

76 Infinitive clauses

And Then There Were None was the first book by Agatha Christie **to sell** more than 100 million copies. It is one of the few books **not to feature** her famous characters Hercule Poirot or Miss Marple.



1 Infinitive clauses (infinitive + to)

We often use infinitive clauses after the verb *be*:

*As a child, my ambition was **to study medicine**. My ambition is **to become a vet**.*

There are active and passive forms of the infinitive:

	ACTIVE INFINITIVE	PASSIVE INFINITIVE
simple*	The most important thing is to tell the truth.	I hate to be told lies.

* There is a perfect form *to have told* and a continuous form *to be telling* (► Unit 65.2).

To make the negative form we put *not* in front of the infinitive:

*It is one of the few books **not to feature** her famous characters Hercule Poirot or Miss Marple.*

*President Solano was the only head of state **not to be invited** to the conference.*

! We don't usually include a subject in an infinitive clause:

~~*X It is important you to tell the truth.*~~ ✓ *It is important **to tell the truth**.*

But if the subject of the infinitive clause is different from the subject of the sentence, we can use *for* + subject + infinitive with *to*:

*I think it's important **for politicians to tell the truth**. My aim is **for my children to be happy**.*

NATURAL ENGLISH There are some well-known expressions with infinitive clauses that we use to make a comment about something we are saying:

*I really don't like him, **to be honest**. **To tell the truth**, the show was disappointing.*

Infinitives which follow certain verbs, e.g. *I refuse to leave* ► Unit 65

2 Infinitives after superlatives, adjectives, etc.

We often use infinitive clauses to replace relative clauses after a superlative, after *the first*, *the second*, etc. or after *one*, *next*, *last*, *few* and *only*:

It was the first book by Agatha Christie which sold more than 100 million copies.

→ *It was **the first book by Agatha Christie to sell** more than 100 million copies.*

We also use infinitives after adjectives which describe people's feelings and opinions:

*We're **delighted to be here**. I'm **happy for them to join** the class.*

3 Infinitive of purpose

We can use an infinitive clause to describe the purpose or reason for an action:

*Carlos went to college **to study law**. I took a pill **to get rid of my headache**.*

! We don't use *for* + infinitive of purpose:

~~*X He went to the corner for to get a taxi.*~~ ✓ *He went to the corner **to get a taxi**.*

FORMALITY CHECK In more formal English we can also use *in order to* or *so as to*:

*We moved to Brighton **in order to be** nearer our grandchildren.*

*Please move to the front **so as to allow** more room for the late arrivals.*

We can put the infinitive clause before the main clause for instructions:

***To make a call**, press the green button. **To inflate the life jacket**, pull on the red cord.*