

National Accident Helpline

Word Work



Look at this part of the poem, and consider the parts highlighted.

It was brilliant until the monthly payments **started coming**
and before I knew it, I couldn't keep up.
I tried to sell the TV back but by then
I owed 10 times the value of the set,
which by then was completely out of date.
I applied for a credit card so I could cover the repayments
but before I knew it,
I was unable to keep up with the interest on the card,
so I applied for another credit card.

In two cases, the main verb ('*tried*' and '*was unable*') is followed by the infinitive ('*to sell*' and '*to keep up with*') while in one case the main verb ('*started*') by the gerund ('*coming*'). This can be a tricky part of the language as it isn't always clear which form you should choose.

1. In the cases of '*payments started coming*' and '*I tried to sell*' either the infinitive or the gerund could be used in, although the meaning changes:

payments started coming
payments started to come

payments started and they continued to come
refers to the moment when they started only

I tried to sell
I tried selling

implies the action was tried once only
the selling was attempted more than once

In both cases, the effect of the words chosen by the poet heightens the growing problems of the debtor (the payments didn't seem to stop – they were unstoppable; the attempt to sell the TV was seen as futile immediately). If the poet had chosen the other form of words, some of the effect would have been lost.

2. In the case of the third example '*I was unable to keep up with*', it isn't possible to substitute the infinitive with the gerund. '*I was unable keeping up with*' simply isn't correct. It's bad English! In this case, only one form is allowed.



This next one is about a man, a woman, a really big plasma screen, and a mountain of credit card debt which started to take over the world

3. Help Box

Stop + infinitive = stop in order to do something else.

When she got to the top of the mountain, she stopped to take a photo.

Stop + gerund = not continue.

Stop talking, please.

Try + infinitive = attempt

He tried to do the exercise but it was very difficult.

Try + gerund = experiment.

If you have a headache, try taking an aspirin.

Remember + infinitive = not forget, remember that you must do something.

Did you remember to send the invitation?

Remember + gerund = recall, remember what you have done.

I remember breaking my leg when I was a child.

Forget + infinitive = not remember

I forgot to buy the book. I have to go out again.

Forget + gerund = not recall

He'll never forget meeting his favourite actress.

Regret + infinitive = be sorry that you must do something.

I regret to say / to inform you that you have failed the exam.

Regret + gerund = Be sorry that you have done some thing.

She regrets having so many children.

Be sorry + infinitive = apologise for a present situation.

I'm sorry to say that you are fired.

Be sorry + gerund = apologise for an earlier situation.

I'm sorry for keeping you waiting.

Mean + infinitive = intend.

Sorry, I didn't mean to insult you.

Mean + gerund = involve

Being a doctor means working day and night.

4. How do you know which verb can use either form and which can only use one? The bad news is that you will only know by experience. There are no rules to help you. Have a look at these verbs, all of which can be followed by both the infinitive and the gerund. Choose FIVE, and write sentences using both forms, and decide what the difference in meaning is between the two forms, or if the meaning is the same.

try
remember
forget
allow
stop
like
love
hate
see
hear

1. I tried managing the debt with four credit cards.
I tried to manage the debt with four credit cards.

Description: *Both forms are similar in meaning although the gerund implies that the action was an experiment (repeated or lasted over a period of time) while the infinitive suggests an attempt was made, perhaps once only.*

2. _____

Description:

3. _____

Description:

4. _____

Description:

5. _____

Description:

6. _____
