

Subjects, Verbs, Objects and Complements

A verb is a word of **doing** or **being**:

E.g. to run; to jump; to sit; to scream; to arrive; to be; to seem

The **subject** of a sentence is the person, place or thing governing or carrying out the action of the verb. In English the subject normally comes before the verb. The subject of a sentence may be a noun, a pronoun or a noun phrase.

E.g. The lion (S) ate (V) the man.

Exercise 1

Identify the verb and its subject in each sentence.

1. The baby slept.
2. A huge bridge spanned the lake.
3. The best man made a speech.
4. The postman arrived.
5. The children picked blackberries.
6. The black cat lying in her basket with her three kittens slept peacefully.
7. The girl read her essay brilliantly.
8. Idle students seem to fail their exams.
9. I know what to do.
10. She wished that the tooth fairy would come.

A verb can be **dynamic** or **stative**.

A dynamic verb is one which relates to action e.g. to run; to hit to speak.

A stative verb is one which expresses states of being or thought processes rather than actions e.g. to be; to seem; to know; to mean.

Exercise 2

List all the verbs used in the sentences in Exercise 1 and say whether each one is dynamic or stative.

A **direct object** is the person, place or thing which receives the action of a verb. It normally follows the verb.

E.g. The lion (S) ate (V) the man (O).

Exercise 3

Divide these sentences into subject (S), verb (V), object (O).

1. Mary opened the letter.
2. The painter decorated the house.
3. Arthur cut his finger.
4. The cat drank the milk.
5. The child threw the ball.

Verbs can be **transitive** or **intransitive**.

Transitive verbs are followed by a direct object:

E.g. The dog (S) bit (V) the postman (DO).

(You wouldn't say 'The dog bit' without saying what or who the dog bit.)

Intransitive verbs cannot take a direct object.

E.g. The dog (S) barked (V).

Look up any verb in a dictionary and it should tell you whether it is transitive (v.t), intransitive (v.i.) or both.

Exercise 4

Look back at numbers 1-7 of Exercise 1 and decide which verbs are transitive and which are intransitive. Check with a dictionary if necessary but remember that some verbs can be used in both ways.

Stative verbs do not take direct objects. A stative verb may be followed by a noun or an adjective to complete the sense of a sentence. This is called a **complement**.

E.g. My friend (S) is (V) sick (C).
My friend (S) is (V) a hairdresser (C).

Sick and hairdresser both refer back to the subject (my friend) and not to something else, so they are not objects but complements.

Exercise 6

Check you know the meanings of the following terms: dynamic verb; stative verb; subject; object; complement; transitive verb; intransitive verb;