



Transitive *versus* Intransitive Verbs

By [Jack Lynch](#)

Not as difficult as some people think. A transitive verb takes a [direct object](#): it shows action upon someone or something. Intransitive verbs take no direct object; they need only a subject to make a sentence.

Some transitive verbs: Hit (you hit something or someone; you don't just hit); climb (you don't just climb; you climb something); and bring (bring what?). Intransitive verbs: sleep (you don't sleep something; you just sleep); and fall (while you can fall down the stairs, you don't fall the stairs).

There are a few things worth noticing. First, just because something grammatically needs a direct object doesn't mean we actually use it. If someone said, I swung the bat and hit, we don't have to ask what he hit; the direct object ball is understood.

Second, many intransitives might look like transitives, as in She walked three hours. Here three hours is not really a direct object; it doesn't say what she walked, but how long (it's actually an [adverbial](#) phrase).

Third, many verbs can be both transitive and intransitive: while a word like ran is usually intransitive, it can also be transitive in "He ran the program for two years." Children can play catch, or they can just play. Even sleep, given above as an intransitive, could become transitive if we said He slept the sleep of the righteous.

The only real danger is when you start changing verbs willy-nilly: "We have to think quality" (giving the intransitive think a direct object; you probably mean "think about quality," if you mean anything at all); "I hope you enjoy" (instead of enjoy it).

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From his [grammar guide Web site](#).

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