in Attic prose. But that is the ‘Future’ of a Perfect verb with Imperfect meaning; it means ‘to be going to remember’ (Intentive).

### 3.3. Functions

As a verb, the Infinitive may take any construction which finite parts of the verb may take.

As a noun, the Infinitive may be used without the definite article:

- as the Subject or Object of another verb
- in dependence on certain adjectives, adverbs and even nouns (especially when these parts of speech denote ability or suitability)
- to express Purpose with certain verbs.

The Infinitive with the neuter definite article (or ‘articular Infinitive’) may also be used in the Nominative or Accusative Case respectively as Subject or Object of a verb. In addition, the Infinitive with the definite article may be used in various constructions in the Genitive or Dative Cases, and after prepositions governing Accusative, Genitive or Dative Cases. (See further the Lessons on the Cases.)

The negative for all Infinitive constructions in this Lesson is regularly μή. There are three examples in §§3.5.3 and 3.5.4 below.

The use of the Infinitive in reported speech and thought and in Temporal and Result constructions will be treated in other Lessons.

### 3.4. Infinitive without Article

#### 3.4.1. Infinitive as Subject

οὐκ ἄξιον περὶ τούτων, Ἀπολλόδωρε, νῦν ἐρίζειν. (Pl.*Smp.* 173 E.)  
*To quarrel about this now, Apollodorus, <is> not worthwhile.*

ἐρίζειν is Subject; ἄξιον is Complement (predicate Nom.). ἄξιον is neuter Gender in reference to the Infinitive as a neuter singular noun. The more usual form of English expression for this sentence is: ‘It is not worthwhile quarrelling about this now, Apollodorus’. ‘It’ is in anticipatory apposition with ‘quarrelling’. As in this example, the verb ‘to be’ is not always expressed in Greek.

τὴν πεπρωμένην μοῖραν ἀδύνατα ἐστὶ ἀποφυγεῖν καὶ θεῶ·  
(Hdt. 1.91.1.)

*It is impossible even for a god to escape one's appointed fate.*

(lit. 'To escape one's appointed fate is impossible even for a god'.) Here, the neuter plural form ἀδύνατα is used as Complement of the Nominative Infinitive phrase; and the verb 'to be' (ἐστὶ) is expressed.

σχέτλια γὰρ  
ἐμέ γε τὸν μακρῶν ἀλάτων πόνων  
οὐρίῳ μὴ πελάσαι δρόμῳ,  
... (S.Aj. 887–889.)

*For <it is> wretched  
that I the wanderer through lengthy labours  
should not approach a favourable course  
...*

(lit. 'For that I the wanderer through lengthy labours should not approach a favourable course <is> wretched...'.) Here, the Subject is an Accusative and Infinitive phrase; and the verb 'to be' is not expressed in Greek. Within the Accusative and Infinitive phrase, ἐμέ ... τὸν ... ἀλάταν is the Subject of the Infinitive πελάσαι. And the neuter plural adjective σχέτλια is the Complement of the Infinitive phrase.

### 3.4.2. Infinitive as Object

μᾶλλον δ' ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὑμῖν, ὡς ἐκεῖνος διηγείτο, καὶ ἐγὼ πειράσομαι  
διηγῆσασθαι. (Pl.Smp. 173 E–174 A.)

*But rather, as he was relating <the matter>, I too shall attempt to relate <it>  
to you from the beginning.*

διηγῆσασθαι is direct Object of πειράσομαι.

### 3.4.3. Infinitive Expressing Purpose

The use of the Infinitive with certain verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs reflects its Indo-European background as a Dative verbal noun expressing Purpose.

### 3.4.3.1. Infinitive with Verbs

The Infinitive may express Purpose, mostly with verbs used transitively, and in prose especially with verbs of giving, receiving and choosing.

οἱ δ' ἄρ' ἀπ' ὤμοιιν Σαρπηδόνοσ ἔντε' ἔλοντο  
χάλκεα μαρμαίροντα, τὰ μὲν κοίλασ ἐπὶ νῆασ  
δῶκε φέρειν ἑτάροισι Μεινοτίου ἄλκιμοσ υἱόσ.  
(Hom.II. 16.663–665.)

*But then from the shoulders of Sarpedon they took the shining  
bronze armour, which the brave son of Menoitius  
gave to his companions to carry to the hollow ships.*

The Infinitive φέρειν expresses the Purpose of the verb δῶκε (without augment).

