

Infinitive Phrases: Composition Activities**From Phrasetry to Story: Narrative** (see *Paragraph Activities* for a full description of phrasetry)

Use one of the infinitive phrasetry examples listed below or your own example as the inspiration for a short narrative essay. The essay should expand the lines of poetry into prose to tell a short story (alternately you can think of it as a single scene from a larger work). In addition to the ones in the poem, add at least three additional infinitive phrases in your essay. Underline the infinitive phrases.

Knelt **to examine the bent branch along the wall**
 Poured plaster **to fill the imprint left by the criminal**
 Searched **to unearth footwear that matches the cast**
 Exposed the culprit **to ensure that this crime would be the last**

Sonia Remick

A dress **to make them gawp**
 A ring **to bind up dreams**
 A cake **to smash in the face**
 A glass **to toast everlasting happiness**
 A limousine **to ride into the future**

Sonia Remick

That is YOUR Question: ARGUMENT (inspired by the most famous infinitive phrase)

When infinitive phrases are used as nouns, the verb loses its immediacy and becomes an abstract concept. The most famous infinitive phrase in the English language makes use of this fact. “To be or not to be,” the opening line of Hamlet’s Act III soliloquy, uses the infinitive to emphasize that Hamlet considers living as an abstract concept. Look at Shakespeare’s text from the first folio (see pg. 2) and examine all the infinitives (to suffer, to take, to say, to die, to sleep, to grunt and sweat, to dream). The entire speech establishes a distant relationship with death considering it calmly as a scholar would consider it. Hamlet is speaking to himself trying to unravel the puzzle of why people do not choose death when life can be so painful. His answer to the question is that people choose life (to be) simply because they cannot be assured that death (not to be) will stop the suffering.

Using Hamlet’s speech as a jumping off point, write a prose argument that answers a Hamlet-esque question. The lead sentence of the essay will take the form “to _____ or not to _____ that is the question.” Here are a few possibilities for topics.

to risk or not to risk

to study or not to study

to do drugs or not to do drugs

to love or not to love

to follow the rules or not to follow the rules

to join _____ or not to join _____

to ask someone to dance or not to ask someone to dance

to fear or not to fear

In preparation for writing, make a list of reasons why people do and do not do whatever your topic is. After making the list, review it and decide which you believe is the right answer (to do or not to do). This is your thesis (position, answer). Use your list, to write the reasoning of your argument. Explain all the reasons in favor of your position and refute the reasons against your position.

To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis Nobler in the mind to suffer
The Slings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune,
Or to take Arms against a Sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them: to die, to sleep
No more; and by a sleep, to say we end
The Heart-ache, and the thousand Natural shocks
That Flesh is heir to? 'Tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep,
To sleep, perchance to Dream; Aye, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes Calamity of so long life:
For who would bear the Whips and Scorns of time,
The Oppressor's wrong, the *proud* man's Contumely,
The pangs of *despised* Love, the Law's delay,
The insolence of Office, and the Spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his Quietus make
With a bare Bodkin? Who would Fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered Country, from whose bourn
No Traveller returns, Puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have,
Than fly to others that we know not of.
Thus Conscience does make Cowards of us all,
And thus the Native hue of Resolution
Is sicklied o'er, with the pale cast of Thought,
And enterprises of great *pitch* and moment,
With this regard their Currents turn *awry*,
And lose the name of Action.