Worksheet 1: The Infinitive in Grammatical Theory

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: What Is "to", and What Is an Infinitive?

The infinitive raises deep questions. Is *to* part of the verb, a separate particle, or a defective auxiliary? Is the "bare infinitive" the same form as the base? Grammarians disagree.

Question	The evidence	Consequence
Is *to* a preposition?	Historically yes; synchronically it takes a verb, not a noun — unlike any preposition	Most modern analyses treat it as an infinitive marker / non-finite subordinator
Is *to* a "pro-form" host?	Ellipsis: "I didn't want to (go)." *To* stands alone, stranding the verb	Evidence that *to* is syntactically independent of the verb
Base form = bare infinitive?	Identical in shape (*go, see*) but appear in different slots (imperatives, after modals, subjunctive)	Huddleston & Pullum: one "plain form" with multiple functions
Is the infinitive tenseless?	No tense, but has aspect (perfect/ continuous) and voice (passive)	Non-finite: no tense or agreement, but retains other verbal categories

The stranding test (key evidence): *to* can be stranded by ellipsis — "You can leave if you want **to**." The verb disappears; *to* remains, standing in for the whole infinitival VP. No genuine prefix or inflection behaves this way — strong evidence that *to* is a separate functional element, not part of the verb word.

Part A – Evidence Evaluation

> **For each piece of data, state what it shows about the status of *to* or the infinitive, and which theoretical claim it supports or undermines.**

1. "I'd love to, but I can't."

2. "To be, or not to be…" — *to* is repeated for the second, negated infinitive.

3. "She helped (to) organise it." — *to* is optional after *help*.

4. "He made her leave" vs "She was made to leave." — *to* appears only in the passive.

Part B – The Plain Form Across Functions

> **The "plain form" of a verb appears in several environments. Identify the function in each and state whether it is (or is not) an infinitive.**

1. "Be quiet!"

2. "I insist that he be present."

3. "She may be late."

4. "To be honest, I disagree."

Score: _____ / 20

Worksheet 2: Infinitives in Discourse & Information Structure

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: What Infinitive Clauses Do Beyond the Sentence

Function	Mechanism	Example
Purposive framing	An initial *to*-infinitive frames the following clause as the means to a stated end	*To understand the crisis, we must look back a decade.*
Topic-launching (fronted)	A fronted infinitive subject presents an action as the topic for evaluation	*To legislate in haste is to repent at leisure.*
Stance / evaluation	Comment infinitives set the speaker's frame	*To be fair, the data are incomplete. Needless to say, …*
Rheme-packaging	End-focus infinitive presents the point as new information	*What matters now is to act.*
Encapsulating purpose in a nominal	noun + infinitive compresses a proposition	*the decision to intervene; a reluctance to commit*

The balanced *to be … is to …* pattern (equative infinitives) is a high-register rhetorical device: *To govern is to choose. To teach is to touch a life.* Both slots are infinitival subjects/complements around *be*, producing aphoristic symmetry. It is a signature of oratory and the sententious essay.

Part A – Identify the Discourse Function

> **For each underlined infinitive structure, name its discourse function and explain its contribution.**

1. "To appreciate what was lost, one must first understand what was there."

2. "The government's failure to consult proved costly."

3. "To hesitate now would be to concede defeat."

4. "Suffice it to say, the meeting did not go well."

Part B – Construct the Equative Pattern

Complete each aphorism using the *to … is to …* equative infinitive pattern, then write one of your own on a topic of your choice.

1. To lead is

2. To forgive is

3. (your own)

Part C – Cohesion Repair

Rewrite this disjointed passage into flowing prose, using at least three infinitive discourse devices (purposive framing, noun + infinitive, rheme-packaging, or the equative pattern).

Reform is necessary. But reform is also risky. We want to understand the risks. So we must examine past attempts. Past attempts often failed. They failed because they moved too fast. The real goal is different. The real goal is to build consensus first.

Score: _____ / 25

Worksheet 3: Stylistic & Rhetorical Control

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: The Infinitive as a Stylistic Instrument

Technique	Effect	Risk
Infinitive parallelism	Series of infinitives builds momentum: *to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield*	Monotony if overextended; loss of focus
Anaphoric *to*-ellipsis	Stranded *to* avoids repetition, tightens prose: "*I never meant to, but I did*."	Obscurity if the antecedent VP is distant
The delayed/suspended infinitive	Withholding the infinitive complement builds anticipation	Reader strain if overdone
Bathetic infinitive of result	*only to* for anticlimax or irony	Cheapens if used mechanically
Register modulation via *be to*	Shifts into official/prophetic register: "*You are to say nothing*."	Sounds pompous out of context

Part A – Identify and Evaluate the Technique

> **Name the stylistic technique in each and assess whether it succeeds.**

1. "They came to conquer, to plunder, to rule — and, in time, to be forgotten."

