

University of Tikrit

College of Education for Humanities

Department of English

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English Grammar

Non-Finite Clauses in English

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1. Introduction

Clauses are fundamental units of sentence structure in English. Traditionally, clauses are classified into **finite** and **non-finite** clauses according to the type of verb they contain.

Consider the following examples:

1. **She believes that he is honest.**
2. **She wants to leave.**

In sentence (1), the clause *that he is honest* contains the finite verb *is*. In sentence (2), the clause *to leave* contains the non-finite verb *to leave*.

Non-finite clauses are extremely common in English and play a crucial role in both spoken and written discourse. They contribute to conciseness, flexibility, and stylistic sophistication, particularly in academic and formal writing.

2. What Is a Clause?

A clause is a group of words containing a subject and a predicate.

Example

- The students attended the lecture.

This is a clause because it contains:

- Subject: *The students*
- Predicate: *attended the lecture*

Clauses may function independently as sentences or may be embedded within larger sentence structures.

3. Finite vs. Non-Finite Clauses

3.1 Finite Clauses

A finite clause contains a finite verb that expresses:

- Tense
- Person
- Number

Examples

- She works hard.

- They worked yesterday.
- He is studying now.

The verbs *works*, *worked*, and *is studying* indicate tense and agreement.

3.2 Non-Finite Clauses

A non-finite clause contains a non-finite verb form.

Non-finite verbs do not show:

- Tense
- Person
- Number

Examples

- To study English is important.
- Walking through the park, she relaxed.
- Encouraged by her teacher, she continued her studies.

The verbs *to study*, *walking*, and *encouraged* are non-finite.

4. Characteristics of Non-Finite Clauses

Non-finite clauses possess several distinctive features.

4.1 Lack of Tense

Non-finite verbs do not express tense independently.

Example

- She hopes to succeed.

The infinitive *to succeed* does not indicate present, past, or future time.

4.2 Absence of Subject Agreement

Non-finite verbs do not change according to person or number.

Examples

- I want to leave.
- She wants to leave.

- They want to leave.

The infinitive remains unchanged.

4.3 Dependence on a Main Clause

Most non-finite clauses cannot stand alone as complete sentences.

Incorrect:

- To study harder.

Correct:

- She decided to study harder.
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5. Types of Non-Finite Clauses

English grammar traditionally recognizes three major types of non-finite clauses:

1. Infinitive Clauses
 2. -ing Clauses
 3. -ed Participial Clauses
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6. Infinitive Clauses

Infinitive clauses are introduced by the infinitive form of the verb, usually marked by *to*.

Structure

To + Base Form of Verb

Examples

- She wants to travel abroad.
 - They decided to continue the project.
 - To learn a foreign language requires dedication.
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Functions of Infinitive Clauses

Subject

- To master English takes time.

Direct Object

- She hopes to win the competition.

Subject Complement

- Her ambition is to become a professor.

Adverbial Purpose

- He came to discuss the proposal.
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7. Bare Infinitive Clauses

A bare infinitive clause contains the infinitive without *to*.

It commonly follows:

- Modal verbs
- Verbs of perception
- Causative verbs

Examples

- You must study.
- I saw him leave.
- She made me apologize.

In these examples, *study*, *leave*, and *apologize* are bare infinitives.

8. -ing Clauses (Gerund-Participle Clauses)

These clauses contain the *-ing* form of the verb.

Examples

- Swimming is excellent exercise.
- She enjoys reading novels.
- Walking down the street, he met a friend.

9. -ed Participial Clauses

-ed participial clauses contain the past participle form of a verb.

Examples

- Encouraged by her success, she continued working.

- Written in simple language, the book is easy to understand.
 - Damaged during the storm, the building required repairs.
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10. Summary

Non-finite clauses are clauses containing non-finite verb forms that do not express tense, person, or number independently. They are an essential feature of English grammar and contribute significantly to concise and sophisticated expression.

The three principal types are:

1. **Infinitive Clauses** (*to study, to succeed*)
2. **-ing Clauses** (*studying, reading, walking*)
3. **-ed Participial Clauses** (*written, encouraged, damaged*)

Non-finite clauses can function as subjects, objects, complements, modifiers, and adverbials. They are particularly common in academic and formal writing because they allow writers to express ideas efficiently and elegantly.