

Split Infinitives

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So, what is a split infinitive?

A split infinitive is an English-Language grammatical construction in which the two parts of a full infinitive are disconnected by a word or phrase (usually an adverb or adverbial phrase).

So, what does that mean?

To put it more clearly a full infinitive is a verb construction consisting of the word *to* and a verb. For instance: “to go,” “to dance,” “to jump,” etc. A **split infinitive** occurs when the *to* and the verb are separated. E.g.: “to boldly go,” “to wildly dance,” “to casually jump,” etc.

Is there a rule against split infinitives?

Unfortunately, it depends. Certain grammarians insist splitting an infinitive is grammatically incorrect, others believe it is perfectly acceptable, and some believe the validity of a split infinitive depends on the circumstance. Most arguments against split infinitives are based on Latin grammar rules, while most arguments for it are based on common usage of split infinitives (the most famous example being *Star Trek*'s “to boldly go where no man has gone before”) and the fact that English is not Latin. Either way, split infinitives are considered to be incorrect by many who do the grading and often foster a tendency for repetitive and generic sentence structures. It is best to avoid them.

How do I avoid split infinitives?

This is the problem. Even if one considers split infinitives to be grammatically incorrect, often splitting the infinitive produces sentences that make sense. Take the following sentence, for example (the parts of the infinitive are underlined and the adverb that splits them is bolded):

-The gorilla decided to **secretly** get out of the zoo in a disguise made from clothing it had collected

This sentence makes perfect sense even though it splits the infinitive. In this sentence, we get the sense that the gorilla is going to leave the zoo in a secretive or concealed fashion. Look at what happens when the only change made to the sentence is the position of the adverb:

-The gorilla **secretly** decided to get out of the zoo in a disguise made from clothing it had collected

-The gorilla decided to get out of the zoo in a disguise made from clothing it had collected **secretly**

The first example changes the meaning of the sentence and implies that it was the gorilla's *decision* that was secretive rather than the actual escape. The second example also changes the meaning by making the *collection* of the clothes a secret process.

However, the sentence can be rewritten to maintain its meaning by using a *noun*, a different grammatical aspect of the verb, or by avoiding the informal “**get out of**”:

-The gorilla decided to get out of the zoo in *secret* by wearing a disguise made from clothing it had collected.

-The gorilla decided it *would* secretly *get out* of the zoo in a disguise made from clothing it had collected.

-The gorilla decided **to escape** the zoo secretly in a disguise it had made from clothing it had collected.