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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>SUBJECT PRONOUNS</strong></th>
<th><strong>OBJECT PRONOUNS</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
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<td>who</td>
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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.*