

Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Transitive and intransitive verbs often cause confusion. Let's begin with a simple definition:

Transitive Verbs

Transitive verbs take direct objects. The vast majority of verbs in English are transitive.

Examples:

I took my books to class.
We played chess last night.

Notice that transitive verbs always take objects. You will always be able to ask a question beginning with 'What' or 'Whom'.

Examples:

I paid the bill last week. - What did you pay?
She studies Russian. - What does she study?

Intransitive Verbs

Intransitive verbs do not take direct objects.

Examples:

Peter's situation improved.
They slept peacefully.

You can recognize that a verb is intransitive because it does not have a passive form.

Examples:

Jack sits in the corner when he reads. NOT The corner is sat when Jack reads.
Peter arrived early. NOT Early was arrived Peter.

Transitive AND Intransitive

Some verbs with multiple meanings are transitive or intransitive depending on their usage. The verb 'run' is a good example. When used in the sense of physical exercise, 'run' is intransitive.

Helen ran every weekend when she was at college.

BUT

'Run' used in the sense of managing a company is transitive.

George runs his company very efficiently