English grammar

Infinitive and Gerund

Bare infinitive (without to)
We usually use infinitives with to in the English language.
I want to go. I told him to come.
The infinitive without to (bare infinitive) is used as follows.
1. After modal verbs - can, may, must, needn't, dare ...
I can bring it. He may take it. You must buy it. We needn't open it. He dared not tell me.
The verbs dare and need can also be followed by the infinitive with to. In such sentences we use do to make questions and negatives.
I dared not call you. x I didn't dare to call you. These two sentences have the same meaning, only the form is different.
You needn't listen to him. (You don't have to listen to him.) x You don't need to listen to him. (There is no need to listen.) These two sentences are different in the form and meaning, too.

2. After the verbs of senses - feel, hear, see, watch.
We saw you swim. I heard her sing.
It is more common, however, to use -ing form in English after the verbs of senses.
We saw you swimming. I heard her singing.
But: In the passive voice the infinitive with to must be used after these verbs.
She was seen to cry.

3. After some more expressions - let, make, would rather, had better, help.
Don't let him go. She made me drive. I'd rather finish it. You'd better start. I helped them carry it.
The verb help can also be followed by the infinitive with to.
I helped them to carry it.
But the passive voice is followed by the infinitive with to.
I was made to drive. He was let to go.

Infinitiv or gerund?
In English some verbs are followed by infinitive (They agreed to come), other verbs are followed by gerund (Did you enjoy flying?) and there are also verbs followed by infinitive and gerund (She began to work - She began working).

1. The verbs followed by infinitive only.
agree decide hope order promise
allow demand instruct permit refuse
appear encourage invite persuade remind
arrange fail learn plan seem
ask forbid manage prepare swear
choose force offer pretend warn

He decided to study at university. We hoped to find it. Did he seem to like it? They allowed me to smoke. I ordered my son to send it.

2. The expressions followed by infinitive.
be about make up one's mind turn out
do one's best set out
He was about to start. I did my best to learn it. I haven't made up my mind to start yet. It turned out to be your car. We set out to cut the tree.

3. The verbs followed by gerund only.
admit enjoy forgive mind risk
consider escape imagine miss suggest
delay excuse insist practise understand
dislike finish keep prevent
She admitted telling him. Did you escape writing the test? I don't want to risk coming late. 
Excuse, forgive and prevent are used with three different forms. 
Excuse my being late. Excuse me being late. Excuse me for being late.

4. The expressions followed by gerund.
be against can't help look forward to
be interested in care for it's no use/good
can't stand give up it's worth

I can't stand waiting for hours. I can't help laughing. Don't give up studying this chapter. It's no use working so late. Is the film worth seeing?

5. The verbs followed by infinitives and gerunds.
A. With the same meaning.
begin can't bear allow recommend it requires
start intend permit it needs it wants
continue advise

Did you continue driving/to drive? He can't bear smoking/to smoke.

If the verbs advise, allow, permit, recommend are used with the indirect object, they are followed by infinitive. If not, gerund must be used.
They didn't allow us to eat there. They didn't allow eating there.
She recommended John to read this book. She recommended reading this book.

After the expressions it needs/requires/wants gerund is more common than infinitive.
The car needs washing/to be washed. The flower wants watering/to be watered.

B. The verbs that have a different meaning with infinitive or gerund.

Remember
I remember watching the match. It was fantastic. We use gerund to talk about earlier actions.
I remembered to watch the match. And so I sat down and switched on the TV. The infinitive is used to talk about following actions.

Try
I tried calling him because I needed to test my new mobile phone. I made an experiment with my mobile.
I tried to call him because I needed to meet him. I made an attempt to get in touch with him.

Love/like/hate/prefer
In the conditional tense these verbs are used with the infinitive.
I'd like to drive. I'd love to drive. I'd hate to drive. I'd prefer to drive.

In other tenses they are used with infinitives or gerunds, but both forms have a slightly different meaning.
I like driving. I love driving. I hate driving. I prefer driving.
I like to drive. I love to drive. I hate to drive. I prefer to drive.

Compare:
I like going to the cinema. (I enjoy it.)
I like to go to the dentist twice a year. (I don't enjoy it, but I go there, because it is good for my health.)
I hate ironing. (It is my least favourite activity. I never enjoy it.)
I hate to iron on Sundays. (I don't mind ironing, but not on Sundays.)

Go on
After dinner he went on showing us his photos.
The gerund is used when we want to say that a previous activity continues.
He gave us a lecture on the Greek history. And then he went on to show us his photos from Greece.
The infinitive is used when we want to describe an activity that follows a previous action and is somehow connected to it.

Stop
I stopped smoking. This means that I do not smoke anymore.
I stopped to smoke. I made a pause to have a cigarette.
Mean
*I didn't mean to hurt you.* I say that I didn't do it on purpose.
*We can go to Spain. But it means spending more money.* In this sentence we describe the consequences.

Be afraid
*She was afraid of getting married.* Any marriage is something that frightens her.
*She was afraid to marry Bill.* She doesn't mind getting married, but the marriage with Bill frightens her.

I'm sorry
*I'm sorry for telling you.* I apologize for a previous action.
*I'm sorry to tell you that your flight will be delayed.* I apologize for something that will happen.

The infinitive with this expression can also mean sorrow.
*I'm sorry to hear that your wife is ill.*

Note
There are a lot of verbs and expressions that are used with gerunds and infinitives. In this chapter we only tried to mention the most frequently used verbs.