

# *to* or not *to*?

to + infinitives and bare infinitives

## Modal auxiliary verbs

*verb + bare infinitive*

**do**      **did**

**will**     **would**

**shall**    **should**

**may**      **might**

**can**      **could**

**must**

Marginal modals:

**need (to)**

**dare (to)**

**used to**

**ought to** (can be with bare infinitive in negative sentences 'I oughtn't have done that' 'Oughtn't we send for the police?')

Semi-auxiliaries:

**have to, be able to, be about to, be apt to, be bound to, be due to, be going to, be likely to, be meant to, be obliged to, be supposed to, be willing to.**

## dare, need

	MODAL AUXILIARY CONSTRUCTION	MAIN VERB CONSTRUCTION
Positive	—	He <i>needed/dared</i> to escape.
Negative	He <i>needn't/daren't</i> escape.	He doesn't <i>need/dare</i> to escape.
Interrogative	<i>Need/Dare</i> we escape?	Do we <i>need/dare</i> to escape?
Negative- interrogative	<i>Needn't</i> he escape after all? <i>Dare</i> he <i>not</i> escape?	Doesn't he need to escape after all? Doesn't he dare to escape?

The modal construction is restricted to nonassertive contexts, i.e. mainly negative and interrogative sentences,\* whereas the main verb construction can almost always be used, and is in fact more common. The auxiliary construction with *dare* and *need* is rarer in AmE than in BrE, where it is also quite rare.

\* Nonassertive contexts are not confined to negative and interrogative clauses: they also include clauses containing semi-negative words such as *hardly* and *only*. The following examples illustrate sentences with negative import, but lacking *not*-negation:

No one *dares* predict the results.

Standards are lower than they *need* be.

*For each sentence decide whether 'to' is needed (making to + infinitive) or not (∅).*

Very often we conform because we know we dare not **to/∅** risk the consequences of non-conformity.

For the purpose of this chapter we need **to/∅** draw only on a commonsense understanding of the importance of names.

The less you have, the more you need **to/∅** spend.

Her neighbours dare **to/∅** say nothing but yet in their hearts wish she were hanged.

I dare you **to/∅** ask him!

How dare you **to/∅** suggest that ...? How dare you **to/∅** presume... ?

I dare **to/∅** say that you are right.

Don't you dare **to/∅** speak to me like that.

They dared not **to/∅** carry out their threat.

*For each sentence decide whether 'to' is needed (making to + infinitive) or not ( $\emptyset$ ).*

I don't like it; I don't want it; I am against it; I need **to/ $\emptyset$**  understand it - and to understand it I have to describe it.

We need now **to/ $\emptyset$**  look more closely and more precisely at the role of knowledge, and how it interacts with language to create discourse.

You need not **to/ $\emptyset$**  bother.

You do not need **to/ $\emptyset$**  bother.

You need **to/ $\emptyset$**  sign the contract.

You do need **to/ $\emptyset$**  sign the contract.

Need I **to/ $\emptyset$**  say more?

Need I **to/ $\emptyset$**  continue?

They do not dare **to/ $\emptyset$**  ask for more.

## Modal idioms

*verb + bare infinitive*

**had better** (ought to, should – with sense of advisability)

**would rather/sooner** (would prefer to, \*~~would rather prefer~~)

**be to** (must – with sense of compulsion, plan, destiny)

**have got to** (must – with sense of obligation and logical necessity)

*For each sentence decide whether 'to' is needed (making to+ infinitive) or not (∅).*

I'd rather not **to/∅** say.

Hadn't we better **to/∅** finish now?

I'd rather he **to/∅** tell me directly than I hear it from someone else.

You had better **to/∅** make that clearer.

You would have been better **to/∅ clear/clearing** up that point before starting **to/∅** negotiate.

He would sooner **to/∅** lose everything than admit he was wrong.

He would prefer **to/∅** gamble his life away than work a steady job.

Would you rather **to/∅** meet the week before Christmas or the week after New Year?

Would you prefer **to/∅** have grapefruit marmalade or raspberry jam with your toast?

You'd better **to/∅** be certain before making such a commitment.

## Main verbs taking bare infinitive

*verb + object + bare infinitive, or verb + object + -ing*

*(passive voice: verb + object + to + infinitive, or verb + object + -ing)*

**see**

**notice**

**observe**

**watch**

**hear**

**overhear**

**feel**

**sense**

**smell**

*verb + object + bare infinitive*

**let**

**help** (can be followed by to + infinitive interchangeably)

**bid** (wish ; invite; † command or order to do)

**make**

verb + bare infinitive

**make do, let slip, hear tell, make believe, let go**



*For each sentence decide whether 'to' is needed (making to+ infinitive) or not (∅). And if no 'to' is needed, which of the bare infinitive or gerund (-ing) to use (both may be possible).*

We heard her **to/∅ sing/singing** at the concert.

