

# THE DIRECT OBJECT

## Recognize a direct object when you find one.

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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.

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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.

