

English grammar rules

Direct - indirect object

The English verbs are followed by two different kinds of objects - the direct object and indirect object.

I sent Mary some flowers.

I sent some flowers to Mary.

These sentences contain both direct and indirect objects. Flowers are the direct object and it refers to *what* I sent. Mary is the indirect object and it refers to *whom* I sent it.

Use

1. If the indirect object comes before the direct object, there is no preposition.

They gave Harold a new car.

2. If the indirect object comes after the direct object, a preposition must be used.

They gave a new car to Harold.

3. If the direct object is a pronoun (it, this ...), it comes before the indirect object and a preposition must be used.

I bought it for my sister.

Can you send it to him?

(Not: *I bought my sister it. Can you send him it?*)

Notes

1. If the verbs *read* and *write* are only followed by the indirect object, a preposition must be used.

Please, read to me. (Not: *Please, read me.*)

But: *Read me the letter. Read the letter to me.* (There are two objects in these sentences.)

I'll write to you soon.

But: *I'll write you a letter. I'll write a letter to you.* (two objects)

2. We can use the verbs *promise*, *show*, and *tell* with the indirect object only, but without a preposition.

I can't promise you. (Or: *I can't promise it to you.* – with two objects)

Show him. (Or: *Show it to him.*)

Can you tell me?