2. "You may go if you wish to."

3. "He crossed three borders, forged two passports and bribed a dozen officials, only to be arrested at his own front door."

Part B – Controlled Imitation

> **Write single sentences to specification.**

1. A sentence using infinitive parallelism (at least three infinitives) to build rhetorical momentum.

2. A sentence exploiting stranded *to*-ellipsis to avoid repeating a verb phrase.

3. A sentence using *only to* for genuine anticlimax or irony.

Part C – Register Boundaries

> **Judge whether the infinitive structure suits the genre named; justify.**

#	Sentence + genre	Verdict + reason
1	"Candidates are to submit their portfolios by 5 p.m." *(exam rubric)*	
2	"To be perfectly honest with you, mate, I'd give it a miss." *(academic abstract)*	
3	"To err is human; to forgive, divine." *(condolence card)*	
4	"We aim to, wherever possible, exceed expectations." *(mission statement)*	

Score: _____ / 30

Worksheet 4: Scholarly Analysis and Extended Writing

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Part A – Scholarly Text Analysis

To call the infinitive "tenseless" is accurate but incomplete. Tenseless it may be, yet it is not featureless: to have gone is not to be going, and neither is to be gone. The form that appears, on the surface, to do nothing turns out, on inspection, to encode aspect, voice, and — through its very silences — a subtle deixis of time relative to the matrix verb. Consider the reporting frame. To be said to know is to be credited with present knowledge; to be said to have known is to be placed in a completed past. The infinitive, having no tense of its own, borrows temporal orientation from its clause, only to repay the loan with interest: what it lacks in tense it recovers in relational precision. To dismiss it as a mere citation form, then — the shape a verb takes in the dictionary — is to mistake a versatile instrument for an inert label.

Questions

1. The passage is saturated with infinitives performing different functions. Catalogue at least eight, classifying each (fronted subject, equative complement, reporting-passive infinitive, perfect infinitive, *only to* result, etc.).

2. "To have gone is not to be going, and neither is to be gone" — analyse the three infinitive forms and explain how their contrast demonstrates the writer's claim.

3. "only to repay the loan with interest" — the writer uses an *only to* construction non-bathetically. How does the metaphor repurpose a normally ironic structure?

4. The passage both describes and enacts the equative *to … is to …* pattern repeatedly. Identify two instances and explain how form mirrors argument.

5. "To dismiss it… is to mistake a versatile instrument for an inert label" — analyse the closing sentence's structure and explain why the writer chose the equative infinitive frame to conclude.

Part B – Extended Scholarly Writing

Write the opening **two paragraphs** (**230–270 words**) of a scholarly essay on one of the following:

A: "*The infinitive is a tenseless form that nonetheless expresses temporal relations. Discuss.*"
B: "*To standardise a language is to freeze what is inherently in motion. Discuss with reference to prescriptivism.*"

Requirements: (1) a fronted infinitive subject launching the essay's topic; (2) an equative *to … is to …* construction serving the argument; (3) a reporting-passive infinitive with correct aspect; (4) a noun + infinitive encapsulating a proposition; (5) an *only to* or comment-infinitive disjunct used with precision; (6) at least one defensible split infinitive or stranded *to*, deployed knowingly.

Topic: ___ A ___ B Word count: _____ Features: _____ / 6

Score: _____ / 35

Answer Key & Teacher Notes

For teacher use only — C2 Level, Infinitives

Worksheet 1 – Part A

#	Analysis
1	**Stranded *to* under ellipsis (VP "love [to do it]" elided). Shows *to* is syntactically detachable from the verb — supports the "infinitive marker as independent functional head" analysis, undermines the "to is a prefix" view.**
2	**The repetition of *to* for the coordinated negated infinitive shows *to* scopes over each infinitive VP separately; it behaves like a subordinator, not part of the verb stem.**
3	**Optionality of *to* after *help* shows *to* is not obligatorily fused to the verb — its presence is licensed by the higher structure, not the verb word itself.**
4	**The active/passive alternation (make her leave / be made to leave) shows *to*-insertion is governed by voice and the higher predicate, not by the infinitive verb — evidence that *to* is structurally conditioned.**

Worksheet 1 – Part B

1 Imperative — plain form, not an infinitive (no *to*, independent clause). **2** Mandative subjunctive — plain form after *insist that*; not an infinitive. **3** Bare infinitive after modal *may*. **4** *to*-infinitive (comment disjunct "to be honest").

