Verbs Followed by Gerunds and Infinitives

Infinitives and gerunds\(^1\) often occur after verbs: the infinitive as a direct object, as an infinitive of purpose or as an adverbial modifier; and the gerund as a direct object. Following are some lists of the most common combinations.

**I) VERBS FREQUENTLY FOLLOWED BY INFINITIVES (WITH “TO”):**

AFFORD: My parents were poor; therefore, they could not afford to send me to college.
AGREE: We cannot agree to do that; that’s against the law.
AIM: The Government’s measures aimed to reduce\(^2\) inflation to 2%.
APPEAR: Mary appears to be tired; she must have worked a lot today.
ARRANGE: The committee has arranged to meet once a week.
ASK: John asked to attend the meeting.
ATTEMPT: In 1992, military officers attempted to overthrow the President.
BEG: They begged to go with us to the circus.
BOTHER: Don’t bother to call me; I won’t answer the telephone.
CARE: Would you care to join our Conversation Club?
CEASE: He ceased to bother me after I gave him a black eye.
CHOSE: We chose to come back because of the heavy rain.
CLAIM: Some French scientists claim to have found a cure for AIDS.
CONSENT: Mr. Taylor consented to give the inaugural speech at the art exhibit.
DARE: When we saw him raging, we didn’t dare to open our mouths.
DECIDE: Have you decided to answer the letter yet?
DESERVE: Jane does not deserve to pass the course; she seldom comes to class.
DETERMINE: The students have determined to have the picnic on Saturday.
ENDEAVOR: We have endeavored to do our best at the competition.
EXPECT: I expect to see you at the party. Don’t miss it, please!
FAIL: Do not fail to visit the art museum this summer; it has beautiful paintings!
HAVE: I have to go to school at eight; I have an exam.
HESITATE: Do not hesitate to call on me for help; I’ll come right away.
HOPE: I hope to hear from you soon; so don’t forget to call me.
INTEND: We intend to go to New York next summer; we have been told it is beautiful!
LEARN: My wife has learned to control her temper; now she’s an easy-going woman.
LONG: When I’m lonely, I long to see my family.
MANAGE: During the recession years, we managed to save as much as we could.
MEAN: Sheila meant to give me the book, but she forgot.
NEED: My students need to study harder if they want to pass this course.
NEGLECT: Some fathers neglect to maintain their children. That’s a sin!

\(^1\)Infinitives, gerunds and participles are often referred to as verbals.
\(^2\)Aim + infinitive is more common in AmE and it is considered to be informal. In formal use, and especially in BrE, aim at + gerund is more common. E.g., The Government’s measures aimed at reducing inflation to 2%.
PLAN: We plan to go to the beach this Sunday.
PREFER: I prefer to stay at home tonight than to go to the party.
PRETEND: As Matthew was accompanied by Mary, he pretended to be her boyfriend.
PROMISE: My father promised to come early tonight, but he hasn’t come yet.
PROPOSE: John proposed to start the project tomorrow.
PROVE: After the investigations, John’s hunches proved to be correct.
REFUSE: I called several times, but Mary refused to answer the telephone.
REGRET: I regret to say that our plans have failed.
REMEMBER: Please remember to buy bread on your way back home.
SEEK: By crying, children seek to draw their parents’ attention.
STRUGGLE: My family struggled to survive during the recession years; they had very little to eat.
SURE: On the day my wife and I got married, I swore to be a good husband.
THREATEN: The terrorists threatened to blow the building if their demands were not met.
TRY: I’ve tried to contact you many times, but I’ve been unlucky.
UNDETER: Since an urgent decision needed to be made, the committee undertook to contact all the members right away.
VENTURE: No one ventured to go out during the curfew; they could be arrested.
VOLUNTEER: Very few students volunteer to read aloud in class.
WANT: I couldn’t wait to see my son when he was born.
WILL: Despite our warnings, Michael willed to make that dangerous trip.
WISH: Many refugees wish to live better in the USA.
WOULD LIKE: I would like to have some orange juice. Could you make some for me?

II) VERBS FREQUENTLY FOLLOWED BY INFINITIVES OF PURPOSE

EAT: Some people eat (in order) to live; others live to eat.
GO: The Martínez went to London to learn English.
LIVE: Some people live to eat; others eat to live.
WORK: John works (in order) to maintain himself while studying at the university.

