VERBS

TYPES OF VERBS

**Transitive and Intransitive Verbs**

Depending on the type of object they take, [verbs](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/verbs.html#verb) may be transitive or intransitive.

The meaning of a **transitive verb** is incomplete without a [direct object](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/objcompl.html#direct%20object), as in the following examples:

**INCOMPLETE**

The shelf **holds**.

**COMPLETE**

The shelf **holds** three books and a vase of flowers.

**INCOMPLETE**

The committee **named**.

**COMPLETE**

The committee **named** a new chairperson.

**INCOMPLETE**

The child **broke**.

**COMPLETE**

The child **broke** the plate.

An **intransitive verb**, on the other hand, *cannot* take a direct object:

This plant has thrived on the south windowsill.

The [compound verb](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/vbcmpd.html#compound%20verb) "has thrived" is intransitive and takes no direct object in this [sentence](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/subjpred.html#sentence). The [prepositional phrase](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/phrfunc.html#prepositional%20phrase) "on the south windowsill" acts as an [adverb](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/adverbs.html#adverb) describing where the plant thrives.

The sound of the choir carried through the cathedral.

The verb "carried" is used intransitively in this sentence and takes no direct object. The prepositional phrase "through the cathedral" acts as an adverb describing where the sound carried.

The train from Montreal arrived four hours late.

The intransitive verb "arrived" takes no direct object, and the [noun phrase](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/phrfunc.html#noun%20phrase) "four hours late" acts as an adverb describing when the train arrived.

Since the company was pleasant and the coffee both plentiful and good, we lingered in the restaurant for several hours.

The verb "lingered" is used intransitively and takes no direct object. The prepositional phrase "in the restaurant for several hours" acts as an adverb modifying "lingered."

The painting was hung on the south wall of the reception room.

The compound verb "was hung" is used intransitively and the sentence has no direct object. The prepositional phrase "on the south wall of the reception room" acts as a adverb describing where the paint hung.

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:

**Transitive**

According to the instructions, we must **leave** this goo in our hair for twenty minutes.

In this example, the verb "leave" takes a direct object, the noun phrase "this goo."

**Intransitive**

We would like to stay longer, but we must **leave**.

In this example, the verb "leave" does not take a direct object.

**Transitive**

The audience attentively **watched** the latest production of The Trojan Women.

In this example, the verb "watch" is used transitively and takes the noun phrase "the latest production of The Trojan Women" as a direct object.

**Intransitive**

The cook watched while the new dishwasher surreptitiously picked up the fragments of the broken dish.

In this example, the verb "watched" is used intransitively and takes no direct object.

**Intransitive**

The crowd moves across the field in an attempt to see the rock star get into her helicopter.

Here the verb "moves" is used as an intransitive verb and takes no direct object.

**Transitive**

Every spring, William moves all boxes and trunks from one side of the attic to the other.

In this sentence "moves" is used as a transitive verb and takes the noun phrase "all the boxes and trunk" as a direct object.