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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 .	<i>transitive-direct</i>	Tex hears the telephone.
Joe-Bob parle à Tex .	<i>transitive-indirect</i>	Joe-Bob is talking to Tex.
Joe-Bob dort souvent au volant.	<i>intransitive</i>	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	He is finishing his breakfast
et il lit le journal. Dring, dring. C'est Joe-Bob au téléphone.	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: **R**egarder, **E**couter, **D**emander, **C**hercher, **A**ttendre, **P**ayer.

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.

Joe-Bob **telephones** à 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**.

🔊 **transitive verb / implied object**

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

Il **parle** fort. (He talks loudly.)

Il **rêve**. (He dreams.)

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

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 **grignote des cacahouettes**. (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.



intransitive / no object

Le week-end passé, Joe-Bob **est sorti**. (Last weekend Joe-Bob went out.)

Au commissariat, la tension de Joe-Bob **monte**. (At the police station Joe-Bob's blood pressure goes up.)

transitive / used with an object

Le week-end passé, Joe-Bob **a sorti son beau camion**. (Last weekend Joe-Bob took out his fine truck.)

Joe-Bob **monte l'escalier**. (Joe-Bob goes up the stairs.)

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



exercices

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.