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definitions: transitive direct, transitive indirect, intransitive

Transitive verbs by definition have an object, either a direct object or an indirect object. Intransitive verbs never have objects.

A **transitive-direct** verb acts directly on its **object**. In the first sentence below, the telephone is the direct object. The verb 'entendre' (to hear) always takes an object; one hears **someone or something**.

A **transitive-indirect** verb acts to or for its object. Tex is the object of the preposition à in the second sentence since Joe-Bob is talking to him.

**Intransitive** verbs, on the other hand, have **no object** at all. The verb *dormir* (to sleep) in the last example, does not need any object to complete it. In fact, because the verb is intransitive, it cannot take an object. Intransitive verbs (as well as transitive ones) may be modified by adverbs or prepositional phrases: 'Joe-Bob sleeps in the car; he sleeps all the time.'

- Tex entend **le téléphone**.  
  
  **transitive-direct**  
  
  Tex hears the telephone.

- Joe-Bob parle à **Tex**.  
  
  **transitive-indirect**  
  
  Joe-Bob is talking to Tex.

- Joe-Bob **dort** souvent au volant.  
  
  **intransitive**  
  
  Joe-Bob often sleeps at the wheel.

For more examples and discussion, review the remarks on transitive vs intransitive verbs in the **introduction**.

transitive verbs

Because transitivity has to do with meaning, most English and French verbs usually maintain the same distinction. Thus, verbs that are transitive in English are also transitive in French, and verbs that are intransitive in French are also intransitive in English. The following examples are transitive in both French and English.

- Tex **mange** un croissant et il **boit** du café.  
  
  Tex is **eating** a croissant and **drinking** some coffee.

- Il **finit** son petit déjeuner et il **lit** le journal.  
  
  He is **finishing** his breakfast and **reading** the newspaper. Ring, ring. It's Joe-Bob on the telephone.

special cases

direct object in French / preposition + object in English

There are, however, special cases where the transitivity of French and English verbs contrast. There are several very common verbs which take a direct object in French, while the English equivalent is followed by a preposition (at, to, for) and object. **REDCAP** is an acronym for the most frequent verbs in this category: **Regarder**, **Ecouter**, **Demander**, **Chercher**, **Attendre**, **Payer**.

Joe-Bob explains what happened:

- Joe-Bob: Je roulais en voiture. Je **regardais** les filles.  
  
  Joe-Bob: I was driving along. I was **looking** at girls.

- J'**écoutais** de la musique country à la radio.  
  
  I was **listening to** country music on the radio.
Et puis, oh, là là. J’ai eu un accident de voiture. La police est arrivée et le flic m’a demandé mes papiers.

J’ai cherché ma carte d’identité, mais je ne l’ai pas trouvée.

Pas de chance! Je suis au commissariat et j’attends mon avocat.

Tex, j’espère que tu vas payer la contravention!

And then, oh, la, la. I had an accident. The police came and the cop asked for my papers.

I looked for my ID, but I didn’t find it.

No luck! I’m at the police station and I’m waiting for my lawyer.

Tex, I hope that you will pay for the ticket.

preposition + object in French / direct object in English

There are also several verbs which have a preposition and object in French, whereas the English equivalent takes a direct object.

Joe-Bob téléphone à Tex.

Teléfono a Tex.

Here are examples of such verbs. These are discussed more fully with indirect objects and indirect object pronouns.

obéir à, to obey
pardonner à, to pardon, to forgive
rendre visite à, to visit (someone)
renoncer à, to give up, renounce

répondre à, to answer
résister à, to resist
ressembler à, to resemble
téléphoner à, to telephone

stated and implied objects

For many transitive verbs, in both French and English, the object is sometimes implied or understood. Do not be concerned about labelling these verbs, since the meaning will be clear from the context; and, like most verbs, they will form their passé composé with avoir.

En voiture, Joe-Bob chante toujours. (Joe-Bob always sings in the car.)

Il parle fort. (He talks loudly.)

Il rêve. (He dreams.)

Il grignotte tout le temps. (He snacks all the time.)

transitive verb / implied object

transitive verb / stated object

En voiture, Joe-Bob chante toujours Freebird. (Joe-Bob always sings Freebird in the car.)

Il parle anglais. (He speaks English.)

Il rêve de hamburgers et de filles. (He dreams of hamburgers and girls.)

Il grignotte des cacahuètes. (He snacks on peanuts.)

intransitive verbs
Perhaps you have already seen verbs which use être to form the passé composé. These être verbs (aller, arriver, partir, sortir, etc.) are the most frequent intransitive verbs and they are summarized in the Alamo d'être. Etre verbs are often described as verbs of motion, but it's important to note that there are many other intransitive verbs of motion which use the auxiliary avoir, for example, 'marcher' (to walk) and 'courir' (to run): 'Tex a marché vite. Les enfants de Rita ont couru.'

transitive or intransitive
Some verbs may be either transitive or intransitive. Contrast the following verbs. Note that the verb sortir uses the auxiliary verb être in the passé composé as an intransitive verb, but avoir in the passé composé when it is used transitively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>intransitive / no object</th>
<th>transitive / used with an object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Le week-end passé, Joe-Bob est sorti. (Last weekend Joe-Bob went out.)</td>
<td>Le week-end passé, Joe-Bob a sorti son beau camion. (Last weekend Joe-Bob took out his fine truck.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Au commissariat, la tension de Joe-Bob monte. (At the police station Joe-Bob's blood pressure goes up.)</td>
<td>Joe-Bob monte l'escalier. (Joe-Bob goes up the stairs.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are several cases where a verb which may be transitive or intransitive in English must be translated by two different verbs in French: 'to return' (retourner, rendre), 'to leave' (partir, laisser, quitter).

verbs with direct and indirect objects
Many transitive verbs may have both a direct and an indirect object, for example:

- Tex donne des conseils à Joe-Bob. Tex gives advice to Joe-Bob.

Here is a list of some common bivalent verbs:

- acheter, to buy
- apporter, to bring
- apprendre, to learn
- demander, to ask
- donner, to give
- écrire, to write
- emprunter, to borrow
- envoyer, to send
- expliquer, to explain
- montrer, to show
- offrir, to offer (give)
- prêter, to lend
- promettre, to promise
- rendre, to give back
- servir, to serve
- vendre, to sell

fill in the blanks
Indicate whether the verb in the sentence is transitive, 't' or intransitive, 'i'.

1. Tammy lit un roman.
2. Tex écrit un poème.
3. Tex et Tammy partent ensemble.
4. Bette ronronne souvent.
5. Edouard arrive en retard.
6. Corey nage beaucoup.
7. Tex prend un café.
8. Fiona écoute la radio.
9. Tammy achète une nouvelle robe.
10. Corey aime l'insecticide.
11. Tex réfléchit souvent.
12. Les parents de Tex sont morts sur l'autoroute.