

Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Depending on the type of action that takes place, verbs may be transitive or intransitive.

The meaning of a transitive verb is expressed without a direct object, and the following examples:

INCOMPLETE

The child **cries**.

COMPLETE

The child **cries** after looking at his new cat.

INCOMPLETE

The committee **met**.

COMPLETE

The committee **met** a new chairman.

INCOMPLETE

The machine **works**.

COMPLETE

The machine **works** well.

As intransitive verbs, on the other hand, cannot take a direct object:

The child **was** **laughing** with his mother.

The compound verb 'was laughing' is intransitive and takes no direct object person. The prepositional phrase 'with his mother' and adverbial 'was laughing' are the only direct objects.

The action of the verb 'was laughing' is intransitive.

The verb 'laughed' is intransitive only in the sentence and takes no direct object. The prepositional phrase 'through the ceiling' and adverbial 'was laughing' are the only direct objects.

The verb 'was laughing' cannot take a direct object.

The intransitive verb 'arrived' takes no direct object, and the noun phrase 'has been late' acts as an adverb describing when the subject arrived.

Since the company was pleased and the coffee delicious and good, we enjoyed the restaurant for several hours.

The verb 'enjoyed' is used intransitively, followed by a direct object. The prepositional phrase 'in the restaurant for several hours' and adverbial 'was enjoying' are the only direct objects.

The verb 'was hanging' is intransitive and takes no direct object.

The compound verb 'was hanging' is used intransitively and the sentence has no direct object. The prepositional phrase 'on the south wall of the restaurant' and adverbial 'was hanging' are the only direct objects.

Many verbs can be either transitive or intransitive, depending on their context in the sentence. In the following pairs of sentences, the first sentence uses the verb transitively and the second uses the same verb intransitively: