

What is complementation? – A three-part explanation

A complement is a part of a sentence that completes the *meaning* of the verb. There are three main kinds of complements: *infinitive* complements, *that-clause* complements, and *gerund* complements. For example:

Subject + Verb	Complement	Type of Complement
The students expect	to graduate.	Infinitive
Their teachers hope	that they will.	That-clause
Their parents worry about	paying for college.	Gerund

Why is complementation such a nightmare for learners and teachers of English?

Predicting the kind of complement to use in a sentence is very difficult. Students often seek a “rule” to understand how complementation works, but “rule” is the wrong paradigm for understanding complementation. The good news is that students can learn which verbs trigger each kind of complementation. Fortunately, the complement that a verb triggers can be predicted (usually) based on the meaning of the verb. In other words, verbs that share similar functions likely require the same kind of complement.

This three-part handout is a detailed look at these three different kinds of complements and the conditions that create a need for them.

Part A: Infinitive Complementation

Verbs that trigger infinitive complements can be divided into **four** categories:

Intention-type Verbs

Verbs that allow people to express wishes, hopes, wants, and expectations usually trigger infinitive complements.

Subject	Verb	Infinitive Complement
I	intend	to return to Mongolia one day.
My mother	expects	to retire next year.

Notice that these verbs express actions that the subject intends to take. Many of these verbs describe potential future actions. Other verbs in this category include: *plan, mean, aspire, aim, propose, wish, resolve, long, promise, vow*.

Attempt-type Verbs

This class of verbs has much in common with *Intention*-type verbs. However, these verbs can express not only intention but the degree of success achieved by the agent (*do*-er of the verb). Many of these verbs (¹) can also trigger gerunds (see **Part C**).

Subject	Verb	Infinitive Complement
<i>She</i>	began ¹	to study <i>Russian</i> .
<i>They</i>	attempted	to rob <i>the bank</i> .
<i>He</i>	forgot ¹	to turn-in <i>the paper</i> .
<i>Jack</i>	remembered ¹	to call <i>his mother</i> .
<i>The birds</i>	continue ¹	to nest <i>in the same place</i> .

Other verbs in this class include: *try*¹, *start*¹, *decide*, *fail*, *manage*, *offer*, *proceed*.

Advise-type Verbs

This class of infinitive complementation is triggered by verbs that imply persuasion, manipulation, and direction of others. Notice that these verbs require another noun in the object position:

Subject	Verb	Object	Infinitive Complement
	caused		
	persuaded		
<i>We</i>	convinced	<i>my father</i>	to try <i>Vietnamese food</i> .
	forced		
	encouraged		

Other verbs in this category include: *coax*, *induce*, *advise*, *tell*.

Belief-type Verbs

Typically, these verbs trigger *that*-complements (see **Part B**). However, *belief*-type verbs can trigger infinitive complementation when a sentence includes these parts: [subject + verb + object + infinitive complement + adjective]

Subject	Verb	Object	Infinitive Complement
	believe		
	assume		to eat <i>poorly</i> .
<i>Many of the elderly</i>	suppose	<i>the children of today</i>	to be <i>undisciplined</i> .
	think		to lack <i>ambition</i> .
	regard		

This use of the infinitive complement sounds quite formal, and is unlikely to be used in casual conversation.

Part B: That-clause Complementation

Essentially, there are six categories of verbs that trigger *that-clause complements*.

Request-type Verbs

These verbs are for making requests, suggestions, or commands. Notice that the final verb after the *that-clause complement* is NOT inflected.*

Subject	Verb	That-Clause Complement
	suggested	
<i>The manager</i>	requested	that <i>he leave</i> * <i>immediately.</i>
	demanded	

Factive Verbs

Though many factive verbs trigger gerunds (see **Part C**), here only verbs that trigger *that-complements* are presented:

Subject	Verb	That-Clause Complement
	resented	
	bemoaned	
<i>The researchers</i>	conceded	[the fact] that <i>the experiment was flawed.</i>
	admitted	
	acknowledged	

Notice that with each one of these verbs, the phrase [the fact] fits before the *that-complement*. This phrase, though optional, does indicate that these verbs show people reacting to true information--or at least the truth as they see it.

Other verbs in this category include: *regret, deplore, establish, demonstrate, accept.*

Emotive Verbs

This class of verbs is employed to express emotion. Like *belief*-type verbs, they are rare in the progressive tense. Though emotive verbs trigger gerundial complements when emotion/preference is expressed about an *activity* (see **Part C**), emotive verbs trigger *that-complements* when feelings about a *fact* are expressed. To determine if a *that-complement* is appropriate, insert the phrase *the fact* after the verb:

Subject	Verb	That-Clause Complement
	loves	
<i>She</i>	hates	[the fact] that <i>college is difficult.</i>
	regrets	

Other verbs in this category include: *like, ignore, fear.*

Belief-type Verbs

Generally, this class of verbs deals not with *fact* but with *belief*, *opinion*, and *understanding*.

