

# Infinitive vs. Gerund in Spanish

*(El Infinitivo vs. El Gerundio)*

In Spanish, both the **infinitive** (*hablar, comer, vivir*) and the **gerund** (*hablando, comiendo, viviendo*) are non-conjugated verb forms, but they serve **different grammatical purposes**. While English often uses an “-ing” form for many situations, Spanish clearly separates when to use the infinitive and when to use the gerund. Understanding the distinction helps students choose the correct structure for actions, descriptions, and verb phrases.

*(El Infinitivo vs. El Gerundio)*

Both the **infinitive** (*hablar, comer, vivir*) and the **gerund** (*hablando, comiendo, viviendo*) are **non-conjugated verb forms**, but they are used in **different grammatical situations**.

English often uses “-ing” for both, but Spanish separates them clearly.

## 1) The Infinitive (El Infinitivo)

### A. What It Is

The **infinitive** is the **base form of a verb**, the one you find in the dictionary:

**hablar** (to speak), **comer** (to eat), **vivir** (to live)

It usually means “**to + verb**” in English or can act like a **noun** in a sentence.

### B. How It's Used

#### Function

#### Explanation

#### Example

##### 1. After prepositions

In Spanish, use the infinitive (not a [conjugated verb](#)) after any preposition.

*Después de **comer**, voy al cine.*  
→ After eating, I go to the movies. *Antes de **salir**, cierra la puerta.* → Before leaving, close the door.

<b>2. As the subject of a sentence</b>	The infinitive can act as a noun (the subject).	<i>Fumar <b>es</b> malo para la salud.</i> → Smoking is bad for your health. <i>Viajar <b>es</b> divertido.</i> → Traveling is fun.
<b>3. After another conjugated verb</b>	Used when two verbs appear together (second stays in infinitive form).	<i>Quiero <b>estudiar</b> español.</i> → I want to study Spanish. <i>Necesitamos <b>salir</b> pronto.</i> → We need to leave soon.
<b>4. After impersonal expressions</b>	Often follows <i>hay que, es bueno, es importante, etc.</i>	<i>Es necesario <b>dormir</b> más.</i> → It's necessary to sleep more. <i>Hay que <b>practicar</b> mucho.</i> → One must practice a lot.
<b>5. After verbs of perception / motion</b>	Common verbs like <i>ver, oír, sentir, ir, venir, entrar, salir</i> are followed by the infinitive.	<i>Lo vi <b>entrar</b>.</i> → I saw him enter. <i>Salió <b>correr</b>.</i> → He went out to run.
<b>6. As an object of prepositional phrases</b>	Same as English gerunds ("after doing," "by eating"), but use infinitive.	<i>Al <b>salir</b>, cerró la puerta.</i> → Upon leaving, he closed the door. <i>Sin <b>decir</b> nada, se fue.</i> → Without saying anything, he left.

**Tip:** Whenever there's a preposition before a verb (*de, a, en, por, sin, para, con, al*, etc.), use the **infinitive!**

## C. Common Expressions with the Infinitive

<b>Expression</b>	<b>Example</b>
tener que + infinitive	<i>Tengo que estudiar.</i> → I have to study.
deber + infinitive	<i>Debes comer bien.</i> → You should eat well.
poder + infinitive	<i>Puedo ayudar.</i> → I can help.
ir a + infinitive	<i>Voy a trabajar.</i> → I'm going to work.
acabar de + infinitive	<i>Acabo de llegar.</i> → I just arrived.
volver a + infinitive	<i>Volvimos a intentar.</i> → We tried again.

## 2) The Gerund (El Gerundio)

## A. What It Is

The **gerund** expresses an **action in progress or describes how something is done** — similar to “-ing” when it means *doing something right now*.

