

Infinitive: An infinitive is the pure form of the verb, without tense, such as *to swim*, *to think*, or *to read*. In other words, it is the *to* form. The infinitive is never a verb in a sentence; you cannot say *I to leave on Wednesday*, so when you see an infinitive in a sentence, you know at once that it is not the verb. It is a verb form, yes, but it is doing something else. In fact, infinitives act as nouns or modifiers (adjectives or adverbs). Also, we regard the infinitive, such as *to swim*, as one word, not two. Notice that a verbal infinitive is different from a prepositional phrase such as *to Boston*, which is two words. Let us take the infinitive *to eat* and add a word to make it a phrase: *to eat pasta*; now let us look at this infinitive phrase to see some of the things it can do in a sentence:

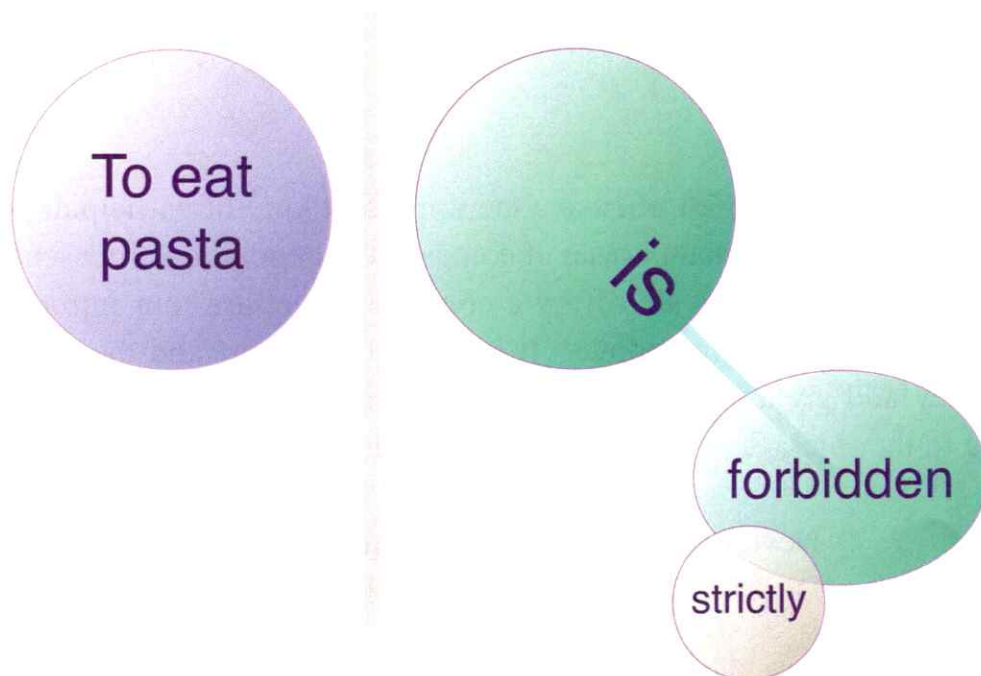
As a noun/subject: *To eat pasta is one of life's great delights.*

As a noun/direct object: *I love to eat pasta.*

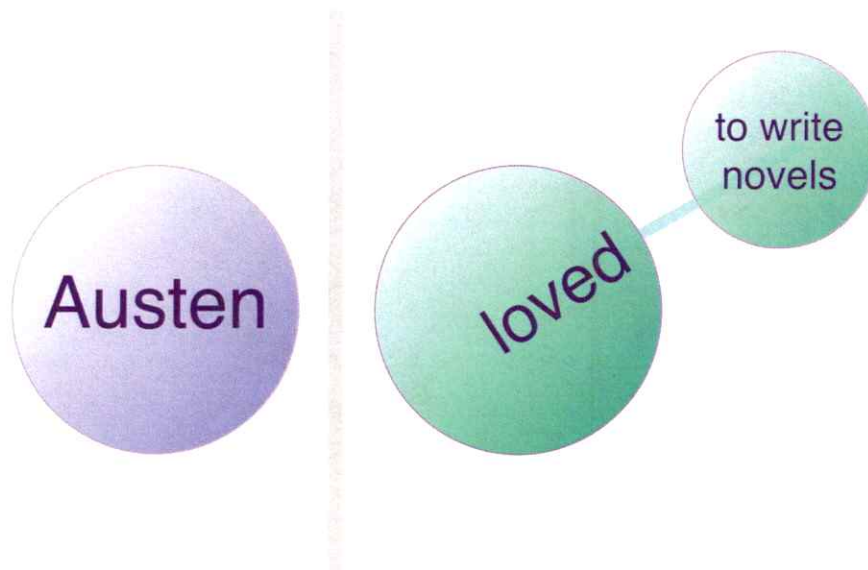
As an adjective: *The way to eat pasta is with a spoon.*

As an adverb: *He lived to eat pasta.*

An infinitive phrase as a noun and the subject of the sentence: *To eat pasta is strictly forbidden.* In the phrase *To eat pasta*, the noun *pasta* is the object of the infinitive *to eat*:



An infinitive phrase as a noun and direct object: *Austen loved to write novels.* In this sentence, the infinitive phrase *to write novels* acts as a noun and direct object, receiving the action of the verb. To write novels is what she loved.



An infinitive phrase as an adverb: *Austen lived to write novels.* In this sentence *lived* is the verb, and *to write novels* is the infinitive phrase acting as an adverb, with *novels* being the object of the infinitive *to write*. Notice that *novels* is not also a direct object; the object of a verbal cannot also be a direct object.

