

Five Sentence Types

The predicates of sentences can be structured into five different ways. Depending on the type of predicate you have, the verb is labelled intransitive, linking, or transitive.

Predicates with Intransitive Verbs

Intransitive verbs can stand alone as the whole predicate, although they may also have adverbial modifiers. Examples are the verbs in *I slept*, *I slept well*, and *I slept like a baby*. (NB that a prepositional phrase can function adverbially.)

You can perform the following tests to determine if a verb is intransitive:

1. Divide the predicate into phrases and see if it contains only a VP or a VP + an adverbial phrase.
2. If you are not sure if the phrase modifying the VP is adverbial, try replacing it with a prototypical adverb like *there* or *then*. If this works, the phrase is functioning adverbially.

You'll notice if you diagram these sentences that intransitive verbs do not have complements. The adverbial phrase just modifies the verb. All the other types of verbs have complements.

Predicates with Linking or Copular/Copulative Verbs

A **linking verb** is a verb that is completed by a phrase which describes the subject of the sentence. This phrase is a complement. Linking verbs occur with two different types of complements: **adverbial complements** and **subject complements**. An adverbial complement is an adverbial phrase. A subject complement is an adjectival phrase or a noun phrase that describes the subject. The following examples illustrate this"

1. An adverbial complement: *I am outside*, *I am in the garage*.
2. An adjectival subject complement: *I am happy*, *I feel sick*, *He seems all right*.
3. A noun subject complement: *I am a genius*, *She considers him a coward*.

***Be* Followed by an Adverbial Phrase**

Examples are *Jesse is outside*. *Her job interviews were yesterday*. *Cheryl's notebook must have been on the desk*. *The reception will be at noon*. You'll notice that they look like intransitive verbs. But compare *The train departs at noon* with *The reception is at noon*. The verbs in the sentences are different because the verb *be* has a special status. It normally functions like an equals sign, between the subject and the complement (e.g. *I am a genius*). Intransitive verbs like *depart* do not function as an equals sign.

***Be* or Another Linking Verb Followed by an Adjectival Subject Complement**

When the subject of a linking verb is described by the verb's complement, the complement is called a **subject complement**. Subject complements can be adjectival or nominal. We'll deal with the **adjectival subject complement** first. Since many grammars use the term **predicate adjective**, that is worth knowing as a synonym. Examples are *Sheila is beautiful*. *His parties were very lavish*. *Bill is becoming friendly*. *Your uncle has seemed happy in the past*.

You can tell whether you have a linking verb followed by an adjectival complement by checking for the following:

1. The main verb is followed by an adjectival phrase describing the subject.
2. The main verb is *be* or can be replaced by *be* without major change to the meaning of the sentence.
3. The most common linking verbs are *be, appear, become, seem, grow, prove, remain, turn, feel, look, smell, taste, and sound*. But note that they do not always *function* as linking verbs, so don't automatically assume that they are.

***Be* or Another Linking Verb Followed by a Nominal Subject Complement**

A **nominal subject complement** is also called a **predicate nominative** in some grammars. The term *nominal* means something that functions as a noun. The term **nominative** is useful for specifying the case of the complement, as we'll see in a moment. Examples are *Those men are brutes. The auction was a success. Our office is becoming a jungle. My three sisters remained friends afterwards.*

Predicates with Transitive Verbs

A **transitive verb** is a verb that is completed by direct object. A **direct object** is defined as a noun phrase which completes a transitive verb. This circularity causes problems for some people. It is perhaps easier to think of what a direct object is and what it is not. A direct object is a noun phrase that does not function as a subject complement; that is, it does not describe the subject. Compare the following sentences:

The house looks a wreck. Linking, Nominal Subject Complement
She prefers popcorn. Transitive, Direct Object

Let's sum up by seeing the patterns:

Main Verb Phrase	Complement
Intransitive	--
Intransitive	Adverbial Modifier
Linking	Adverbial Complement
Linking	Adjectival Subject Complement
Linking	Nominal Subject Complement
Transitive	Noun Phrase (Direct Object)

It's important to realise that no other pattern is possible. You can't have, say an intransitive verb with a direct object, or a transitive verb with a subject complement.

Object Complements

Consider the following sentences:

She prefers popcorn. Transitive, Direct Object
She gives him popcorn. Transitive, Direct Object

Both sentences have transitive verbs, but what is the direct object in the second sentence? *Him* is in fact the **indirect object**, which can be defined as the recipient of the direct object.

In the sentence *She considers him a genius*, notice that *him* is the direct object and *a genius* describes *him*? This is called an **object complement**.

What about these sentences?

The ball rolled slowly (Intransitive, Type I, Adverbial Modifier)

The child rolled the ball (transitive, Type V, Direct Object)

So is *roll* a transitive or an intransitive verb. This is a pointless debate. It changes depending on whether you have an adverbial modifier or a direct object.