

The Intransitive Verb

Recognize an *intransitive verb* when you see one.

An intransitive verb has two characteristics. First, it is an action verb, expressing a doable activity like **arrive, go, lie, sneeze, sit, die**, etc. Second, unlike a transitive verb, it will *not* have a direct object receiving the action.

Here are some examples of intransitive verbs:

Huffing and puffing, we **arrived** at the classroom door with only seven seconds to spare.

Arrived = intransitive verb.

James **went** to the campus cafe for a steaming bowl of squid eyeball stew.

Went = intransitive verb.

To escape the midday sun, the cats **lie** in the shade under our cars.

Lie = intransitive verb.

Around fresh ground pepper, Sheryl **sneezes** with violence.

Sneezes = intransitive verb.

In the evenings, Glenda **sits** on the front porch to admire her immaculate lawn.

Sits = intransitive verb.

Flipped on its back, the beetle that Clara soaked with insecticide **dies** under the refrigerator.

Dies = intransitive verb.

Realize that many verbs can be both transitive and intransitive.

An action verb with a direct object is transitive while an action verb with no direct object is intransitive. Some verbs, such as **arrive, go, lie, sneeze, sit, and die**, are always intransitive; it is impossible for a direct object to follow.

Other action verbs, however, can be transitive *or* intransitive, depending on what follows in the sentence. Compare these examples:

Because of blood sugar problems, Rosa always **eats** before leaving for school.

Eats = intransitive verb.

If there is no leftover pizza, Rosa usually **eats** whole-grain cereal.

Eats = transitive verb; **cereal** = direct object.

During cross-country practice, Damien **runs** over hills, through fields, across the river, and along the highway.

Runs = intransitive verb.

In the spring, Damien **will run** his first marathon.

Will run = transitive verb; **marathon** = direct object.



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The Transitive Verb

Recognize a *transitive verb* when you see one.

A transitive verb has two characteristics. First, it is an action verb, expressing a doable activity like ***kick, want, paint, write, eat, clean***, etc. Second, it must have a direct object, something or someone who receives the action of the verb.

Here are some examples of transitive verbs:

Sylvia ***kicked*** Juan under the table.

Kicked = transitive verb; ***Juan*** = direct object.

Joshua ***wants*** a smile from Leodine, his beautiful but serious lab partner.

Wants = transitive verb; ***smile*** = direct object.

Cornelius ***painted*** the canvas in Jackson Pollock fashion, dribbling bright colors from a heavily soaked brush.

Painted = transitive verb; ***canvas*** = direct object.

Alicia ***wrote*** a love poem on a restaurant napkin.

Wrote = transitive verb; ***poem*** = direct object.

Antonio ***eats*** lima beans drenched in brown gravy.

Eats = transitive verb; ***lima beans*** = direct object.

Pinky the poodle ***cleans*** the dirty supper dishes with his tongue before Grandma ***loads*** the "prewashed" items into dishwasher.

Cleans, loads = transitive verbs; ***dishes, items*** = direct objects.

Important note: When no direct object follows an action verb, the verb is *intransitive*.



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The Direct Object

Recognize a *direct object* when you see one.

A direct object will follow a transitive verb [a type of action verb]. Direct objects can be nouns, pronouns, phrases, or clauses. If you can identify the subject and verb in a sentence, then finding the direct object—if one exists—is easy. Just remember this simple formula:

SUBJECT + **VERB** + *what? or who?* = **DIRECT OBJECT**

Here are examples of the formula in action:

Zippy and Maurice played **soccer** with a grapefruit pulled from a backyard tree.

Zippy, Maurice = subjects; **played** = verb. Zippy and Maurice played *what?* **Soccer** = direct object.

Zippy accidentally kicked **Maurice** in the shin.

Zippy = subject; **kicked** = verb. Zippy kicked *who?* **Maurice** = direct object.

Sometimes direct objects are single words like **soccer** and **Maurice**; other times they are phrases or clauses. The formula nevertheless works the same.

Sylina hates **biting her fingernails**.

Sylina = subject; **hates** = verb. Sylina hates *what?* **Biting her fingernails** [a gerund phrase] = direct object.

Even worse, Sylina hates **when Mom lectures her about hand care**.

Sylina = subject; **hates** = verb. Sylina hates *what?* **When Mom lectures her about hand care** [a subordinate clause] = direct object.