III) VERBS OF THINKING + OBJ. PRONOUN/NOUN + TO BE

BELIEVE: Paul may be crazy, but I believe him to be an honest person.
CONSIDER: John may have many defects, but I consider him to be the best candidate.
FEEL: As I saw the accident, I felt it to be my duty to call the police.

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3 Plan + inf. means to make a plan to do something; to intend to do something.
4 Propose + inf. means to intend.
5 In this case, the action of regretting occurs first; the action of saying occurs afterwards.
6 In this case, the action of remembering occurs first; the action of buying occurs afterwards.
7 Generally, try + inf. means ‘attempt, to make an effort to do something’. Informally, in this sense, try + and + simple form of the verb can be used (esp. in the imperative). E.g., Try and call me up tonight.
8 Infinitives of purpose express the intention of the speaker; they are usually a short form for in order to.
9 Feel in this case means consider, believe.
KNOW: You can trust Mary; she’s known to be an honest person.10
SUPPOSE: We are supposed to be there at three; so let’s hurry up.11
THINK: As John always talks about his family, I think him to be a good father.
UNDERSTAND: I understood his words to be a good piece of advice to me.

IV) VERBS FREQUENTLY FOLLOWED BY “HOW” + INFINITIVE (WITH “TO”):

DISCOVER: After reading the owner’s manual, I discovered how to start the car.
EXPLAIN: The instructor explained how to use the parachutes.
FIND OUT: We have to find out how to solve this problem. Let’s not dismay!
KNOW: Can you give me a hand? I don’t know how to answer this test.
LEARN: If you want to learn how to pronounce well, you need to follow my advice.
SHOW: Pay attention! I’ll show (you) how to repair this appliance as its plan indicates.
UNDERSTAND: After his explanations, I understood how to do the project.
WONDER: When I am broke, I wonder how to make money without working.

V) VERBS FREQUENTLY FOLLOWED BY GERUNDS:

ADMIT: The thief admitted stealing the money.
ANTICIPATE: John anticipated meeting his partners a week in advance.
APPRECIATE: Mary would appreciate hearing from you; so please write to her.
AVOID: After their quarrel, Mary has avoided meeting Paul.
CONSIDER: John has already considered continuing his studies.
CONTEMPLATE: My father contemplates visiting the Alps next summer.
DEFER: Please defer paying the bill until after January.
DELAY: Matthew delayed writing the letter until the last minute.
DENY: When questioned, the boy denied cheating on the exam.
DETEST: How I detest begging people for favors.
DISLIKE: Tom dislikes going to the dentist; that’s why he’s crabby.
ENJOY: After a hectic week, they enjoyed spending a day at home.
EXCUSE: Please excuse our calling you by your first name.
ESCAPE: By some miracle, George escaped being hurt in the fight.
EXPECT: I expect to be at your house before 8 o’clock.
FANCY: I don’t fancy his living with us for a long time.
FINISH: Charles had barely finished putting his room in order when the lights went out.
FORGIVE: I cannot forgive being humiliated by rich people.
GIVE UP: John gave up smoking ten years ago.
GO ON: After a short pause, the Principal went on speaking.
IMAGINE: Sean can’t imagine doing that again!
I can’t imagine John crying.
KEEP (ON) (= continue): Jenny is so homesick that she keeps (on) hoping for a letter from home.
Our boss keeps us working all day.
LEAVE: Mary left me waiting last night.

10 As can be seen, know + infinitive is very common in the passive.
11 Be supposed to + infinitive conveys the idea of duty or assumption.
12 Expect + inf. merely means a thought about the future: I think that I shall be there before 8 o’clock.
LEAVE OFF (= cease; stop): It didn’t leave off raining until midnight.

LOVE: I love dancing to all kinds of music.

MENTION: Susan mentioned seeing John in the zoo.

MIND (= dislike, object to): I do not mind working in the summer.

MISS: Due to the traffic jam, Arthur missed catching his usual bus.

PARDON: Please pardon my calling you by your first name.

PLAN: We have planned (on) going to the beach this summer.

POSTPONE: Jack postponed leaving for college because of health problems.

PROPOSE: The President proposed increasing the minimum salary to Bs. 150,000.00.

