

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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