### 3.4.3.2. Infinitive with Nouns

μὴ δῶμεν αὐτοῖσ σχολήν μήτε βουλευσασθαι μήτε  
παρασκευάσασθαι ἀγαθὸν αὐτοῖσ μηδέν, μηδὲ γνῶναι πάμπαν  
ὅτι ἄνθρωποὶ ἐσμεν ... (X.Cyr. 4.2.22.)

*let us not give them leisure for deliberating or preparing any benefit for  
themselves, nor for realising at all that we are humans ...*

The Infinitives βουλευσασθαι, παρασκευάσασθαι and γνῶναι express the Purpose of the noun σχολήν.

### 3.4.3.3. Infinitive with Adjectives

ἅμα μὲν γὰρ αὐτῷ ὁ χώροσ ἐπιτήδειοσ ἐφαίνετο ἐν στρατοπεδεῦσαι  
... (Th. 2.20.4.)

*For at the same time the place appeared to him suitable for encamping ...*

The Infinitive ἐν στρατοπεδεῦσαι expresses the Purpose of the adjective ἐπιτήδειοσ.

### 3.4.3.4. Infinitive with Adverbs

οὕτω χαλεπῶσ ἂν ἐδόκουν οἱ στρατιῶται τοὺσ Μαντινέασ  
ἐφηδομένουσ τῷ δυστυχήματι θεάσασθαι. (X.HG 4.5.18.)

*The soldiers would be thinking it so difficult to look upon the Mantineans  
exulting over their misfortune.*

The Infinitive *θεάσασθαι* expresses the Purpose of the adverb *χαλεπῶς*. (The adverb has been translated as an adjective for the sake of English idiom. But English idiom itself sometimes allows an adverb where an adjective would be expected: 'all is *well* that ends well'.)

### 3.5. Infinitive with Article

#### 3.5.1. Infinitive as Subject (Nominative)

τὸ γὰρ φιλότιμον ἀγήρων μόνον, καὶ οὐκ ἐν τῷ ἀχρείῳ τῆς ἡλικίας τὸ κερδαίνειν, ὥσπερ τινὲς φασι, μᾶλλον τέρπει, ἀλλὰ τὸ τιμᾶσθαι. (Th. 2.44.4.)

*For love of honour alone <is> unaffected by age, and in the ineffective <stage> of life <it is> not making a profit, as some say, <which> gives more enjoyment, but being honoured.*

τὸ κερδαίνειν and τὸ τιμᾶσθαι are (contrasted) Subjects of *τέρπει*.

#### 3.5.2. Infinitive as Object (Accusative)

πρὸς μὲν οὖν τὸ ἐμπειρότερον αὐτῶν τὸ τολμηρότερον ἀντιτάξασθε, πρὸς δὲ τὸ διὰ τὴν ἧσαν δεδιέναι τὸ ἀπαράσκευοι τότε τυχεῖν. (Th. 2.87.5.)

*Therefore, against their greater experience set <your> greater daring, and against <your> being afraid because of <your> defeat <set> the fact that you happened to be unprepared then.*

τὸ ... τυχεῖν is a second Object of *ἀντιτάξασθε*, parallel to the first Object τὸ τολμηρότερον. Although τὸ ... τυχεῖν is in the Accusative Case, *ἀπαράσκευοι* ('unprepared'), within the Infinitive phrase, is Nominative, because it refers to the Subject of the Main verb *ἀντιτάξασθε*. The sentence also contains a prepositional phrase with articular Accusative Infinitive phrase (for this usage see §3.5.5 below).

#### 3.5.3. Genitive

The following examples illustrate the main ways in which the Genitive of the articular Infinitive is used.

### Objective

πολλά δὲ καὶ ἄλλα ἔχω ἐς ἐλπίδα τοῦ περιέσεσθαι ... (Th. 1.144.1.)

*And I have many other <arguments> relevant to the hope of being successful ...*

### Partitive

... καὶ νῦν οὐδὲν οὔτ' ἀναιδείας οὔτε τοῦ ψεύδεσθαι παραλείψει.  
(D. 37.45.)

*... even now he will leave out no <aspect> of shamelessness nor of being deceitful.*

### Comparative

τὸ μὴ γενέσθαι τῷ θανεῖν ἴσον λέγω,  
τοῦ ζῆν δὲ λυπρῶς κρεῖσσόν ἐστι κατθανεῖν. (E.Tr. 636–637.)