PRACTICE: Please practice pronouncing English words quickly.

PUT OFF: Jack put off leaving for college until September.

QUIT: James quit working for Mrs. Steele because she paid him very little.

RECOLLECT: I can’t recollect having seen him before.

RECOMMEND: Martha recommended seeing the show; it has new attractions.

REGRET: After I got to know her well, I regretted telling her my secrets.

RESENT: Joan resents working so hard for such a low salary.

RESIST: We couldn’t resist eating another piece of cake.

RISK: Good students don’t risk cheating during an exam.

SAVE: If we buy plenty of food now, it will save shopping again next week.

SUGGEST: I suggest having a cup of coffee before we leave.

TOLERATE: The teacher won’t tolerate cheating during an examination.

Possessive adjectives or possessive forms of nouns are often used before gerunds, especially in formal situations (some consider this use to be more literary and elegant). In informal situations (especially in spoken language), object pronouns, nouns or bare noun phrases are often used before gerunds. Examples:

APPRECIATE: I appreciate Mary’s going to the hospital with me; I didn’t want to go alone.

DETEST: How I detest her singing that song; it brings me unpleasant memories.

FORGIVE: My parents will never forgive my wasting all the family’s fortune.

IMAGINE: I can’t imagine John’s working as a bus driver after working as teacher.

LIKE: I don’t like your coming late every night. So you’d better come early tomorrow.

MIND: Do you mind their coming too? I have invited them to join us.

PREVENT: Nothing can prevent John’s talking in class; he can’t be silent for a minute.

UNDERSTAND: We really cannot understand your doing something like that. You’re a sensible person!

VI) VERBS FREQUENTLY FOLLOWED BY EITHER INFINITIVES (WITH “TO”) OR GERUNDS

ADVISE: The teacher advised studying hard.

The teacher advised us to study hard.

ALLOW: The teacher does not allow smoking in class.
The teacher does not allow us to smoke in class.

ATTEMPT: Jane attempted cheating during the exam.
Jane attempted to cheat during the exam.

BEGIN: We began studying at 8 last night.
We began to study at 8 last night.

CONTINUE: John continued being lazy despite my advice.
John continued to be lazy despite my advice.

DISLIKE: Mary dislikes dancing in the streets; it’s dangerous.
Mary dislikes to dance in the streets; it’s dangerous.

DREAD: Almost everybody dreads going to the dentist.
Almost everybody dreads to go to the dentist.

FORGET: I forgot putting gas in the car this morning.
(I put gas in the car this morning, then I forgot that I had done it.)
I forgot to put gas in the car this morning; now the tank is empty.
(I forgot that the car needed gas.)

HATE: I hate getting up early on Sundays.
I hate to get up early on Sundays.

INTEND: My parents intend leaving this afternoon.
My parents intend to leave afternoon.

LOVE: Some children love being naughty.
Some children love to be naughty.

LIKE: My wife likes going to the movies.
My wife likes to go to the movies.

NEGLECT: My uncle went bankrupt because he neglected looking after his business.
My uncle went bankrupt because he neglected to look after his business.

PLAN: My mother plans (on) having surgery in December.
My mother plans to have surgery in December.

PERMIT: Our teacher does not permit smoking in class.
Our teacher does not permit anyone to smoke in class.

PREFER: Sheila prefers dancing to drinking.
Sheila prefers to dance than to drink.

PROPOSE: Michael proposed starting at twelve so that we could finish earlier.
Michael proposed to start at twelve so that he could finish earlier.

START: The police started searching for the criminal.
The police started to search for the criminal.

REGRET: Many people regret not having studied when they were young.
Many people regret not to have studied when they were young.

REMEMBER: I can’t remember putting gas this morning.
(I cannot recall the act of putting gas this morning.)
Did you remember to pick up the clothes from the cleaner’s?
(Did you remember to do the act of picking up the clothes?)

STOP: George stopped drinking two years ago.
(George no longer drinks.)
George stopped to drink some coffee.
(George stopped what he was doing in order to drink some coffee.)

TRY: Some students tried cheating, but it did not work.

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14Propose + gerund means ‘suggest’.
Inglés IV (B-2008)
Prof. Argenis A. Zapata

Please try solving the problem by yourself. (= experiment)
Some students tried to cheat, but it did not work.