Direct objects can also follow verbals—infinitives, gerunds, and participles. Use this abbreviated version of the formula:

VERBAL + *what? or who?* = **DIRECT OBJECT**

Here are some examples:

To see **magnified blood cells**, Gus squinted into the microscope on the lab table.

To see = infinitive. To see *what?* **Blood cells** = direct object.

Gus bought contact lenses because he wanted to see **the beautiful Miranda**, his lab partner, more clearly.

To see = infinitive. To see *who?* **The beautiful Miranda** = direct object.

Dragging **her seventy-five pound German shepherd** through the door is Roseanne's least favorite part of going to the vet.

Dragging = gerund. Dragging *what?* **Her seventy-five pound German shepherd** = direct object.

Heaping **his plate** with fried chicken, Clyde winked at Delores, the cook.

Heaping = participle. Heaping *what?* **His plate** = direct object.

Don't mistake a direct object for a subject complement.

Only action verbs can have direct objects. If the verb is linking, then the word that answers the *what?* or *who?* question is a subject complement.

The space alien from the planet Zortek accidentally locked **his keys** in his space ship.

Alien = subject; **locked** = action verb. The space alien locked *what?* **His keys** = direct object.

The space alien was **happy** to find a spare key taped under the wing.

Alien = subject; **was** = linking verb. The space alien was *what?* **Happy** = subject complement.

Don't use subject pronouns as direct objects.

The chart below contains subject and object pronouns. Because direct objects are *objects*, always use the objective form of the pronoun when you need a direct object.

Subject Pronouns	Object Pronouns
I	me
we	us
you	you
he, she, it	him, her, it
they	them
who	whom

Check out these sample sentences:

After I give my dog Oreo a scoop of peanut butter, she always kisses **me** with her sticky tongue.

She = subject; **kisses** = verb. She kisses *who*? **Me** = direct object.

Because Jo had skipped Mr. Duncan's class five times in a row, she ducked out of sight whenever she spotted **him** on campus.

She = subject; **spotted** = verb. She spotted *who*? **Him** = direct object.

Because David was always eating her food, Theresa sneaked corn chips and candy bars into her room and hid **them** in the clothes hamper.

Theresa = subject; **hid** = verb. Theresa hid *what*? **Them** = direct object.



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The Indirect Object

Recognize an *indirect object* when you see one.

Indirect objects are rare. You can read for pages before you encounter one. For an indirect object to appear, a sentence must first have a direct object.

Direct objects follow transitive verbs [a type of action verb]. If you can identify the subject and verb in a sentence, then finding the direct object—if one exists—is easy. Just remember this simple formula:

SUBJECT + **VERB** + *what? or who?* = **DIRECT OBJECT**

Here are examples of the formula in action:

Jim built a *sandcastle* on the beach.

Jim = subject; **built** = verb. Jim built *what?* **Sandcastle** = direct object.

Sammy and Maria brought *Billie Lou* to the party.

Sammy, Maria = subject; **brought** = verb. Sammy and Maria brought *who?* **Billie Lou** = direct object.

To explain the broken lamp, we told a *lie*.

We = subject; **told** = verb. We told *what?* **Lie** = direct object.

When someone [or something] *gets* the direct object, that word is the *indirect object*. Look at these new versions of the sentences above:

Jim built his *granddaughter* a *sandcastle* on the beach.

Jim = subject; **built** = verb. Jim built *what?* **Sandcastle** = direct object. Who got the sandcastle? **Granddaughter** = indirect object.

So that Darren would have company at the party, Sammy and Maria brought *him* a *blind date*.

Sammy, Maria = subjects; **brought** = verb. Sammy and Maria brought *who?* **Blind date** = direct object. Who got the blind date? **Him** = indirect object.

To explain the broken lamp, we told *Mom* a *lie*.

We = subject; **told** = verb. We told *what?* **Lie** = direct object. Who got the lie? **Mom** = indirect object.

Sometimes, the indirect object will occur in a prepositional phrase beginning with **to** or **for**. Read these two sentences:

Tomas paid *the mechanic* 200 dollars to fix the squeaky brakes.

Tomas paid 200 dollars *to the mechanic* to fix the squeaky brakes.

In both versions, the *mechanic* [the *indirect* object] gets the *200 dollars* [the *direct* object].

When the direct object is a pronoun rather than a noun, putting the indirect object in a prepositional phrase becomes a necessary modification. The preposition smoothes out the sentence so that it sounds natural. Check out these examples:

Leslie didn't have any money for a sandwich, so Smitty purchased *her* it.

