

Transitive vs. Intransitive Verbs: Explanation & Exercises

Learning the difference between **transitive** and **intransitive verbs** can help students of English improve their knowledge of English grammar, which improves fluency.

1. Transitive verb

A **transitive verb** is a verb that can have an object. For example, the verb *kick*.

Sandra kicked the ball.

(subject)+(verb)+(object).

The object of the verb *kick* in the above sentence is *the ball*. Transitive verbs like *kick* are common in English. They describe actions that can be done to something. For example,

- She bought the cake.
- She caught the ball.
- He has found a problem.
- He will take a train.
- He is reading a letter.

Hint: Think of 'transitive' as a verb that can be 'transferred' an object. If it can take an object, it can be used as a transitive verb.

2. Intransitive verb

An **intransitive verb** is a verb that cannot have an object. For example, the verb *sleep*.

People sleep.

(subject)+(verb).

In this example, there is only a **subject** (the person doing the action) and a **verb**. There is no object. Here are some other examples of intransitive verbs:

Identifying Intransitive and Transitive Verbs

To know if the verb in a sentence is transitive, you need to see if the verb has an object in the sentence. To do that, ask *What* the subject did with the verb. For example:

- *She opened the door.* > She opened *what?* = the door. 'The door' is an object, so we know the verb is used transitively.
- *The manager will close the store early.* > The manager will close *what?* = the store. This means the verb is transitive.
- *The children sat.* > The children sat *what?* = ?? This question doesn't make sense. You cannot *sit* something because *sit* is only an *intransitive* verb.

Note that not everything that comes after a verb is an object. Compare these two sentences.

- *The children sat.* (Intransitive — the verb *sat* has no object)
- *The children sat in chairs.* (Intransitive — *in* is a preposition, so *in chairs* is a **prepositional phrase** that describes *where* the children sat; it does not tell you *what* the children sat.)
- *The children sat happily in chairs with their friends.* (Intransitive, again. Here, *happily* is an adverb describing *how* they sat, and *in chairs* and *with their friends* are phrases started with prepositions.)

Verbs that Can Be Both Transitive and Intransitive

Some verbs have **both** a transitive and intransitive form.

- *The dog eats.* (Intransitive — the verb has no object)
- *The dog eats food.* (Transitive — the object 'food' means the verb is used transitively).
- *Roger cleans often.* (Intransitive — there is no object. *Often* is an adverb describing *how* often something happens. It does not tell you *what* Roger cleans).
- *Roger cleans his bathroom often.* (Transitive — Roger cleans what? His bathroom. That is the object of the verb.)

This is true of many verbs (there are too many to list). If you do not know if a verb is transitive or intransitive (or both), you can look it up in the dictionary.

The 4 Types of Sentence Structure

What is a Sentence?

A set of words that is complete in itself, typically containing a subject and predicate, conveying a statement, question, exclamation, or command, and consisting of a main clause and sometimes one or more subordinate clauses.

we saw the minimum requirements for the formation of a sentence. Now we can look in more detail at the four types of **sentence structure**.

The 4 types of Sentence Structure

- 1 simple
 - 2 compound
 - 3 complex
 - 4 compound-complex
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Simple Sentence Structure

A **simple sentence** consists of one independent clause. (An independent clause contains a subject and verb and expresses a complete thought.)

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE

- I like coffee.
- Mary likes tea.
- The earth goes round the sun.
- Mary did not go to the party.

Compound Sentence Structure

A **compound sentence** is two (or more) independent clauses joined by a conjunction or semi-colon. Each of these clauses could form a sentence alone.

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE COORDINATING CONJUNCTION INDEPENDENT CLAUSE

- I like coffee and Mary likes tea.
- Mary went to work but John went to the party.
- Our car broke down; we came last.

There are seven coordinating conjunctions:

- *and, but, or, nor, for, yet, so*

Complex Sentence Structure

A **complex sentence** consists of an independent clause plus a dependent clause. (A dependent clause starts with a subordinating conjunction or a relative pronoun, and contains a subject and verb but does not express a complete thought.)

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTION DEPENDENT CLAUSE

- We missed our plane because we were late.

- Our dog barks when she hears a noise.
- He left in a hurry after he got a phone call.
- Do you know the man who is talking to Mary?

Here are some common subordinating conjunctions:

- *after, although, as, because, before, how, if, once, since, than, that, though, till, until, when, where, whether, while*

Here are the five basic relative pronouns:

- *that, which, who, whom, whose*

Compound-Complex Sentence Structure

A **compound-complex sentence** consists of at least two independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.



- John didn't come because he was ill so Mary was not happy.
- He left in a hurry after he got a phone call but he came back five minutes later.

