Formation AND USE of the personal or inflected infinitive in portuguese

*Disclaimer: this file is a teaching document intended to clarify the principal uses of the personal or inflected infinitive , with examples, in a class for intermediate to advanced students of Portuguese. It can also be used as a self-study resource. For other explanations of this verb form, see, for example, Manuela Cook, Portuguese Verbs Explained. Knebworth, Herts: Able Publishing, 2004, pp. 139-148; Milton M.Azevedo, Portuguese Verbs Explained: A Linguistic introduction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 141 – 143; Sheila R. Ackerland and Rebecca Jones-Kellogg, Portuguese: A Reference Manual. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 137-138.*

**FORMATION OF THE PERSONAL OR INFLECTED INFINITIVE**

The personal infinitive is formed using the general infinitive of *any* verb (there are no irregular forms as such) and adding the endings illustrated in the table below, which gives a few examples:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **eu** | trabalhar | aprender | ir | fazer | por |
| **tu** | trabalhar**es** | aprender**es** | ir**es** | fazer**es** | por**es** |
| **você** | trabalhar | aprender | ir | fazer | por |
| **ele/ela** | trabalhar | aprender | ir | fazer | por |
| **nós** | trabalhar**mos** | aprender**mos** | ir**mos** | fazer**mos** | por**mos** |
| **vocês** | trabalhar**em** | aprender**em** | ir**em** | fazer**em** | por**em** |
| **eles/elas** | trabalhar**em** | aprender**em** | ir**em** | fazer**em** | por**em** |

**Note** **(1)** **Por** loses its circumflex accent in the personal infinitive form.

**Note (2)** The **personal infinitive** is very easily confused with the **future**

**subjunctive**, and the two forms are, in fact, identical in the regular

verbs of the **–ar**, **-er**, and **–ir** conjugations. It is easier to remember the difference if we bear in mind that the personal infinitive is formed with the **general infinitive** as its stem, and the future subjunctive is formed using the stem of the **third person preterite** tense. Compare and contrast the examples in the chart above with the future subjunctive form below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| fazer | ser | ter |
| fizer | for | tiver |
| fizeres | fores | tiveres |
| fizer | for | tiver |
| fizermos | formos | tivermos |
| fizerem | forem | tiverem |

**USES OF THE PERSONAL INFINITIVE**

1. **THE PERSONAL INFINITIVE WITH IMPERSONAL EXPRESSIONS**

The personal infinitive is used with **impersonal expressions** when the infinitive refers to a **specific subject**.

STUDY THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES:

É impossível **estarmos** em casa nessa hora.  
It’s impossible **for us to be** at home during that time.

É perigoso **atravessarem** a rua aqui.  
It’s dangerous **for you to cross** the road here.

When the subject of the infinitive is referred to using a **personal** **pronoun** (eu, tu, ele/ela, nós) the personal infinitive may also be used, especially when you want to emphasize the subject of a sentence.

EXAMPLE:

É preciso **lavares tu** os dentes antes de ir à cama.  
You must brush your teeth before going to bed.

1. **THE PERSONAL INFINITIVE WITH PREPOSITIONS**

The personal infinitive is used when the infinitive is contained within a **subordinate clause** and introduced by certain **prepositions**, the most common of which are shown below:

**ao**

**até**

**de**

**para**

**por**

Note: this combination can be used with the present, past and future tenses.

STUDY THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES.

As crianças ficavam aborrecidas/ **por não terem** nada para fazer.  
The children were bored because they didn’t have anything to do.

Todos os amigos encontraram-se/ **para se dirigirem** ao local da festa.  
All the friends met up in order to get themselves to the place where the party was held.

**Ao completarem** cinquenta anos de casamento/ os meus pais celebraram as bodas de ouro em Julho.   
On completing 50 years of marriage, my parents celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary in July.

**Ao confessarem** a verdade,/ os ladrões foram presos.  
On confessing the truth, the thieves were arrested.

Temos que aguentar inúmeros atrasos/**até que chegarmos** ao emprego.  
We have to put up with endless delays before we arrive at work.

1. **THE PERSONAL INFINITIVE WITH PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES**

The personal infinitive is also used with **prepositional phrases**, the most common of which are shown below.

|  |
| --- |
| **Apesar de Antes de Depois de No caso de No sentido de Por causa de Devido a A fim de** |

STUDY THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES:

**Apesar de não termos** muito dinheiro, sempre comemos bem.  
In spite of not having much money, we always eat well.

**Antes de fazeres** os concertos, apaga a electricidade.  
Before you do the repairs, shut off the electricity.

**Depois de saires** da casa, tranca a porta, se faz favor.  
When you leave the house, lock the door, please.

**No caso de encontrarem** a solução do problema, avisem-me.  
If you find a solution to the problem, let me know.

Assistiram à assembleia geral **a fim de se informarem** mais sobre o assunto.  
They attended the annual general meeting to find out more about the issue.

|  |
| --- |
|  |

1. **THE USE OF THE PERSONAL INFINITVE TO EXPRESS A REASON FOR DOING SOMETHING**

Instead of using **porque** plus the **infinitive** to express a reason for something not coming about, or for not doing something (não passei a prova porque não estudei, for example) you can use the preposition **por** plus the **personal infinitive** as a substitute.

STUDY THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES:

1. **Indicative**: Não fomos à aula hoje porque tivemos gripe.

**Personal infinitive**: Não fomos à aula **por termos** gripe.

We didn’t go to class today because we had a cold.

1. **Indicative**: Não mandei um cartão porque não soube o

dia do seu aniversário.

**Personal infinitive**: Não mandei um cartão **por não saber** o dia do seu aniversário.

I didn’t send a card, because I didn’t know the date of your birthday.

1. **THE USE OF THE PERSONAL INFINITIVE TO CLARIFY A SUBJECT**

The personal infinitive is also used when there are two separate subjects, or agents, of two or more verbs adjacent within the same sentence. In order to avoid any confusion, and for extra clarification, it is necessary to make it clear who the infinitive is referring to.

1. In the following example, the speaker wants to clarify that both she and her colleague have the same qualifications:

A minha colega conseguiu a promoção e eu não, **apesar de termos** as mesmas habilitações.  
My colleague got the job and I didn’t, in spite of us having the same qualifications.

1. In the following two examples, the subject of the infinitive is inserted after the auxiliary verb (pedir/deixar) which takes a different subject:

O guia pediu **aos turistas reunirem-se** na entrada do museu.  
The guide asked the tourists to meet up at the entrance to the museum.  
  
Deixe **as criançãs brincarem** em paz.  
Let the children play in peace.

1. In a complex sentence, the personal infinitive is necessary for clarification and emphasis:

Hoje em dia **muitas meninas** bebem demais, mas têm grande dificuldade em o **confessarem**.  
Many girls these days drink too much, but find it very difficult to admit it.

1. Or you can just use the personal infinitive for simple emphasis of the subject:

Não convém **entrarmos** na igreja vestidos nestas calções.  
It’s not appropriate for us to go into the church dressed in these shorts.

1. **THE USE OF THE PERSONAL INFINITIVE TO EXPRESS SARCASM OR INCREDULITY**

Two examples will illustrate this usage:

1. Eu, **parar** de fumar?

Me, give up smoking?

1. Nós, **desligarmos** nossos telemóveis?

Us, switch off our mobiles?

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by