Blech! That version sounds awful! But now try the sentence with the indirect object after a preposition:

Leslie didn't have any money for a sandwich, so Smitty purchased it *for her*.

Locating the indirect object *her* in a prepositional phrase lets the sentence sound natural! Now read this example:

After Michael took generous spoonfuls of stuffing, he passed *us* it.

Ewww! This version sounds awful too! But with a quick fix, we can solve the problem:

After Michael took generous spoonfuls of stuffing, he passed it *to us*.

With the indirect object *us* in a prepositional phrase, we have an improvement!



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The Preposition

Recognize a *preposition* when you see one.

Prepositions are the words that indicate location. Usually, prepositions show this location in the physical world. Check out the three examples below:



The puppy is **on** the floor.



The puppy is **in** the trash can.



The puppy is **beside** the phone.

On, **in**, and **beside** are all prepositions. They are showing *where* the puppy is. Prepositions can also show location in *time*. Read the next three examples:

At midnight, Jill craved mashed potatoes with grape jelly.

In the spring, I always vow to plant tomatoes but end up buying them at the supermarket.

During the marathon, Iggy's legs complained with sharp pains shooting up his thighs.

At midnight, **in the spring**, and **during the marathon** all show location in time. Because there are so many possible locations, there are quite a few prepositions. Below is the complete list.

about	concerning	onto
above	despite	on top of
according to	down	out
across	during	out of
after	except	outside
against	except for	over
along	excepting	past
along with	for	regarding
among	from	round
apart from	in	since
around	in addition to	through
as	in back of	throughout
as for	in case of	till
at	in front of	to
because of	in place of	toward
before	inside	under
behind	in spite of	underneath

below	instead of	unlike
beneath	into	until
beside	like	up
between	near	upon
beyond	next	up to
but*	of	with
by	off	within
by means of	on	without

* **But** is very seldom a preposition. When it is used as a preposition, **but** means the same as **except**—*Everyone ate frog legs but Jamie*. **But** usually functions as a coordinating conjunction.

Understand how to form a prepositional phrase.

Prepositions generally introduce prepositional phrases. Prepositional phrases look like this:

PREPOSITION + **OPTIONAL MODIFIERS** + **NOUN, PRONOUN, OR GERUND**

Here are some examples:

At school

At = preposition; **school** = noun.

According to us

According to = preposition; **us** = pronoun.

By chewing

By = preposition; **chewing** = gerund.

Under the stove

Under = preposition; **the** = modifier; **stove** = noun.

In the crumb-filled, rumpled sheets

In = preposition; **the, crumb-filled, rumpled** = modifiers; **sheets** = noun.

Realize that some prepositions also function as subordinate conjunctions.

Some prepositions also function as subordinate conjunctions. These prepositions are **after, as, before, since, and until**. A subordinate conjunction will have both a subject and a verb following it, forming a subordinate clause.

Look at these examples:

After Sam and Esmerelda kissed goodnight

After = subordinate conjunction; **Sam, Esmerelda** = subjects; **kissed** = verb.

As Jerome buckled on the parachute

As = subordinate conjunction; **Jerome** = subject; **buckled** = verb.

Before I eat these frog legs

Before = subordinate conjunction; **I** = subject; **eat** = verb.

Since we have enjoyed the squid eyeball stew

Since = subordinate conjunction; **we** = subject; **have enjoyed** = verb.

Until your hiccups stop

Until = subordinate conjunction; **hiccups** = subject; **stop** = verb.

If you find a noun [with or without modifiers] following one of these five prepositions, then all you have is a prepositional phrase. Look at these examples:

After the killer calculus test

After = preposition; **the, killer, calculus** = modifiers; **test** = noun.

As a good parent

As = preposition; **a, good** = modifiers; **parent** = noun.

Before dinner

Before = preposition; **dinner** = noun.

Since the breakup

Since = preposition; **the** = modifier; **breakup** = noun.

Until midnight

Until = preposition; **midnight** = noun.



The Prepositional Phrase

Recognize a *prepositional phrase* when you see one.

At the minimum, a prepositional phrase will begin with a preposition and end with a noun, pronoun, gerund, or clause, the "object" of the preposition.

