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:

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

Here are examples of the formula in action:

Zippy and Maurice played \textit{soccer} with a grapefruit pulled from a backyard tree.

\textit{Zippy, Maurice} = subjects; \textit{played} = verb. Zippy and Maurice played \textit{what? Soccer} = direct object.

Zippy accidentally kicked \textit{Maurice} in the shin.

\textit{Zippy} = subject; \textit{kicked} = verb. Zippy kicked \textit{who? Maurice} = direct object.

Sometimes direct objects are single words like \textit{soccer} and \textit{Maurice}; other times they are phrases or clauses. The formula nevertheless works the same:

Selena hates \textit{biting her fingernails}.

\textit{Selena} = subject; \textit{hates} = verb. Selena hates \textit{what? Biting her fingernails} (a gerund phrase) = direct object.

Even worse, Selena dreads \textit{when Mom lectures her about hand care}.

\textit{Selena} = subject; \textit{dreads} = verb. Selena dreads \textit{what? When Mom lectures her about hand care} (a subordinate clause) = direct object.

Direct objects can also follow verbals—\textit{infinitives, gerunds}, and \textit{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.

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**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>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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<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>you</td>
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<tr>
<td>he, she, it</td>
<td>him, her, it</td>
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<tr>
<td>they</td>
<td>them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who</td>
<td>whom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.