VII) VERBS FOLLOWED BY A NOUN, A NOUN PHRASE OR AN OBJECT PRONOUN PLUS AN INFINITIVE (WITH “TO”):

ADVISE: The teacher advised us to review for the examination.
ALLOW: The teacher doesn’t allow us to smoke in the classroom.
ASK: The teacher asked us to write a report on AIDS.
BEG: I begged John to take me the movies, but he refused.
CAUSE: Flowers cause some people to sneeze.
CHALLENGE: Sean challenged David to cross the river in five minutes.
COMMAND: The colonel commanded the soldiers to stand at attention.
ENABLE: His support enabled us to complete our project.
ENCOURAGE: Our teacher usually encourages us to study every day.
EXPECT: I expect all of you to pass this course with high grades.
FORBID: My mother forbade me to go out at night; she says it’s dangerous.
FORCE: The thieves forced her to hand in all her belongings.
GET: The manager got John to resign; now he is unemployed.
HATE: I’d hate my wife to know about my previous love affairs.
HELP: Stephen helped me to solve the math problems.
HIRE: I hired ten men to build my house quickly.
INSTRUCT: The secretary instructed me to complete the form before I left.
INTEND: My wife intends me to become a doctor.
INVITE: The committee invited all the members to participate in the discussions.
LIKE: I would like you to come for dinner tomorrow.
LOVE: I’d love you to go with to the dance tonight.
MEAN: I didn’t mean you to think you’re wrong.
ORDER: Because the player didn’t respect the umpire, the umpire ordered the player to leave the game.
PERMIT: I cannot permit you to do that to your children.
PERSUADE: Gladys finally persuaded her boyfriend to go to the dance with her.
PREFER: Mary prefers you to dance with her.
REMIND: Please remind me to pay the electricity bill before October 12.
REQUEST: His friends requested him to join their club.
REQUIRE: The test required us to know all about reported speech.
TEACH: My mother taught me (how) to dance pasodobles.
TELL: The teacher told us to come at seven tomorrow.
TEMPT: The offer of a good job tempted him to leave school.
URGE: The doctor urged my father to rest for a while.
WANT: I want you to go to town with me, nobody else.

15Expect + personal object pronoun + inf. may, on the one hand, express a thought about the future, but it can also mean ‘I think it is your/his/her, etc. duty to do something’ or ‘I’ll be annoyed if you don’t do something’.
16This use of hate + obj. pron/noun + inf. is used mainly in colloquial English.
17Love + obj. pron./noun + inf. is used mainly in colloquial English.
WARN: The teacher warned the students not to cheat during the exam.
WISH: I wish Martha to meet my parents when she visits my hometown.
WILL: The crowd was cheering her, willing\(^{18}\) her to win.

**VIII) VERBS FOLLOWED BY A NOUN, A NOUN PHRASE OR AN OBJECT PRONOUN PLUS AN INFINITIVE (WITHOUT “TO”)**\(^{19}\) (Verbs of causing)

BID: The doctor bade (= commanded) me hold out my tongue.
HAVE: I had (= caused) the barber cut my hair.
HELP: My mother helped me write the project.
LET: Please let (= permit) me go with you.
MAKE: The teacher made (= forced; caused) us do\(^{20}\) the exercise twice.

**IX) VERBS FOLLOWED BY A NOUN, A NOUN PHRASE OR AN OBJECT PRONOUN PLUS A PRESENT PARTICIPLE\(^{21}\) OR AN INFINITIVE (WITHOUT “TO”)** (Verbs of sense or perception)\(^{22}\)

HEAR: We heard John sing at the concert.

WE heard John singing at the concert.

FEEL: Everyone felt the weather become warm.

Everyone felt the weather becoming warm.

OBSERVE: The medical students observed the surgeon perform the operation.

The medical students observed the surgeon performing the operation.

SEE: Mary saw me break the furniture.

Mary saw me breaking the furniture.

SMELL: We smelled the fish fry.

We smelled the fish frying.

WATCH: I watched the bird make its nest.

I heard the bird making its nest.

Note: The following verbs are usually followed by present participles.

CATCH: I caught my students cheating during the exam.

FIND: My father found Paul and me shoveling the snow.