> *The pedagogical payoff: the identical shape be appears as imperative, subjunctive, bare infinitive, and to-infinitive. Huddleston & Pullum unify these as the "plain form"; older grammars scatter them. Advanced learners appreciate seeing that one shape ≠ one function.*

Worksheet 2 – Part A

1 Purposive framing — the initial infinitive states the goal that the main clause serves. **2** Noun + infinitive encapsulation — "failure to consult" compresses a whole proposition into a subject NP. **3** Topic-launching fronted subject + equative complement — "To hesitate… would be to concede", staging the action for evaluation. **4** Comment/stance infinitive — "Suffice it to say" is a fossilised evaluative frame (note the subjunctive *suffice*).

Worksheet 2 – Part B (sample answers)

Accept any well-formed equatives: "To lead is to serve." / "To forgive is to release oneself." Reward symmetry, register, and semantic point over cleverness.

Worksheet 2 – Part C (model)

> *Model: "To understand the risks of reform — necessary yet perilous — we must examine why past attempts failed. The pattern is clear: haste. The real goal, then, is not merely to legislate but to build consensus first." Accept any version deploying three infinitive discourse devices coherently.*

Worksheet 3 – Part A

1 Infinitive parallelism with a bathetic final turn ("to be forgotten" undercuts the triad of conquest). Succeeds — the structure sets up grandeur, then deflates it. **2** Stranded *to*-ellipsis ("wish to [go]"). Succeeds — tightens, avoids repetition. **3** *only to* anticlimax after a tricolon of elaborate action; the irony of arrest "at his own front door" lands hard. Succeeds.

Worksheet 3 – Part C

1 Suits — *be to* for official instructions is exactly right for a rubric. **2** Does not suit — "honest with you, mate" is conversational; jarring in an academic abstract. **3** Borderline/suits — the Pope aphorism ("To err is human…") is apt for consolation, though clichéd; acceptable if sincere. **4** Does not suit well — the split ("to, wherever possible, exceed") is clumsy in a mission statement where polish matters; the interruption after stranded-feeling *to* is awkward. Rewrite: "to exceed expectations wherever possible."

Worksheet 4 – Part A

#	Infinitive / function
1	**To call the infinitive "tenseless" — fronted infinitive subject**
2	**to have gone / to be going / to be gone — perfect, continuous, and passive(-form) infinitives in contrast**
3	**to do nothing — infinitive complement of "appears" (raising)**
4	**to encode aspect, voice… — infinitive complement of "turns out" (raising)**
5	**To be said to know / to have known — reporting-passive infinitives (simple vs perfect), each in an equative frame**
6	**only to repay the loan — only to infinitive of result (non-bathetic)**
7	**To dismiss it… is to mistake — closing equative (fronted subject + equative complement)**
8	**having no tense of its own — perfect participle (bonus: not an infinitive, tests discrimination)**

Q2: Perfect (*to have gone*, completed/anterior), continuous (*to be going*, in progress), and passive-shaped stative (*to be gone*, resultant state). The three differ in aspect/voice though all are "tenseless" — proving that tenselessness ≠ featurelessness, the writer's thesis.
Q3: Normally *only to* marks an unwelcome reversal; here the "reversal" is positive — the infinitive, having borrowed tense, "repays with interest", i.e. gains relational precision. The financial metaphor converts the usual disappointment into a surplus, wittily inverting the construction's default valence.
Q4: E.g. "To be said to know is to be credited with present knowledge" and the closing "To dismiss it… is to mistake…". The balanced two-infinitive frame enacts the equivalence the writer asserts — form performs meaning; the symmetry claims that the two sides are the same act viewed twice.
Q5: Fronted infinitive subject ("To dismiss it… as a mere citation form") + equative complement ("is to mistake a versatile instrument for an inert label"). The equative frame delivers the thesis as an identity claim — dismissal *equals* error — with aphoristic finality suited to a conclusion.

Worksheet 4 – Part B: Marking Rubric

Criterion	Descriptor at C2	Marks
Fronted infinitive topic	Launches the essay; rhetorical weight earned	0–5
Equative pattern	*to … is to …* serves the argument, not decoration	0–5
Reporting-passive infinitive	Aspect correct; anteriority or simultaneity precise	0–5
Noun + infinitive	Encapsulates a proposition economically	0–5
Disjunct / only to	Comment infinitive or result infinitive used with control	0–5
Knowing split / stranded to	Deployed deliberately; defensible on clarity/rhythm	0–5

> *The C2 benchmark: infinitive structures should be load-bearing — framing topics, compressing propositions, building aphorisms, modulating register — not ornamental. A script hitting all six requirements mechanically should score below one where the constructions feel inevitable to the argument. Reward the student who, like the Part A author, makes the grammar enact the point.*