

The Verb

12d. A verb is a word used to express action or to help otherwise in making a statement.

Predicate verbs are those that express action in a sentence. Predicate verbs can be classified in two ways—by type and by voice.. A verb may stand alone or be the main verb in a verb phrase. The grammatical function of a pure verb or verb phrase is that of predicate.

Transitive and Intransitive Types

When verbs are considered by their meanings in dictionaries or their functions in sentences, they are classified as being either transitive or intransitive. Because the distinction is based on the verb's function within a specific sentence, the same verb can be transitive in one sentence and intransitive in another.

A **transitive verb** is a verb that expresses an action that “goes across” or “passes over” from the subject (or doer) to the object (or receiver) of the action. Therefore, every transitive verb requires a receiver for the action it expresses. In the active voice, the receiver is called the direct object.

Rule 12.d.1. Every transitive predicate in the active voice must have a direct object.

EXAMPLES John **sang** the song. [The action of the verb *sang* is directed toward the object *song*.]

After the meeting, Marguerite **sent** the email. [The action of the verb *sent* is directed toward the object *email*.]

Accept the responsibility for your decisions. [The action of the verb *accept* is directed toward the object *responsibility*.]

An **intransitive verb** is a verb that expresses action or tells something about a subject without the action “going across” to any receiver or object.

EXAMPLES Before their long walk, the children **ate** quickly. [The verb *ate* does not direct its action toward any object. (Nothing gets expressly eaten.)]

My, how we **laughed** after the jester’s story! [The verb *laughed* does not direct its action toward any object.]

The fascinated child **seemed** thrilled with her new toy. [The verb *seemed* does not direct its action toward any object.]

There are two types of intransitive verbs: copulative and complete. An **intransitive copulative verb** is a verb that connects the subject of a sentence with either a noun that renames the subject (a Predicate Nominative) or an adjective that modifies the subject (a Predicate Adjective). Since they each refer to—and complete—the subject of a sentence, PNs and PAs are called Subjective Complements.

Rule 12.d.2. Every intransitive copulative predicate must have a subjective complement.

EXAMPLES The minor difficulty soon **became** a monstrous obstacle. [The verb *became* connects the subject *difficulty* with the PN *obstacle*, which renames the subject.]

Fresh-baked bread **smells** wonderful. [The verb *smells* connects the subject *bread* with the PA *wonderful*, which modifies the subject.]

Regardless of their age, cats **remain** kittens. [The verb *remain* connects the subject *cats* with the PN *kittens*, which renames the subject.]

She **felt** somewhat awkward in front of the board of inquiry. [The verb *felt* connects the subject *she* with the PA *awkward*, which modifies the subject.]

Reference Note

For more about **objects and their functions**, see page 431.

Reference Note

For more about **subject complements**, see page 429.

Below are two lists of intransitive copulative verbs and verb phrases. The list on the left contains the most commonly used intransitive copulative verbs and verb phrases; the list on the right contains common intransitive copulative verbs that are frequently mistaken for being transitive.

be	shall be	should be
being	will be	would be
am	has been	can be
is	have been	could be
are	had been	should have been
was	shall have been	would have been
were	will have been	could have been

appear	seem
become	smell
feel	sound
grow	stay
look	taste
remain	turn

An **intransitive complete** verb is a verb that represents action that is limited to the subject or agent with no dependency whatsoever on any other object, complement, or modification.

EXAMPLES Fran **hurried** to the store. [The verb *hurried* expresses the complete action performed by the subject *Fran*.]

Magically, icicles **glistened** in the moonlight. [The verb *glistened* expresses the complete action performed by the subject *icicles*.]

Active and Passive Voices

Voice is the modification of a transitive verb that indicates whether the subject is acting or being acted upon.

17g. A transitive verb in the active voice expresses an action done by its subject. A transitive verb in the passive voice expresses an action done to its subject.

EXAMPLES **ACTIVE VOICE:** The coach **instructed** us. [The action of the verb *instructed* is directed from the subject *coach* toward the object *us*.]

PASSIVE VOICE: We **were given** three new plays. [The action of the verb phrase *were given* is directed toward the subject *we*.]

ACTIVE VOICE: Matt **scored** the winning touchdown. [The action of the verb *scored* is directed from the subject *Brandon* toward the object *touchdown*.]

PASSIVE VOICE: The other team **was defeated**. [The action of the verb phrase *was defeated* is directed toward the subject *team*.]

Exercise 11 Identifying Intransitive Copulative Verbs and Subjective Complements

Using the sentences provided for Exercise 11 on page 389 of your textbook, identify the intransitive copulative verb or verb phrase in each. Then, list the subjective complement and label it as a Predicate Nominative or Predicate Adjective, as appropriate.

EXAMPLE 1. Dixie can be a very obedient dog.
1. *can be*; *dog* (PN)

Exercise 15 Identifying Verbs and Verb Phrases

Using the sentences provided for Exercise 15 on page 392 of your textbook, identify all the verbs and verb phrases in each. Include all auxiliary verbs, even if the parts of a verb phrase are separated by other words. Label each verb or verb phrase as VT, Vicop, or Vicom, as appropriate.

EXAMPLE 1. We will probably go to the movie if we can finish our assignment.
1. *will go* (Vicom); *can finish* (VT)

Reference Note

For more about **passive voice**, see page 537.