*Not to be born I count as equal to dying,  
but dying is better than living in grief.*

### Separation

εἰ γὰρ οἴεσθε ἀποκτείνοντες ἀνθρώπους ἐπισχῆσειν τοῦ  
ὄνειδίξειν τινὰ ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐκ ὀρθῶς ζῆτε, οὐκ ὀρθῶς διανοεῖσθε.  
(Pl.Ap. 39 D.)

*For if you think that by putting people to death you will prevent anyone from  
criticising you because you do not live properly, you do not think properly.*

### Purpose

καὶ φρούριον ἐπ' αὐτοῦ ἦν καὶ νεῶν τριῶν φυλακὴ τοῦ μὴ ἐσπλεῖν  
Μεγαρεῦσι μηδ' ἐκπλεῖν μηδέν ... (Th. 2.93.4.)

*And there was a fort on it and a protective force of three ships, so that nothing  
might sail in nor sail out for the Megarians ...*

αὐτοῦ ('it') refers to the point of the island of Salamis.

This construction is usually left unexplained in Greek grammars. And to say that the Genitive articular Infinitive has been separated from any governing noun or verb does not clarify the usage. The idiom occurs first and especially in Thucydides and is often negative. As in the present example, a number of instances in Thucydides and Xenophon are close to a construction of 'preventing' with Genitive of Separation. (Cf. Lesson 29.6.8.)

καὶ πρῶτον μὲν περιεσταύρωσαν αὐτοὺς τοῖς δένδρεσιν ἃ ἔκοψαν τοῦ μηδένα ἐπεξιέναι ... (Th. 2.75.1.)

*And in the first place they [= Spartans] stockaded them [= Plataeans] with trees which they had felled*

- a. <to prevent> any one from going out against <them>... [Prevention]
- b. <so that> no one might go out against <them>... [Purpose]

οὓς δὲ μὴ δύναιντο λαμβάνειν, ἀποσοβοῦντες ἂν ἐμποδῶν γίγνοιτο τοῦ μὴ ὄραν αὐτοὺς τὸ ὅλον στράτευμά σου ... (X.Cyr. 2.4.23.)

*and those whom they could not catch, they would scare off*

- a. and get in the way of their seeing your whole contingent ... [Prevention]
- b. and get in their way, so that they might not see your whole contingent ... [Purpose]

### 3.5.4. Dative

The Dative articular Infinitive is especially used to express Cause, means or instrument.

σαφῶς γὰρ ἂν, εἰ πείθοιμι ὑμᾶς καὶ τῷ δεῖσθαι βιαζοίμην ὁμωμοκότας, θεοὺς ἂν διδάσκοιμι μὴ ἠγεῖσθαι ὑμᾶς εἶναι ... (Pl.Ap. 35 D.)

*For clearly, if I were to persuade you and by begging were to force you when you have sworn an oath, I would be teaching you not to believe that gods exist ...*

τῷ δεῖσθαι is Dative of Means.

### 3.5.5. Prepositions

οὕτω γὰρ πρὸς τὸ ἐπιέναι τοῖς ἐναντίοις εὐψυχότατοι ἂν εἶεν, πρὸς τε τὸ ἐπιχειρεῖσθαι ἀσφαλέστατοι. (Th. 2.11.5.)

*For in this way they would be most courageous with regard to assaulting their opponents, and most steadfast with regard to being attacked.*

## References

Goodwin (1889), *Syntax of the moods and tenses of the Greek verb*, §§741–750, 758–775, 788–814.

Palmer (1980), *The Greek language*, p. 314.

Smyth (1956), *Greek grammar*, §§1966–2015, 2025–2037.

## EXERCISE 3

Translate the following sentences. Give particular attention to the Aspect of the Infinitives, so far as idiomatic translation allows.

1. ἀλλὰ γὰρ οὐδὲν εἶχε σαφὲς λέγειν.

---

ἀλλὰ γάρ	<i>but really</i>
ἔχειν	<i>to be able (+ Infin.)</i>

---

2. οὐδενὶ γὰρ ἐπιμελὲς ἦν σκοπεῖν ταῦτα.

---

ἐπιμελής, -ές	<i>&lt;a matter&gt; of concern</i>
σκοπεῖν	<i>to examine</i>

---

3. καὶ ὁπόθεν ποτὲ ταύτην τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν ἔλαβες τὸ μανικὸς καλεῖσθαι, οὐκ οἶδα ἔγωγε·

---

ἐπωνυμία, -ας, ἡ	<i>name, reputation</i>
μανικός, -ή, -όν	<i>mad</i>
τὸ μανικὸς καλεῖσθαι	<i>in apposition with ταύτην τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν</i>

---

4. ὁ δὲ Χαλκιδεὺς καὶ ὁ Ἀλκιβιάδης πλέοντες ὅσοις τ' ἐπιτύχοιεν ξυνελάμβανον τοῦ μὴ ἐξάγγελτοι γενέσθαι ...

