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:

\[
\text{Subject} + \text{Verb} + \text{what? or who?} = \text{Direct Object}
\]

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:

\[
\text{Verbal} + \text{what? or who?} = \text{Direct Object}
\]

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Pronouns</th>
<th>Object Pronouns</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>me</td>
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<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>us</td>
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<td>you</td>
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<td>he, she, it</td>
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<td>they</td>
<td>them</td>
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<td>who</td>
<td>whom</td>
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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.