

41 Verb patterns (1)

1 Transitive and intransitive verbs

Transitive verbs need a direct object:

*We spent **all our money**.*

Intransitive verbs do not have a direct object:

*They've **arrived!** The children **are sleeping**.*

Some common intransitive verbs are *arrive, come, fall, go, happen, lie, sleep, swim, wait*.

Some verbs can be intransitive or transitive, for example:

begin break change close continue dry finish hang hurt move separate stand start stop tear turn

Compare:

*The door **opened**.* (intransitive) *He **opened** the door.* (transitive)

*The meat **burnt**.* (intransitive) *The cook **burnt** the meat.* (transitive)

Sometimes the two uses of a verb can have very different meanings:

*He **ran** to catch the bus.* (intransitive = moved quickly)

*He **ran** the new software to show us how it worked.* (transitive = operated)

In modern usage, some transitive verbs are used as intransitive verbs:

*I don't know why you're bothering with those brands – they won't **sell**.*

And some intransitive verbs are used as transitive verbs:

*In order to survive we need to **grow** the business by fifty percent within two years.*



Only the most skilled pilots are allowed to steer large passenger ships into Venice's small harbour.

2 Verb + object patterns

Transitive verbs have a direct object, which can be a noun phrase or an *-ing* form (with or without a prepositional phrase):

*We **discussed** the problem/it (at great length).*

*Karl **suggested** practising (on the nursery slopes first).*

We can omit the object after some transitive verbs if the context is clear:

*Geoff was disappointed to find that he **had failed** (the test) again.*

Some common verbs that can be used like this are: *answer, ask, drink, eat, enter, fail, leave, pass, play, practise, sing, study, wash, win* and *write*.

3 Verb + prepositional phrase

We can use a prepositional phrase after intransitive verbs:

*The train **departed** from platform 9 – but we **were waiting** on platform 5.*

We can also use prepositional phrases after a transitive verb + object:

*He carefully **removed** the egg from the nest.*

*Pilots **are allowed** to steer large passenger ships into Venice's small harbour.*

! We do not usually change the order of transitive verb + object + prepositional phrase, unless the object is very long:

X He carefully removed from the nest the egg.

✓ He carefully removed from the nest the three fragile blue-speckled eggs and the one chick that had already hatched.