Purpose clauses

They are introduced by the subordinating conjunction “so (that)” and by subordinators like the “to-infinitive, in order to, so as to”. These clauses are used to indicate the purpose of an action, that is, they explain why someone does something.

Uses:
- The “to-infinitive” is the most common structure to indicate purpose:
  Elvis ran to catch the train.
- “In order to, so as to” can also be used, but are more formal:
  She brought the subject up in order to annoy Sandra.
  I drove at 50 mph so as to save fuel.
- To express a negative purpose we cannot use “not” with a “to-infinitive”, we use “in order not to” and “so as not to”:
  I agreed to her suggestion in order not to upset her.
  We went along silently on tiptoe so as not to disturb anyone.
- The subordinating conjunction “so (that)” is also used for purpose:
  He lowered his voice so Doris couldn’t hear.
  Why don’t you start out early so that you don’t have to hurry?

Word order: purpose clauses can have an initial (in more formal contexts) or final position (i.e. they can be used before or after the main clause), but those introduced with “so that” and “so as to” have a final position:
1) (In order) + to infinitive ..., / subject + main verb...
   In order to achieve these goals, other factors must be considered.
   To assess the impact on education, we turn to some specific cases.
2) subject + main verb.../ to infinitive ...
   I just called to invite you to a party.
   We are saving money in order to buy a new car.
   They went on foot, so as not to be heard.
3) subject + main verb .../ subordinating conjunction “so that” + subject + verb ...:
   He works hard so that he can make a lot of money.

Tenses used:
1) After “so that” we use present tenses or the modal verbs “can”, “may” (formal) or “will” to refer to the present or future:
   Send the letter express so that she gets/ will get it before Tuesday.
   He works hard so that he can make a lot of money.
   We send them reports so that they may have full information about progress.
   (formal)
   After “so that” we use past tenses or the modal verbs “could”, “might” (formal), “should” or “would” to refer to the past:
   He walked quietly, so that nobody could hear his footsteps.
   She reserved a table so that she wouldn’t have to wait in a queue.
   They held the meeting on a Saturday so that everybody should be free to attend.
   I spent a year in Germany so that I might learn German. (formal)

2) With the other subordinators, we always use a to-infinitive form:
   I just called to invite you to a party.
   We are saving money in order to buy a new car.
   I took photos of the baby so as to send them to my friends abroad.
* Notice: we can also use the preposition “for” in the following cases:

1) **People’s purposes**: the preposition “for” can be used to talk about somebody’s purpose in doing something, but only followed by a **noun**:
   
   We stopped at the pub **for a drink**.
   
   I went to the college **for an interview** with Professor Taylor.
   
   “For” is not used to express a person’s purpose before a verb. The to-infinitive is used for this:
   
   We stopped at the pub **for having a drink**.
   
   We stopped at the pub **to have a drink**.

2) **The purpose of things**: the preposition “for” can be used followed by an -ing form to talk about the “purpose” of a thing, i.e. what it is used for, especially when the thing is the subject of the clause. The to-infinitive is also possible:
   
   This heater is **for keeping/to keep** the plants warm in winter.
   This machine is used **for cutting/to cut** plastic.
   This is a knife **for cutting bread/to cut** bread.
   When the subject is a person, we use a to-infinitive:
   I put the heater on **to keep** the plants warm.
   **We use altimeters to measure** height above sea level.

3) **After reactions**: the preposition “for” can be used followed by an -ing form, after a positive or negative reaction, to explain the behaviour that caused the reaction:
   
   We are grateful to you **for helping** us out.
   I’m angry with you **for waking** me up.
   They punished the child **for lying**.

* Notice: the “to infinitive” can also be used in noun clauses. When we use them in noun clauses, they function as a noun (subject, object, etc.):

   **To fly an airplane upside down** can be very dangerous. (The infinitive clause is the subject of the sentence).
   I want **to enjoy myself tonight**. (The infinitive clause is the direct object of the verb **want**).