---

Χαλκιδεύς, -έως, ὁ	<i>personal proper name</i>
πλεῖν	<i>to sail</i>
τ(ε)	<i>Omit: anticipates a following καί.</i>
ἐπιτυγχάνειν	<i>to encounter (+ Dat.)</i>

- |                 |                  |
|-----------------|------------------|
| ξυλλαμβάνειν    | <i>to arrest</i> |
| ἐξάγγελτος, -ον | <i>reported</i>  |
- 
5. τῷ δὲ ἐμπειρότεροι εἶναι θρασύτεροί ἐσμεν.
- |                  |                        |
|------------------|------------------------|
| ἐμπειρος -ον     | <i>experienced</i>     |
| θρασύς, -εῖα, -ύ | <i>bold, confident</i> |
- 
6. καὶ νῦν τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ... ἐγγὺς ὄντας περιορᾶτε, καὶ ἀντὶ τοῦ ἐπελθεῖν αὐτοὶ ἀμύνεσθαι βούλεσθε μᾶλλον ἐπιόντας ...
- |                         |                                  |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| περιορᾶν                | <i>to overlook (here Indic.)</i> |
| ἀντί (+ Gen.)           | <i>instead of</i>                |
| ἐπιέναι (Aor. ἐπελθεῖν) | <i>to attack</i>                 |
| ἀμύνεσθαι (Mid.)        | <i>to ward off (+ Acc.)</i>      |
- 
7. ἀδύνατον δὲ καὶ ὑμῖν ἐστί, περὶ τοιούτου πράγματος φέρουσι τὴν ψῆφον, ἢ κατελεῆσαι ἢ καταχαρίσασθαι Ἄνδοκίδη ...
- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| δὲ καί                | <i>and indeed</i>                           |
| ἀδύνατος, -ον         | <i>impossible</i>                           |
| φέρειν                | <i>to cast (here Dat. pl. Partc.)</i>       |
| ψῆφος, -ου, ἡ         | <i>vote</i>                                 |
| κατελεεῖν             | <i>to pity (+ Acc., not expressed here)</i> |
| καταχαρίζεσθαι (Mid.) | <i>to show favour (to) (+ Dat.)</i>         |
| Ἄνδοκίδης, -ου, ὁ     | <i>Andocides</i>                            |
- 
8. ὥστε μὰ τὸν Δία οὐ ῥάδιόν ἐστιν ὑμῖν αὐτῷ οὐδὲν χαρισμένους παρὰ τὸ δίκαιον λαθεῖν τοὺς Ἕλληνας.
- |                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| ὥστε            | <i>and so (used as coordinating conjunction)</i>                              |
| μὰ τὸν Δία      | <i>by Zeus (oath formula)</i>   |
| ῥάδιος, -α, -ον | <i>easy</i>   |
| παρά (+ Acc.)   | <i>contrary to</i>  |
| λανθάνειν       | <i>to escape the notice of someone (Acc.)<br/>in doing something (Partc.)</i> |
-

9. ἤδη τεθνάναι καὶ ἀπηλλάχθαι πραγμάτων βέλτιον ἦν μοι.

---

ἀπαλλάσσειν	<i>to free, to release</i>
πρᾶγμα, -ατος, τό	<i>trouble, problem</i>
βελτίων, -ον	<i>better</i>

---

10. For you are the most appropriate [person] to be reporting your companion's discussions.

---

<i>appropriate</i>	δίκαιος, (-α,) -ον
<i>to report</i>	ἀπαγγέλλειν
<i>companion</i>	ἑταῖρος, -ου, ὁ
<i>discussion</i>	λόγος, -ου, ὁ

---

11. having expelled those [people], they did not dare to expropriate their lands ...

---

<i>to dare</i>	τολμᾶν
<i>to expropriate</i>	ἐξιδιοῦσθαι (Mid.)
<i>land</i>	χώρα, -ας, ἡ

---

This text is taken from *Intermediate Ancient Greek Language*,  
by Darryl Palmer, published 2021 by ANU Press, The Australian  
National University, Canberra, Australia.