INFINITIVES AS NOUNS

When used as a noun, the Spanish infinitive is always masculine and almost always singular. Like other nouns, it can be the subject of a sentence, a predicate nominative (usually a noun that follows a form of "to be" or ser) or the object of a verb or preposition. The infinitive noun sometimes retains the characteristics of a verb; it sometimes is modified by an adverb rather than an adjective and can sometimes have objects. It is often translated into the English gerund (the "-ing" form of the verb). Here are some examples of the infinitive being used as a noun:

•As a subject: Nadar es el mejor remedio para el dolor de espalda. Swimming is the best remedy for a backache.

•As a subject: Es prohibido fumar. Smoking is prohibited. (Note: In Spanish, unlike English, it isn't unusual for the subject to follow the verb of the sentence.)

•As a subject: El beber puede conducir a la intoxicación e incluso a la muerte. Drinking can lead to poisoning and even death.

•As a subject: No me gusta cocinar. I don't like to cook.(Note: Literally, the sentence would be translated as "cooking doesn't please me.")

•As a predicate nominative: La vida es un abrir y cerrar de los ojos. Life is an opening and closing of the eyes.

•As a predicate nominative: La intimidad es un hablar honesto y profundo de lo que se siente y se piensa. Intimacy is speaking sincerely and deeply about what one feels and thinks.

•As the object of a verb: Yo preferiría salir. I would prefer to leave.

•As the object of a verb: Odio estudiar algo que creo que no necesito. I hate studying something I believe I don't need.

•As the object of a preposition: Pienso de salir contigo. I'm thinking about leaving with you.

•As the object of a preposition: Ten moderación en el comer o el beber. Show moderation in eating or drinking.

•As the object of a preposition: Al entrar al Sistema de Salud, usted y su empresa recibirán enormes beneficios. Upon entering the Health System, you and your business will receive great benefits.

As you may notice, the definite article el (or the contraction al) is not consistently used with the noun infinitive. It is most often used in certain set phrases and following some prepositions. When an infinitive is the subject of the sentence, the el is often optional; when it is used, it can give the sentence a more personal or informal sound.

Note also that the translations given above are not the only ones possible

AL + INFINITIVE

**Using 'Al' Followed by an Infinitive**

**This Is Common Way of Indicating When Something Happens**

The use of the contraction al followed by an infinitive is a very common way of indicating when something happens.

Al followed by an infinitive is usually the approximate equivalent of "upon," "on" or "when" followed by the gerund (the "-ing" form of a verb) in English.

Here are some examples of this usage:

•El diagnóstico se hace al encontrar que hay dolor. (The diagnosis is done upon finding that there is pain.)

•Hay error al enviar mensajes desde mi programa de correo. (There is an error when sending messages from my email program.)

•Lea en la mañana al despertarse; lea en la noche al acostarse. (Read in the morning on getting up; read in the evening when going to bed.)

•Al comprar una empresa, la consideración más importante es sus aspectos económicos. (When buying a business, the most important consideration is its economic aspects.)

•Me puse nervioso al ver la osa con su cría. (I became nervous upon seeing the bear with her cub.)

• Al escuchar el himno nacional todas las personas quitarán el sombrero. (On hearing the national anthem, all the people will take off their hats.)

The translations given above are all fairly literal. If you were translating such sentences in real life, you'd probably rephrase in some cases in order to get more natural English:•Hay error al enviar mensajes desde mi programa de correo. (I get an error when I send messages from my email program.)

•Me puse nervioso al ver la osa con su cría. (I became nervous when I saw the bear with her cub.)

Using Infinitives after Other Verbs with a Change of Subject

Some Such Usages Have No English Equivalent

An infinitive that follows a conjugated verb usually has the same subject as the first verb (see the listing of other lessons on infinitives). However, there are two main types of sentences where the infinitive can have a different subject:

**Following verbs of influence:** A verb of allowing, influencing, prohibiting or obliging — and similar verbs such as those involving requests — can be followed by an infinitive that represents action of someone other than the subject of the sentence. An indirect object is used to indicate who was asked to perform (or not) the action. These sentences are similar in structure to equivalent sentences in English.

**Examples:** María me dejó **entrar**. (María allowed me **to enter**.) *Los mandamos* ***escribir*** *la carta.* (We required them **to write** the letter.) *Te prohibo* ***fumar****.* (I forbid you **to smoke**.) *Ella me hace* ***hacer****lo.* (She made me **do** it.) *Me dijo* ***salir****.* (She told me **to leave**.)

**Following verbs of observation:** After verbs of observation — the most common are *ver* (to see) and *oír* (to hear) — the infinitive can be used to describe already completed action by someone other than the main subject of the sentence. These sentences in Spanish are structured much the same as those in the examples immediately above; the person performing the action of the second verb is indicated by an indirect object. In English, the infinitive cannot be used this way. Typically, the equivalent English sentence would or could use the gerund (the "-ing" form of the verb).

**Examples:** *Te vi* ***salir****.* (I saw you **leave**.) *¿Me oíste* ***cantar****?* (Did you hear me **sing**?) *Violeta te miraba* ***dormir****.* (Violeta watched you **sleep**.)