

Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

There are three different kinds of verbs in the English language – transitive, intransitive and linking verbs. This handout will focus on both transitive and intransitive verbs.

What is a transitive verb?

A verb is a word that conveys action to the reader. A transitive verb is a verb that takes a *direct object* (the thing, or person, upon which the action is performed). Most verbs in English are transitive verbs. Here are some examples of transitive verbs (the verbs and their objects appear in *italics*).

She *has* a *car*.

Ying *washed* the *dishes* yesterday.

Heinrich will *photograph* his friend's *wedding*.

Ask yourself if the thing the verb is being done to is visible within the sentence. If it is, you probably have a transitive verb.

What is an intransitive verb?

An intransitive verb is the opposite of a transitive verb – it appears in the sentence without a direct object. The thing or person on which the verb acts is not visible within the sentence. Here are some examples:

Don't *go*.

The tornado *happened* at noon.

They *spoke* through the afternoon.

Activity

Determine if the italicized verb in each sentence is transitive or intransitive.

1. Ron Burgundy has been *gossiping* since early this morning.
2. Jack White *founded* The White Stripes.
3. I *lived* in Las Vegas for a very brief period.
4. I *make* an excellent shrimp stir-fry.
5. Michael Simon *gave* an outrageous speech yesterday.
6. Stephen Curry *slipped* on his way to the basket.

7. The prosecution *proved* the defendant's guilt.
8. George Lucas *rejected* the script under false pretenses.
9. I *worked* for ten hours yesterday.
10. The GOP *nominated* a questionable candidate.

Answer Key for Activity

1. intransitive
2. transitive
3. intransitive
4. transitive
5. transitive
6. intransitive
7. transitive
8. transitive
9. intransitive
10. transitive

What Are Transitive And Intransitive Verbs?

A **transitive** verb is one that is used with an **object**: a **noun**, **phrase**, or **pronoun** that refers to the person or thing that is affected by the action of the verb. In the following sentences, *admire*, *maintain*, *face*, and *love* are transitive verbs:

*I **admire** your courage.*

*We need to **maintain** product quality.*

*I couldn't **face** him today.*

*She **loves** animals.*

Some transitive verbs can be used with a **direct object** and an **indirect object**:

*Liz brought **her** **a glass of water**.*

[indirect object] [direct object]

*He sent **her** **a letter**.*

[indirect object] [direct object]

Here is a short list of some common verbs that can take a direct and indirect object:

Verb	Example
give	<i>Pat gave me a book for my birthday.</i>
buy	<i>Can I buy you a drink?</i>
pass	<i>Paul passed her a cup of coffee.</i>
make	<i>Shall I make us some lunch?</i>
sell	<i>Jenny was trying to sell me her car.</i>
take	<i>We took Maria some flowers and wine.</i>
show	<i>Show me your holiday photos.</i>
offer	<i>The company has offered me a job.</i>
leave	<i>Leave me a message and I'll get back to you.</i>
wish	<i>Everyone wished us all the best for the future.</i>
lend	<i>Could you lend me £20?</i>
cost	<i>Ben's mistake cost him his job.</i>

Intransitive verbs

An **intransitive** verb does not have an object. In the following sentences, *cry*, *work*, *laugh*, and *talk* are intransitive verbs:

*The baby **was crying**.*

*I **work** for a large firm in Paris.*

*They **laughed** uncontrollably.*

*We **talked** for hours.*

Transitive and intransitive verbs

Many verbs can be transitive or intransitive. For example:

*The choir **sang** carols. [transitive]*

*Pete always **sings** in the bath. [intransitive]*

*She **left** London on June 6. [transitive]*

*I want to **leave** early. [intransitive]*

Here is a short list of some common verbs that can be transitive or intransitive:

Verb	Transitive	Intransitive
move	<i>Could you move your car please?</i>	<i>The trees were moving in the breeze.</i>
start	<i>Taylor was found guilty of starting the fire.</i>	<i>The match starts at 3 p.m.</i>
change	<i>Marriage hasn't changed her.</i>	<i>The area's changed greatly in the last decade.</i>
close	<i>Close your eyes; I've got a surprise for you.</i>	<i>Most shops here close at 5.30 p.m.</i>
open	<i>Open the window; it's too hot in here!</i>	<i>The museum opens at 10 a.m.</i>
stop	<i>Greg tried to stop her from leaving.</i>	<i>When the rain stopped, we went for a walk.</i>
do	<i>Have you done your coursework?</i>	<i>Joe's doing well in his new job.</i>
set	<i>Kate set a chair next to the bed.</i>	<i>The sun was setting and a red glow filled the sky.</i>
run	<i>Michelle used to run a restaurant.</i>	<i>The path ran over the hill.</i>
live	<i>Our cat lived till he was 10.</i>	<i>He was living a life of luxury abroad.</i>
wash	<i>Have you washed your hands?</i>	<i>I washed, dressed, and went out.</i>
write	<i>Write your name here.</i>	<i>Kevin couldn't read or write.</i>

Adapted from: <https://www.lexico.com/en/grammar/transitive-and-intransitive-verbs>