

THE DIRECT OBJECT

Recognize a direct object when you find 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 the **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:

Selena hates **biting her fingernails**.

Selena = subject; **hates** = verb. Selena hates *what?* **biting her fingernails** (a **gerund phrase**) = direct object.

Even worse, Selena dreads **when Mom lectures her about hand care**.

Selena = subject; **dreads** = verb. Selena dreads *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 examples:

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

To see = infinitive. To see *what?* **Magnified 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.

Do not confuse a direct object with 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**.

Compare these two sentences:

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

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.

Do not 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.

| SUBJECT PRONOUNS | OBJECT PRONOUNS |
|------------------|-----------------|
| I | me |
| we | us |
| you | you |
| he, she, it | him, her, it |
| they | them |
| who | whom |

Read these examples:

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 has skipped Professor Duncan's class five times in a row, she ducks out of sight whenever she spots **him** on campus.

She = subject; **spots** = verb. She spots *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.