**X) EXPRESSIONS FOLLOWED BY INFINITIVES:**\(^{23}\)

\(^{18}\) Will here means ‘to try to make something happen or to make somebody or oneself do something by using one’s mental powers.’

\(^{17}\) The infinitive without “to” is also called the bare infinitive or the simple form of the verb.

\(^{20}\) In the passive, however, the infinitive is used after make “We were made to do the exercise twice.”

\(^{22}\) In some books you will find that the present participle is incorrectly referred to as the gerund.

\(^{22}\) The construction with the gerund indicates that we perceived only part of the action in progress; we did not perceive either its beginning or its end. The construction with the infinitive denotes that you perceived all the action, from beginning to end.

\(^{23}\) Some of these expressions must have the impersonal pronoun it as their subject; some require a personal pronoun (i.e., I, you, he, she, we, they) as their subject.
BE ADVISABLE: It is not advisable to invest in automobiles; you may have accidents and lose your money easily.
BE AFRAID: I am afraid to go out at night; it’s dangerous.
BE AMAZED: I am amazed to see so much poverty in Venezuela.
BE ANGRY: My father was angry to learn that I had wrecked his car.
BE ANXIOUS: John is anxious to take the math test; he thinks he may fail.
BE ASHAMED: After my lecture, my students were ashamed to have played hooky on me.
BE ASTONISHED: I was astonished to see such a terrible accident.
BE CAREFUL: You must be careful not to make the same mistakes again.
BE CONTENT: I am content to have students like you.
BE DANGEROUS: It is dangerous to go out in Caracas at night.
BE DELIGHTED: We are delighted to have you with us.
BE DETERMINED: The President was determined to curb inflation.
BE DIFFICULT: It is not difficult to learn English in Venezuela.
BE DISAPPOINTED: I am disappointed to find the work undone.
BE EAGER: My children are eager to see Disney Land.
BE EASY: Mary is easy to please; she’s not a fastidious girl.
BE FAIR: It is fair to pay the working-class higher salaries.
BE FOOLISH: It is foolish to invest in cars; you may lose your money easily.
BE FORTUNATE: We are fortunate to have friends like you.
BE GLAD: I am glad to meet you.
BE HAPPY: I am happy to be with you here.
BE HARD: It is hard to live in Caracas nowadays; it’s very dangerous!
BE HESITANT: John is hesitant to start the new project.
BE JUST: It is just to give Simón Bolívar glory and honor.
BE KIND: It is very kind of you to visit us.
BE LIKELY: It is likely to rain today; the sky is cloudy.
BE LOVELY: It is lovely to dance with you.
BE LUCKY: I was lucky to find you home; you’re seldom here.
BE MOTIVATED: My parents are highly motivated to learn Chinese; they’re visiting Peking next year.
BE NECESSARY: It is necessary to study hard in order to pass this course with a high grade.
BE PLEASED: I am pleased to meet you, young lady.
BE POSSIBLE: It is not possible to fly to Caracas from Mérida in the evening.
BE POWERLESS: The Government is powerless to stop corruption.
BE PREPARED: You must be prepared to take a test next week.
BE PROUD: I am proud to have you as my guests.
BE READY: We must be ready to survive in worse times.
BE RELUCTANT: Bobby is reluctant to have a haircut; he likes his hair long.
BE RELIEVED: I am relieved to learn that inflation has been curbed.
BE RIGHT: The teacher is right not to let the students smoke in class.
BE SHOCKED: I was shocked to see Mary in a wheelchair.
BE SILLY: It is silly to try to compete with developed countries.
BE SORRY: I am sorry to hear that you failed the test.
BE STUNNED: I was stunned to see John do those tricks.
BE STUPID: It is stupid to try to cheat during an exam.
BE SURE: John is sure to succeed in his studies; he’s an industrious person.
BE SURPRISED TO: We were surprised to see Tim at the meeting.
BE UPSET: Paul was upset to see his girlfriend dancing with me.
BE WILLING: I am willing to help you if you ask me to.
BE WRONG: It is wrong to steal money from anyone.
BE TOO + ADJ/ADV.: He is too young to marry that woman.
   John works too slowly to be much use to me.
BE + ADJ./ADV. + ENOUGH: Peter is old enough to travel alone.
ENOUGH + NOUN: Peter earns enough money to live in a palace.
BE ABOUT: The show is about to start. Please hurry up!
ONLY: He hurried to the home only to find that it was empty.
BE FIRST, SECOND, LAST, ETC.: John loves parties so much that he was the first (one/person) to come and the last to go.
BE GOOD/KIND, ETC. OF YOU/HIM/HER + INFINITIVE: It was kind of you to visit me at the hospital.
BE + ADJ25. + NOUN + INFINITIVE: It was a stupid idea to come here at this time.
THERE IS NOTHING TO DO about corruption; it seems to be part of us.

