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SENTENCE STRUCTURE L 11 – INFINITIVE CLAUSES

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WHAT ARE INFINITIVE CLAUSES?

Infinitive clauses are sentences in which the verb isn't conjugated but remains in its infinitive form, i.e., the basic form.

An infinitive clause is a subordinate clause and has no subject of its own. The subject is only in the main clause. Therefore, the subject, the accusative complement, or the dative complement of the main clause has to be similar to the subject of the subordinate clause.

We use infinitive clauses after certain verbs and phrases.

We use infinitive clauses with "zu" when the verb in the main clause is directly related to the verb in the subordinate clause.

The main clause thus determines how and in what way the action of the subordinate clause is taking place.

- „Ich **versuche**, das Tor **zu treffen**.“

"Versuchen" refers to the verb "treffen" in the subordinate clause. That's why we have to use the infinitive clause.

WHEN DO WE USE ZU + INFINITIVE?

After specific verbs: Verbs that are related to a second action and don't have a noun as a complement.

- „Ich **schlage vor**, heute Abend ins Kino **zu gehen**.“
→ I propose an action: "gehen" → zu + Infinitive

The same idea can also be expressed with a dass-clause:

- „Ich **schlage vor**, **dass** wir heute Abend ins Kino gehen.“

When the subject in the subordinate clause isn't important (because it is already known or only a specific meaning is possible), we can always use an infinitive clause + zu.

When the subject has to be mentioned because a lot of people or plenty of things are involved, we can't use infinitive + zu:

- „**Ich** hoffe, dass **er** bald perfekt Deutsch spricht.“
- „**Ich** hoffe, dass **ich** bald perfekt Deutsch spreche.“

Because there is no subject in an infinitive clause, it only works when the subject in the infinitive clause is identical to the subject, the accusative object, or the dative object of the main clause.

- „**Ich** hoffe, bald perfekt Deutsch **zu sprechen**.“

If I want to express that somebody else will soon speak perfect German, I cannot use zu + infinitive because the subject is not the same, and as in this case, not obvious.

Examples with identical accusative or dative objects:

The accusative object is identical to the subject in the subordinate clause:

- dass: „Der Kellner bittet **den Mann**, dass **er** draußen raucht.“
- Inf.: „Der Kellner bittet den Mann, draußen zu rauchen.“

The dative object is identical to the subject in the subordinate clause:

- dass: „Der Kellner verbietet **dem Mann**, dass **er** im Restaurant raucht.“
- Inf.: „Der Kellner verbietet dem Mann, im Restaurant zu rauchen.“



Remember:

If the subject, the accusative object, and the dative object in the main clause are not identical to the subject in the subordinate clause, you cannot use zu + infinitive.

If it is the same, you can (and you should) use zu + infinitive. Infinitive clauses usually sound better because they are shorter and less complicated.

VERBS THAT REQUIRE INFINITIVE CLAUSES

All verbs that require a second action:

- *aufhören, stoppen, beginnen, anfangen, versuchen, vorhaben, warnen vor, sich weigern, ...*

→ These verbs almost always correspond to a second action and require an infinitive clause.

VERBS THAT WE CAN USE WITH INFINITIVE CLAUSE

1. All Verbs That Have a "Dass-Clause" Complement:

- *glauben, denken, meinen, hoffen, wissen, entscheiden, scheinen, ...*

→ We can only use *zu* + infinitive when the subject of the subordinate clause refers to the subject, the accusative complement, or the dative complement of the main clause.

- „*Ich hoffe, dass ich bald perfekt Deutsch spreche.*“
- „*Ich hoffe, bald perfekt Deutsch zu sprechen.*“

→ **Both versions are possible since the subject is the same.**

- „*Ich hoffe, dass du bald wieder zu Hause bist.*“

→ Only the *dass*-clause is possible because the subject of the subordinate clause is not in the main clause.

2. The Constructions *sein/finden* + Adjective or "haben" + Nouns.

- „*Ich habe Lust, mit dir ins Kino zu gehen.*“
- „*Ich finde es schwierig, die deutsche Sprache zu lernen.*“
- „*Es ist einfach, einen Job in Deutschland zu finden.*“

If the subject is not the same, these verbs require a *dass*-clause as the complement. However, it is rare, and they usually use an infinitive clause + *zu* → None of the three examples above can be formed with a *dass*-clause.

- „**Ich** finde es super, dir beim Deutschlernen helfen **zu können**.“
- „**Ich** finde es super, **dass ich** dir beim Deutschlernen helfen kann.“

In this example, both versions are possible.

It isn't obvious that the subject is the same.

It could be somebody else who is helping → a dass-clause is possible.

- „**Ich** finde es super, **dass du** mir beim Deutschlernen helfen kannst.“

No infinitive clause is possible because there are two different subjects.

INFINITIVE CLAUSES WITH SEPARABLE VERBS

With separable verbs, the "zu" needs to be between the prefix and the main part of the verb. Thus, it is all written together as one word.

- „Ich versuche, die Tür **abzuschließen**.“
- „Ich schlage vor, morgen sehr früh **aufzustehen**.“
- „Es ist schwierig, bei Lärm **einzuschlafen**.“

VERBS WITHOUT INFINITIVE CLAUSES

Some verbs are directly related to a second verb and directly influence how the action takes place. Therefore, they don't use an infinitive clause but sentence brackets.

These include all modal verbs, verbs of movement ("gehen", "fahren", "laufen", "kommen",...), and the verbs "bleiben", "lassen", "sehen" and "hören".

The auxiliary verbs "haben", "sein" and "werden" do not use an infinitive clause with "zu" either, since they have no meaning of their own and are only used to form the tense.

Examples:

- „Ich **soll** heute noch Hausaufgaben **machen**.“
(modal verb → no infinitive clause)
- „Ich **gehe** morgen mit meinem Bruder **einkaufen**.“
(gehen → no infinitive clause)

- „Ich **lasse** mein Auto in der Werkstatt **reparieren**."
(lassen → no infinitive clause)
- „Ich **werde** morgen zum ersten Mal in die Schule **gehen**."
(auxiliary verb → no infinitive clause)

WORD ORDER & COMMAS

Infinitive clauses are subordinate clauses, so the verb comes at the end.

- „Ich fange morgen an, Deutsch **zu lernen**.“

The infinitive clauses must come after the main clause. SC + MC is not possible.

I recommend you to separate the infinitive clause from the main clause with a comma, but you don't have to most of the time.

SUMMARY

- Infinitive clauses are subordinate clauses.
- If the verb refers directly to a second action/verb, the infinitive + zu is used (alternative: some verbs use a dass-clause).
- This applies to all verbs except of modal verbs, gehen, fahren, bleiben, kommen, lassen, sehen, and hören.
- Since there is no subject in an infinitive clause, it only works when the subject in the dass-clause is identical to the subject, the accusative object, or the dative object in the main clause.
- The separation between the two clauses with a comma is not obligatory but is recommended.

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