


## Understanding Verbs: Transitive versus Intransitive

A complete sentence consists of a subject and a predicate. The part of the sentence that we will discuss today is the predicate. The predicate of a sentence contains the sentence's verb phrase. Verbs may interact with the rest of the predicate that follows the verbs in the sentence in one of two ways, and they are classified as transitive or intransitive according to this interaction. Generally, this interaction has much to do with whether the sentence has a direct object.

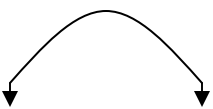
The **direct object** is the word or phrase in a sentence that follows the verb and receives the verb's action. Verbs which require a direct object to succeed them unless they are made passive are called **transitive verbs**, while verbs which require no direct object and cannot be made passive are called **intransitive verbs**. Let's take a look at some examples:

### Transitive verb



Thomas Edison **invented** the light bulb in 1879.

### Transitive verb made passive



The light bulb **was invented** by Thomas Edison in 1897.

Note that the first sentence is active. In this sentence *Edison* is the subject, the person or thing that the rest of the sentence is about, while *invented* functions as a transitive verb which must be followed by a direct object. In this case, it is the light bulb. The second example differs because it has been made passive. The former direct object, *light bulb* is now the subject, while *was invented* is the verb and *by Thomas Edison in 1897*, a prepositional phrase, follows it. In this case, the sentence has no direct object. The fact that the verb *invented* can be made passive shows that it is a transitive verb.

### Intransitive

James **intruded** when he eavesdropped on my conversation.  
James **intruded**.

Note that both sentences are active. *James* is the subject, the person or thing that the rest of the sentence is about, while *intruded* functions as an intransitive verb. It is not followed by a direct object, but instead it is followed by a prepositional phrase (*when he eavesdropped*). However, note that the verb *intruded*, since it is intransitive, does not necessarily need anything to follow it at all. Although the second sentence, *James intruded*, provides little detail, it is grammatically correct because the verb is intransitive and does not have to be followed by anything.

Some verbs are both transitive and intransitive, depending on the sentence that they appear in. Let's take a look at some examples:



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James **committed** a robbery on Highway 59.  
Although I'm interested in the event, I cannot **commit** at this time.

In the first example, *committed* is a transitive verb and its meaning requires an object. It must be followed by a direct object which, in this case, is *robbery*. If the sentence were made passive, *A robbery was committed on Highway 59*, then the verb could function without a direct object. This is how we know that, in this case, the verb is transitive. However, the verb has a different, though related, meaning in the second example and is intransitive. The speaker says that he/she cannot *commit*, but does not explain about what. This verb is being used in an intransitive manner, and it does not require a direct object when the sentence is active.

### Exercise 1

Underline the verb in each sentence and indicate whether it is being used as a transitive verb or an intransitive verb.

1. Many contemporary television programs expose children to violence and vulgar language.
2. My exam grade will exclude me from the soccer game.
3. Alice imagined a world full of fascinating creatures.
4. James ran in the park every afternoon.
5. The tornado destroyed entire buildings when it struck.
6. I raked the yard on Saturday.
7. The boiling water scalded my hand.
8. We talked about the news all evening.
9. My mother washes clothes every Saturday.
10. I opened the door for the lady with the stroller.

### Answer Key to Exercise 1

1. Many contemporary television programs expose children to violence and vulgar language. T
2. My exam grade excludes me from the soccer game. T
3. Alice imagined a world full of fascinating creatures. T
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