THE INDIRECT OBJECT

Recognize an indirect object when you find one.

Indirect objects are rare. You can read for paragraphs before you encounter one. For an indirect object to appear, a sentence must first have a direct object.

Direct objects follow transitive verbs (a type of action verb). 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:

Jim built a sandcastle on the beach.


Sammy and Maria brought Billie Lou to the party.

Sammy, Maria = subjects; brought = verb. Sammy and Maria brought who? Billie Lou = direct object.

To explain the broken lamp, we told a lie.

We = subject; told = verb. We told what? Lie = direct object.

Whoever (or whatever) gets that direct object is the indirect object.

Consider these new versions of the sentences above:

Jim built his granddaughter a sandcastle on the beach.


So that Darren would have company at the party, Sammy and Maria brought him a blind date.
**An indirect object will sometimes begin with to or for.**

Occasionally, the indirect object will occur in a **prepositional phrase**.

Read these two sentences:

- Tomas paid the mechanic **200 dollars** to fix the squeaky brakes.
- Tomas paid **200 dollars** to the mechanic to fix the squeaky brakes.

In both versions, the **mechanic** (indirect object) receives the **200 dollars** (direct object).

When the direct object is a **pronoun** rather than a **noun**, putting the indirect object in a prepositional phrase often becomes a necessary modification. The **preposition** smooths out the sentence.

Consider this example:

- Leslie did not have enough money for the sandwich, so Smitty purchased her it.

Blech! That version is awful! But now try the sentence with the indirect object after a preposition:

- Leslie did not have enough money for the sandwich, so Smitty purchased it for her.

Locating the indirect object **her** in a prepositional phrase makes the sentence less choppy!

Now read this example:

- After Michael helped himself to the stuffing, he passed us it.
Ewww! This version is awful too! But with a quick fix, we can solve the problem:

After Michael helped himself to the stuffing, he passed it to us.

With the indirect object us in a prepositional phrase, we have a smooth sentence!