Infinitive	Gerund	English
hablar	hablando	speaking
comer	comiendo	eating
vivir	viviendo	living
leer	leyendo	reading
decir	diciendo	saying
dormir	durmiendo	sleeping

## B. How It's Used

Function	Explanation	Example
<b>1. With <i>estar</i> to form the <b>Present Progressive</b></b>	Shows an action happening <i>right now</i> .	<i>Estoy <b>estudiando</b>.</i> → I'm studying. <i>Ellos están <b>trabajando</b>.</i> → They are working.
<b>2. With <i>seguir</i> / <i>continuar</i> / <i>andar</i></b>	Shows continuation of an action.	<i>Sigo <b>leyendo</b> el libro.</i> → I keep reading the book. <i>Andan <b>buscando</b> trabajo.</i> → They're going around looking for work.
<b>3. To describe how an action is done (manner)</b>	Explains <i>how</i> or <i>by doing what</i> .	<i>Entró <b>gritando</b>.</i> → He entered shouting. <i>Aprendió español <b>viviendo</b> en México.</i> → He <a href="#">learned Spanish</a> by living in Mexico.
<b>4. To indicate simultaneous actions</b>	Two actions happening at once.	<i>Caminaba <b>escuchando</b> música.</i> → She walked while listening to music.

## C. Never Use the Gerund:

Spanish **does not** use the gerund when English uses “-ing” as a noun or after a preposition. Use the **infinitive** instead.

**English / Wrong Spanish**

**Correct Spanish**

<i>Estoy interesado en <b>aprendiendo</b> español.</i>	<i>Estoy interesado en <b>aprender</b> español.</i>
<i>Después de <b>comiendo</b>, salgo.</i>	<i>Después de <b>comer</b>, salgo.</i>
<i>El <b>fumar</b> es malo. (Correct)</i>	<i>El <b>fumando</b> es malo. (Incorrect)</i>

The **gerund** cannot be the **subject** or [object of a sentence in](#) Spanish — only the **infinitive** can.

### 3) Formation of the Gerund

#### Verb Type Ending Example

-ar verbs	-ando	<i>hablar → hablando</i>
-er verbs	-iendo	<i>comer → comiendo</i>
-ir verbs	-iendo	<i>vivir → viviendo</i>

#### Irregular Gerunds

Infinitive	Gerund	English
decir	diciendo	saying
pedir	pidiendo	asking
servir	sirviendo	serving
dormir	durmiendo	sleeping
morir	muriendo	dying
leer	leyendo	reading
traer	trayendo	bringing
ir	yendo	going
venir	viniendo	coming
poder	pudiendo	being able to

### 4) Comparison: Infinitive vs. Gerund

Use	Infinitive	Gerund
As subject	<i>Fumar es peligroso.</i>	<i>Fumando es peligroso.</i>
After preposition	<i>Antes de salir.</i>	<i>Antes de saliendo.</i>

After conjugated verb (quiere, debe, puede...)	<i>Quiero comer.</i>	<i>Quiero comiendo.</i>
With <i>estar</i> (action in progress)	<i>Estoy estudiar.</i>	<i>Estoy estudiando.</i>
To express "by doing"	<i>Por hacer eso.</i>	<i>Hizo dinero trabajando.</i>
To describe simultaneous actions	<i>Camina escuchar música.</i>	<i>Camina escuchando música.</i>

## 5) Practice: Choose Infinitive or Gerund

1. Estoy \_\_\_\_\_ (leer) un libro interesante.
2. Quiero \_\_\_\_\_ (viajar) a España.
3. Aprendió español \_\_\_\_\_ (vivir) en México.
4. Después de \_\_\_\_\_ (comer), salimos.
5. Ella sigue \_\_\_\_\_ (buscar) trabajo.

### Answers:

1. leyendo
2. viajar
3. viviendo
4. comer
5. buscando

## 6) Practice: Translate

1. I'm studying right now.
2. After eating, we go to the park.
3. I want to [learn Spanish](#).
4. He learned by listening.
5. Working is important.

### Answers:

1. Estoy estudiando ahora mismo.
2. Después de comer, vamos al parque.
3. Quiero aprender español.
4. Aprendió escuchando.
5. Trabajar es importante.

## 7) Quick Summary Chart

### Infinitive

Dictionary form (-ar, -er, -ir)

Used after prepositions

Can be subject or object

Expresses purpose (“to...”)

Examples: *Antes de salir, Quiero comer*

### Gerund

-ando / -iendo form

Used after *estar, seguir*, etc.

Can't be subject or object

Expresses ongoing action (“doing...”)

Examples: *Estoy comiendo, Sigue hablando*

## Why It Matters

Understanding when to use the **infinitive** vs. **gerund** helps learners:

- Avoid direct English translation errors
- Express **actions in progress** vs. **general actions or goals** correctly
- Sound natural when using **progressive tenses, prepositional phrases, and verb combinations**
- Achieve **true fluency** and grammatical precision

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