The object of the preposition will often have one or more modifiers to describe it. These are the patterns for a prepositional phrase:

PREPOSITION + **NOUN, PRONOUN, GERUND, OR CLAUSE**

PREPOSITION + **MODIFIER(S)** + **NOUN, PRONOUN, GERUND,
OR CLAUSE**

Here are some examples of the most basic prepositional phrase:

At home

At = preposition; **home** = noun.

In time

In = preposition; **time** = noun.

From Richie

From = preposition; **Richie** = noun.

With me

With = preposition; **me** = pronoun.

By singing

By = preposition; **singing** = gerund.

About what we need

About = preposition; **what we need** = noun clause.

Most prepositional phrases are longer, like these:

From my grandmother

From = preposition; **my** = modifier; **grandmother** = noun.

Under the warm blanket

Under = preposition; **the, warm** = modifiers; **blanket** = noun.

In the weedy, overgrown garden

In = preposition; **the, weedy, overgrown** = modifiers; **garden** = noun.

Along the busy, six-lane highway

Along = preposition; **the, busy, six-lane** = modifiers; **highway** = noun.

Without excessively worrying

Without = preposition; **excessively** = modifier; **worrying** = gerund.

Understand what prepositional phrases *do* in a sentence.

A prepositional phrase will function as an adjective or adverb. As an adjective, the prepositional phrase will answer the question *Which one?*

Read these examples:

The book **on the bathroom floor** is swollen from shower steam.

Which book? The one **on the bathroom floor!**

The sweet potatoes **in the vegetable bin** are green with mold.

Which sweet potatoes? The ones forgotten **in the vegetable bin!**

The note **from Beverly** confessed that she had eaten the leftover pizza.

Which note? The one **from Beverly!**

As an adverb, a prepositional phrase will answer questions such as *How? When?* or *Where?*

Freddy is stiff **from yesterday's long football practice**.

How did Freddy get stiff? **From yesterday's long football practice!**

Before class, Josh begged his friends for a pencil.

When did Josh do his begging? **Before class!**

Feeling brave, we tried the Dragon Breath Burritos **at Tito's Taco Palace**.

Where did we eat the spicy food? **At Tito's Taco Palace!**

Remember that a prepositional phrase will *never* contain the subject of a sentence.

Sometimes a noun within the prepositional phrase seems the logical subject of a verb. Don't fall for that trick! You will *never* find a subject in a prepositional phrase. Look at this example:

Neither *of these cookbooks* contains the recipe for Manhattan-style squid eyeball stew.

Cookbooks do indeed contain recipes. In this sentence, however, **cookbooks** is part of the prepositional phrase **of these cookbooks**. **Neither**—whatever a neither is—is the subject for the verb **contains**.

Neither is singular, so you need the singular form of the verb, **contains**. If you *incorrectly* identified **cookbooks** as the subject, you might write **contain**, the plural form, and thus commit a subject-verb agreement error.

Some prepositions—such as **along with** and **in addition to**—indicate "more to come." They will make you think that you have a plural subject when in fact you don't. Don't fall for that trick either!

Read this example:

Tommy, *along with the other students*, breathed a sigh of relief when Mrs. Markham announced that she was postponing the due date for the research essay.

Logically, more than one student is happy with the news. But Tommy is the only subject of the verb **breathed**. His classmates count in the real world, but in the sentence, they don't matter, locked as they are in the prepositional phrase.



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The Object of a Preposition

Recognize an *object of a preposition* when you see one.

Prepositions often begin prepositional phrases. To complete the phrase, the preposition usually teams up with a noun, pronoun, or gerund, or the *object* of the preposition. Here are some examples:

At noon

At = preposition; **noon** = noun or the *object* of the preposition.

Behind them

Behind = preposition; **them** = pronoun or the *object* of the preposition.

Without sneezing

Without = preposition; **sneezing** = gerund or the *object* of the preposition.

The object of the preposition will often have modifiers that add description:

At the kitchen counter

At = preposition; **the, kitchen** = modifiers; **counter** = noun or the *object* of the preposition.

Between us only

Between = preposition; **us** = pronoun or the *object* of the preposition; **only** = modifier.

Without completely finishing

Without = preposition; **completely** = modifier; **finishing** = gerund or the *object* of the preposition.

Infrequently, a clause will be the object of the preposition, as in this example:

In class today, we talked about **what Mr. Duncan expects in our next research essay**.

About = preposition; **what Mr. Duncan expects in our next research essay** = noun clause or the *object* of the preposition.