XI) EXPRESSIONS FOLLOWED BY GERUNDS

IT’S NO USE CRYING over spilt milk.
BE/BECOME/GET USED/ACCUSTOMED TO: I’m used to getting up early; so it won’t bother me to get up at 4 a.m.
BE GIVEN TO: She is given to making wild accusations.
BE WORTH: That movie is worth seeing; it is about women’s role in society.
CANNOT HELP (= prevent/avoid): My wife can’t help crying when she says goodbye to her mother.
CANNOT RESIST: The cake was so good that I couldn’t resist eating two pieces.
CANNOT STAND (= endure): I cannot stand seeing a person suffer.
DEVOTE ONESELF TO: Mother Teresa devoted herself to caring for the poor.
DEVOTE SOMETHING TO: I’m devoting all my efforts to being a good student.
LOOK FORWARD TO: I’m looking forward to visiting the US next year.
OBJECT TO: Do you object to my using your car tonight?
TAKE TO:26 Peter took to ringing us up in the middle of the night.

XII) VERBS AND EXPRESSIONS FOLLOWED BY THE SIMPLE FORM OF THE VERB:

DO/DOES/DID (esp. in negative and interrogative sentences): I don’t need money now
CAN/COULD, MAY/MIGHT, WILL/WOULD, MUST, SHALL/SHOULD (Modals): I can speak Spanish well, but I’d like to write it well, too.

24Be about + infinitive expresses immediate future.
25Adjectives that can be used here are amazing, astonishing, crazy, extraordinary, funny (= odd), mad, odd, powerless, queer, ridiculous, rude, strange.
26Take to means ‘to adopt as a habit, custom or course (= activity).
HAD BETTER, WOULD RATHER: I’d better hurry, or I’ll miss the train.
   I’d rather not go out at night; I’ll wait till tomorrow.

LET: Let me help you; you mustn’t push the car alone.

NEED:27 You needn’t wake up early on Sunday; we’ve already done all the work.

DARE: I dare not wake John up now; he’ll get furious.

NOTES:

1. Notice that the sentences that contain verbs followed by infinitives can be negated in two different ways. For example, the negative forms of I want you to go are:
   a) I do not want you to go. (Here ‘not’ negates the entire predicate.)
   b) I want you not to go. (Here ‘not’ negates only ‘to go’.)

2. Short answers to questions that contain verbs followed by infinitives can be made in two different ways, as indicated below.
   Q: Do you want to go to work here?
   A: Yes, I do. or Yes, I want to.

   Notice that the second form ends in to and it is an elliptical form for ‘Yes, I want to work here.’ Another example of an ellipsis is: John doesn’t study medicine, but he wants to.

3. In general, after prepositions we use the gerund: PREP. + GERUND
   E.g., I am tired of working at night. John is thinking of building a house next year.

4. After the verbs COME and GO we often use AND + SIMPLE FORM of the verb, in the imperative.
   E.g., Go and help John. Come and help me carry this desk.

   But if come and go are followed by the verb see, the infinitive is usually used. E.g.,
   Come to see me on Tuesday. Go to see the doctor; you have a terrible cough.

5. BE + INFINITIVE is used to:
   a) Convey impersonal orders or instructions (usually in the third person), as in:
      No one is to leave this building without permission of the police. (= No one must leave.)
   b) Convey a plan, as in:
      Mary is to be married next month.
   c) To express remote future, usually a future-in-the-past. In this case be + inf. means something like
      ‘to be destined to’. E.g.,
      He received a blow on the head. It didn’t worry him at the time, but it was to be very troublesome later. (= it turned out to be or it proved to be troublesome.)

REFERENCES:


27If dare and need are preceded by the auxiliaries do/will/would, they’re followed by the infinitive with ‘to’.


