

Verbs

TRANSITIVE AND INTRANSITIVE VERBS

Transitive and Intransitive Verbs - Introduction

Transitive verbs require an object.

Intransitive verbs do not require or have an object.

Some verbs can be transitive and intransitive.

There are implications for the passive voice.

Transitive Verbs – Examples #1

The object is the answer to the question, “What/whom did the verb happen to?”

- Peter (subject) is reading (action) a book (object).
- The book is the *what* that Peter is reading.

- Jane (subject) ate (action) a healthy salad (object) yesterday.
- The salad is the *what* that Jane ate.

- I (subject) met (action) your brother (object) in town today.
- Your brother is the *whom* I met today.

Intransitive Verbs – Examples #1

With intransitive verbs, the question, “What/whom did the verb happen to?” doesn’t make sense.

The action does not happen to anyone or anything.

- The baby (subject) is sleeping (action) (no object).
- The question, “What/whom is the baby sleeping?” makes no sense.

- Our hamster (subject) escaped (action) (no object).
- The question, “What/whom did our hamster escape?” makes no sense.

Intransitive Verbs – Examples #2

Sometimes, a verb seems transitive, but instead of an object, has a prepositional phrase.

- The baby (subject) is sleeping (action) in his room (object?).
- Here, 'his room' is the object of the preposition 'in'.
- 'in his room' is a prepositional phrase, not an object.

- Our hamster (subject) escaped (action) from its cage (object?).
- Here, 'its cage' is the object of the preposition 'from'.
- 'from its cage' is a prepositional phrase, not an object.

Ambitransitive Verbs – Examples #1

Some verbs can be transitive or intransitive, depending on how they are used.

They are also known as ‘ambitransitive verbs’

➤ Peter (subject) read (action) a book (object).

Here, the verb is being used in a transitive manner.

➤ Peter (subject) read (action) all day (not an object – an adverb).

Here, the verb is intransitive.

Transitive Verbs – Passive Voice Examples

We can make rewrite sentences with transitive verbs in the passive voice.

- Peter (subject) is reading (action) a book (object).
- The book was read by Peter.

- Jane (subject) ate (action) a healthy salad (object) yesterday.
- The salad was eaten by Jane yesterday.

- I (subject) will meet (action) your brother (object) in town today.
- Your brother will be met by me in town today.

Intransitive Verbs – Passive Voice Examples

Intransitive verbs, having no object, cannot be written in the passive voice.

- The baby slept for 12 hours.
- 12 hours were slept by the baby.

- Our hamster escaped from its cage.
- The cage was escaped by the hamster.

Please see the lesson on active and passive voice for more information.