

DIRECT OBJECTS, INDIRECT OBJECTS, AND SUBJECT COMPLEMENTS

1) Direct Object

A direct object follows an action verb. It answers the questions “Whom?” or “What?” after the action verb. It completes the action of the verb and is always a noun or pronoun. (Note: Not all action verbs require a direct object.)

D.O. D.O.
Joe likes apples and oranges.

D.O.
The boy in the red jacket bought a new kite.

D.O.
She sailed the boat down the river.

2) Indirect Object

An indirect object follows an action verb and comes before the direct object. It answers the questions “To whom?” or “For whom?” after the verb. It is always a noun or pronoun and never appears without a direct object.

Important: The words “to” and “for” are only implied; they do not actually appear in the sentence. If they appear in the sentence, they begin a prepositional phrase, not an indirect object.

I.O.
Joe gave me an apple.

I.O.
The boy in the red jacket bought his brother a new kite.

I.O.
She sold John a new boat to sail down the river.

Important: Notice the direct objects “apple” “kite” and “boat” in the sentences above.

3) Subject Complement

A subject complement always follows a linking verb. (See study sheet on “Linking Verbs”) It refers to and describes, or means the same as, the subject of the sentence. It is always a noun, a pronoun, or an adjective.

S.C.
Joe is a lover of apples.

S.C. S.C.
The boy’s new kite was blue and yellow.

S.C.
She will be the one sailing the boat down the river.

Important: Notice the linking verbs “is,” “was,” and “be” in the sentences above.

4) The Application of the Direct Object, Indirect Object, and Subject Complement Definitions

It is necessary to know whether a pronoun is working in a sentence as a direct object, an indirect object, or a subject complement so that you can choose between the subject or object form of the pronoun.

Subject Pronouns

I
He, She, It
We
They
Who
You

Object Pronouns

Me
Him, Her, It
Us
Them
Whom
You

Subject pronouns are used as subjects and subject complements.

S
She will call you later.

SC
The president of the club is she.

Object pronouns are used as direct objects and indirect objects.

D.O. I.O.
Jim likes her. He gave her a beautiful vase for her birthday.

Object pronouns are also used as objects of prepositions.

prep. phrase
There has always been competition between her and me.

Practice: Label the direct objects (DO), indirect objects (IO), and subject complements (SC) in the following sentences. Be careful: some of these sentences contain none of the above.

1. My sister Mary teaches math and physical education at the high school.
2. I gave my younger sister a lovely necklace for her graduation.
3. The teacher was sick yesterday. In fact, she went to the hospital for some tests.
4. I enjoy television. My favorite programs are NYPD and Nature.
5. The students felt great about their essays. The teacher returned them this morning.
6. No, I have not told Karen about the party. I will tell her tonight.
7. My father is quiet and shy. He is an excellent auto mechanic.
8. Jerry told her the story about the lost dog. It was really a sad story.
9. Usually for breakfast my wife has tea, cereal, and a banana.
10. Marilyn walked to the store, then to the school, and finally to the bank.