Independent clause: An independent clause can stand alone as a sentence. It contains a subject and a verb and is a complete idea.

- o I like spaghetti.
- o He reads many books.

Dependent clause: A dependent clause is not a complete sentence. It must be attached to an independent clause to become complete. This is also known as a subordinate clause.

- o **Although** I like spaghetti,...
- o **Because** he reads many books,...

Subject: A person, animal, place, thing, or concept that does an action. Determine the subject in a sentence by asking the question "Who or what?"

- o I like spaghetti.
- o He reads many books.

Verb: Expresses what the person, animal, place, thing, or concept does. Determine the verb in a sentence by asking the question "What was the action or what happened?"

- o I like spaghetti.
- o He reads many books.
- o The movie is good. (The *be* verb is also sometimes referred to as a copula or a linking verb. It links the subject, in this case **the movie**, to the complement or the predicate of the sentence, in this case, **good**.)

Object: A person, animal, place, thing, or concept that receives the action. Determine the object in a sentence by asking the question "The subject did what?" or "To whom?/For whom?"

- o I like spaghetti.
- o He reads many books.

Prepositional Phrase: A phrase that begins with a preposition (i.e., in, at for, behind, until, after, of, during) and modifies a word in the sentence. A preposition phrase answers one of many questions. Here are a few examples: "Where? Whom? In what way?"

- o I like spaghetti for dinner.
- o He reads many books in the library.

CLASSIFICATION OF ESSAYS

Essays may be classified as Narrative Essays, Descriptive Essays, Expository Essays, Reflective Essays and Imaginative Essays. The classification is useful, so long as it is remembered that these classes are not mutually exclusive, and that some essays may partake of the peculiarities of more than one class. For example, a narrative essay may contain a good deal of description ; and essays of all classes should be more or less reflective, for the original idea of this form of composition is an expression of the writer's own feelings and opinions about a given subject. For this reason, let us begin with—

1. Reflective Essays.—A reflection is a thought on some subject—on an idea arising in the mind. So a reflective essay consists of reflections or thoughts on some topic, which is generally of an abstract nature ; for example ; (a) *habits, qualities, etc.*, such as truthfulness, thrift, temperance, cowardice, heroism, patriotism, industry etc., (b) *social, political and domestic topics*, such as riches and poverty, caste, democracy, liberty, government, family life, education, marriage, business, etc., (c) *philosophical subjects*, such as right and wrong, reality, consciousness, the meaning of the universe, etc. ; or (d) *religious and theological topics*.

In treating such themes, you should try (i) to explain, for example, the importance or advantages of possessing good habits and qualities, and the risks and disadvantages of lacking them ; and quote stories, fables, or historical or literary references in support of your statements ; (ii) discuss the importance of social institutions etc. ; (iii) expound and discuss philosophical and theological theories. You should *reason* and support your statements with arguments and facts.

2. Narrative Essays.—A narrative essay consists mainly in the narration of some event, or series of events. I say “mainly” because a narrative essay must not be confused with a short story or bits of history. The narrative it relates should be treated as a subject for thought and comment, and so the essay should be more or less reflective. Narrative essays may treat of—(a) *historical stories or legends* (e.g., the reign of Akbar, the story of Rama and Sita) ; (b) *biographies* (e.g., life of Shivajee, or of Babar) ; (c) *incidents* (e.g., a street quarrel, a festival, a marriage) ; (d) *an accident or natural disaster* (e.g., a flood, a fire, a ship-wreck, an earthquake) ; (e) *a journey or voyage* ; (f) *a story* (real or imaginary).

3. Descriptive Essays.—A descriptive essay consists of a description of some place or thing ; e.g., (a) *animals, plants, minerals* (such as the elephant, the pipal tree, coal) ; (b) *towns, countries, buildings, etc.*, (e.g., Mumbai, Italy, the Taj Mahal) ; (c) *aspects and phenomena of nature* (such as volcanoes, the monsoon, sunlight, organic life) ; and (d) *manufactured articles* (such as motor-cars, steam-engines, silk, paper, etc.).

4. Expository Essays.—An expository (or explanatory) essay consists of an exposition or explanation of some subject ; e.g. : (a) *institutions, industries, occupations* (e.g.,

parliament, the press, silk-weaving, farming, etc.): (b) *scientific topics* (such as gravitation, evolution, astronomy, etc.) ; (c) *literary topics* (such as the nature of poetry, prose styles, the genius of Shakespeare, the novels of Scott, history of fiction, etc.).

5. Imaginative Essays—Essays on subjects such as the feelings and experiences of the sailor wrecked on a desert island may be called imaginative Essays. In such the writer is called to place himself in imagination in a position of which he has had no actual experience. Such subjects as "If I were a king," or "The autobiography of a horse," would call for imaginative essays.