Subject	Verb	That-Clause Complement
	assumed	
<i>Most medieval Europeans</i>	believed	that <i>the world was flat.</i>
	supposed	
	thought	

In most cases, the phrase *the fact* would sound strange with *belief-type* verbs. It is also important to note that these verbs are rarely used with present progressive tense. The exception is the verb *think*, which is commonly used in the present progressive in informal communication to indicate *deliberation* (e.g. *I'm thinking that I'll go to a movie tonight.*).

Advise-type Verbs

This kind of *that*-complementation is triggered by verbs that imply persuasion, manipulation, or direction of others. Notice that these verbs require another noun or pronoun in the object position and either **A**) *that* + (pro)noun + modal + verb, OR **B**) *that* + (pro)noun + verb + adverbial/adjective.

Subject	Verb	Object + that +(pro)noun + (modal) + verb + adverb/adjective
<i>The professor</i>	instructed	<i>them</i> that <i>the test is next week.</i>
	reminded	
<i>The meteorologist</i>	told	<i>drivers</i> that <i>the storm would be dangerous.</i>
	warned	
<i>Nancy</i>	advised	<i>them</i> that <i>they should study.</i>
	convinced	

Reporting Verbs

These verbs are used to convey information.

Subject	Verb	That-Clause Complement
	said	
<i>Several critics have</i>	remarked	that <i>the law is poorly designed.</i>
	declared	
	pointed out	

Importance to academic writing

These verbs and others like them, also known as *signal verbs*, are essential for paraphrasing the ideas of other scholars in academic writing. For a more extensive list these verbs and examples of their use, please refer to the TLC handout "**Reporting Verbs.**"

Part C: Gerund Complementation

A gerund is a noun with an *-ing* ending. At first glance, they can appear to be verbs in a progressive tense. Though verbs are sometimes described as action words (e.g. *He **works** there.*), gerunds are the noun forms of action words (e.g. ***working** here is fun.*). Since gerunds are actions, perhaps it is not surprising to find that verbs that require actions or activities as objects take *gerundial complements*.

Factive Verbs

These verbs require the speaker or writer to comment on the factivity--in other words, the truth--of action.

Subject	Verb	Gerundial Complement
	regret	
<i>The accountants</i>	deny	<i>cooking the books.</i>
	admit (to)	

Other factive verbs include: *acknowledge, confess (to)*; factive verbs can also trigger *that-clause* complements (see **Part B**).

Adverbs of Time with Factive Verbs

Note that adverbials referencing the past can fit before or after the complement.

Subject	Verb	Optional Adverbial	Gerundial Complement	Optional Adverbial
	admitted			<i>(before).</i>
<i>He</i>	denied	<i>(previously)</i>	<i>plagiarizing</i>	<i>(in the past).</i>
	mentioned			<i>(last time).</i>

Attitude-type Verbs

English speakers use gerunds to express their feelings about / preference for activities and experiences.

Subject	Verb	Gerundial Complement
	enjoys	<i>reading novels.</i>
	dislikes	<i>writing papers.</i>
<i>Vivian</i>	relishes	<i>camping.</i>
	can't stand	<i>working with others.</i>
	had fun	<i>dancing.</i>

Other verbs in this class include: *revel in, adore, appreciate, savor, detest, despise, detest, loathe, abhor, frown on; have + [fun, difficulty, a hard time, a blast]*.

Result-type Verbs

These verbs are action words that result in subsequent actions.

Subject	Verb	Gerundial Complement
	entail	
<i>Going to that college (will/would)</i>	necessitate	<i>moving across the country;</i>
	require	

Other verbs of this kind include: *warrant, demand, call for, mean, to be grounds for.*

Preventative Verbs

These verbs are used in reference to preventing other actions. Often the agent of the prevented action is named in the object position and followed by the preposition *from*: [subject + verb + (object + *from*) + gerund].

Subject	Verb	(Object + From) + Gerundial Complement
	discouraged	
<i>Lifeguards</i>	dissuaded	<i>(people from) surfing during the storm.</i>
	prevented	

Other verbs in this category include: *restrain, avert, hinder, impede, exclude, obstruct.*

Verbs + Prepositions

There are a number of verbs that are followed by prepositions. These verb + preposition sequences tend to trigger gerundial complements.

Subject	Verb + Preposition	Gerundial Complement
	approves of	<i>driving fast.</i>
	boasts about	<i>spending money.</i>
<i>Ken</i>	is engaged in	<i>selling computers.</i>
	persists in	<i>running red lights.</i>
	is thinking of	<i>moving to Los Angeles.</i>

Dual Complement Verbs

Either an infinitive complement OR a gerundial complement can follow these verbs: *begin, continue, forget, hate, like, love, prefer, remember, start, try*

Subject	Verb	Complement
<i>The dog</i>	started	to bark / barking.

The verb *regret* can trigger a *to-clause* complement, but usually only with *inform*:

Subject	Verb	Complement
<i>We</i>	regret	to inform you that you were not selected.