The Split Infinitive

What is a split infinitive? This question becomes easier when we first clarify what a regular infinitive is.

When we write sentences we often express an action or state of being by placing the word “to” before a simple verb. These usually function either as an adverb, a noun, or an adjective in the context of our sentence. Like this:

The whole point of taking a road trip, as you know, is to drive.

In the above sentence “to drive” is an infinitive.

Sometimes we write sentences with infinitive phrases. These are simply instances in which an infinitive is in a phrase with other words that modify the action or state being expressed. Like this:

The whole point of taking a road trip, as you know, is to drive leisurely.

The addition of the adverb “leisurely” gives us the infinitive phrase “to drive leisurely.”

And that’s all we mean by infinitive and infinitive phrase! Now with that in mind, we can go ahead and take a look at split infinitives.

An infinitive (like “to drive”) becomes split when we place one or more words in between the word “to” and whatever verb comes immediately after it. Usually we do this because we’re trying to modify the verb. It might look like this:

The whole point of taking a road trip, as you know, is to leisurely drive.
Now we’ve “split” our infinitive by placing a word or words in between “to” and “drive.”

But when it comes to grammar (the rules concerning how sentences are put together) split infinitives are not incorrect, per se. Sometimes in writing split infinitives are considered okay, especially ones employing a single adverb (like our above example). But when it comes to formal and academic writing, they should still be avoided. In general, when we do writing assignments for school or other kinds of academic writing, we should try not to split our infinitives.