I saw her **to/∅ come/coming** in by the front entrance.

He was seen **to/∅ enter/entering** by the back gate.

We are going to hear Prof. Wise **to/∅ lecture/lecturing** on wisdom literature.

This term you can hear Prof. Wise **to/∅ lecture/lecturing** on wisdom literature.

I didn't notice him **to/∅ come/coming** in.

Nobody saw it **to/∅ come/coming**.

It was with horror that I watched the accident **to/∅ happen/happening**.

I made her **to/∅** wait outside.

I was made **to/∅** wait my turn.

Help me **to/∅ do/doing** the washing up, please.

*For each sentence decide whether 'to' is needed (making to+ infinitive) or not (∅). And if no 'to' is needed, which of the bare infinitive or gerund (-ing) to use (both may be possible).*

Would it help **to/∅** consider another option?

Would you help me **to/∅** get up, please?

I overheard her **to/∅ whisper/whispering** the answer to her neighbour.

I heard them **to/∅ whisper/whispering** surreptitiously.

I noticed him **to/∅ pause/pausing** before daring **to/∅** cross the ravine.

He didn't **to/∅** dare **to/∅** dive in.

As soon as I notice her **to/∅ leave/leaving** I'll let you **to/∅** know.

She was filled with consternation as she watched the share prices **to/∅ plummet/plummeting**.

The onset of night saw the moon **to/∅ rise/rising** high.

The Battle of the Boyne saw the Protestant ascendancy **to/∅** continue in Ireland.

Surprisingly often one sees a cow **to/∅ jump/jumping** over the moon.

*For each sentence decide whether 'to' is needed (making to+ infinitive) or not (∅). And if no 'to' is needed, which of the bare infinitive or gerund (-ing) to use (both may be possible).*

She was heard **to/∅ mutter/muttering** "I shall never forgive you" as she left the room.

Those present heard her **to/∅ obstinately declare/declaring** "I shall never resign."

Names and schools have been freely suggested, but where one guess is as good as another one had better **to/∅ ignore** them all.

I felt the creep-crawly **to/∅ creep/creeping** slowly up my leg.  
Upon feeling the creepy-crawly **crawl/crawling** up my leg, I screamed.

I feel a song **to/∅ come/coming** on.  
I feel a cup of tea **to/∅ be/being** the answer to our present needs.

The crowd sensed the speaker **to/∅ hesitate/hesitating** and started **to/∅ heckle/heckling**.

I watched McEnroe **to/∅ play/playing** Borg in the Wimbledon final.  
Glued to my seat, I watched them **to/∅ play/playing**.

*For each sentence decide whether 'to' is needed (making to+ infinitive) or not (∅). And if no 'to' is needed, which of the bare infinitive or gerund (-ing) to use (both may be possible).*

I can hear people **to/∅ talk/talking** in the next room.

She could see the path ahead **to/∅ peter/petering** out in the gloom.

I could make the cat **to/∅ wait/waiting** longer out in the rain but I'll take pity on it before the caterwauling begins.

The professor bade his students **to/∅ enter**.

'Something told me it was over

When I saw you and her **to/∅ talk/talking**

...

I would rather **to/∅ go** blind, boy, than **to/∅ see** you **to/∅ walk** away from me

...

I don't want **to/∅ watch** you **to/∅ leave** me,

Most of all, I just don't, I just don't wanna be free'

*[from the Etta James song I'd rather go blind]*

*For each sentence decide whether 'to' is needed (making to+ infinitive) or not (∅). And if no 'to' is needed, which of the bare infinitive or gerund (-ing) to use (both may be possible).*

Please let me **to/∅** continue.

Please allow me **to/∅** continue.

Let me **to/∅** help you **to/∅** find the way out.

Commentators have observed economic

Ratings can be observed **to/∅ decline/declining** over recent years.

Let it **to/∅** be.

I could smell the roses **to/∅ give/giving** off their heavy scent.

Brushing against the roses, I smelled the flowers **to/∅ release/releasing** their scent.

The last over of the day saw England **to/∅ lose/losing** three wickets.

†I bade him **to/∅** go.

I told him **to/∅** go.