Gerunds and Infinitives – Doing What Noun Phrases Do

Here is a brief review of the differences between gerunds and infinitives.

- **Gerunds** are formed with **ING**: walking, talking, thinking, listening
- **Infinitives** are formed with **TO**: to walk, to talk, to think, to listen

Gerunds and infinitives can do several jobs:

- **Both gerunds and infinitives** can be the **subject of a sentence**:
  - Writing in English is difficult.
  - To write in English is difficult.

- **Both gerunds and infinitives** can be the **object of a verb**:
  - I like writing in English.
  - I like to write in English.

But...

- **Only gerunds** can be the **object of a preposition**:
  - We are talking about writing in English.

It is often difficult to know when to use a gerund and when to use an infinitive. These guidelines may help you:

- **Gerunds** are often used when actions are **real, concrete or completed**:
  - I stopped smoking.
  - (The smoking was real and happened until I stopped.)

- **Infinitives** are often used when actions are **unreal, abstract, or future**:
  - I stopped to smoke.
  - (I was doing something else, and I stopped; the smoking had not happened yet.)
Yuri was in his first year at university, studying History. He was rather a lazy student, and he tended to avoid (work) whenever he could. In the middle of the semester, his history professor gave out an assignment, due in two weeks. Yuri intended (do) the assignment, but he postponed (write) it for a week. The following week, he forgot (do) it. The night before the assignment was due, he suddenly remembered it, and rushed to the library. He tried (read) as much as possible on the topic, but there wasn't enough time. Yuri considered (ask) for more time to do his paper, but the History professor was known to be very tough on students, so finally he decided (cheat) and copy his paper from somewhere else. He found an old article on the same topic, and quickly typed it out. The next day, he submitted the paper, (think) he could really get away with it.

The following week, he was alarmed (see) the professor approaching him, looking angry. "Is this your own work, or did you copy it?" asked the professor. Yuri denied (copy) the paper. "If you expect me (believe) that, you must be very stupid," said the professor. "Every word is taken from an article I wrote myself five years ago. Did you really think I would forget (write) it?"
Using these six sentences, write a paragraph using either a gerund or an infinitive where appropriate.

1. Yoko want/go/abroad.
2. Her mother/suggest/go/to Canada.
3. She decide/visit/ British Columbia.
4. She consider/study/in Vancouver.
5. However, she/hate/live/in big cities.
6. Finally, she choose/live/in Victoria.