

Tricks & Shortcuts to making Grammatical Distinctions

An easy way to find the grammatical subject is to ask a question consisting of the phrase “who or what” and the verb. The noun element in the sentence that answers the question is your subject.

Bill is a raging grammarian. {*Who or what* is? Bill is. Bill is the subject.}

If a sentence with an action verb contains only one object (not including objects of prepositions), it will always be a direct object. You can locate direct objects by asking a question consisting of the subject and verb followed by the phrase “whom or what.” Beware, sometimes adverbs look like direct objects; the answer needs to supply a solid “whom or what,” not a “when, where, how, or why.”

Janey gave the apple. {Janey gave *whom or what*? She gave the apple. Apple is the direct object.}

To find an indirect object, ask the question “To or for whom or what?”

Janey gave Dylan the apple. {Janey gave the apple *to or for whom or what*? She gave it to Dylan. Dylan is the indirect object.}

You can find object complements by asking a question that combines the verb and the direct object with “what?”

Bill named Sean Leftenant. {Bill named Sean *what*? Bill named him Leftenant. Leftenant is the object complement.}

Appositives differ from subject complements and object complements in that appositives can be turned into clauses beginning “who or which is (or are)” (46).

Janey is President. {subject complement – predicate noun}
Janey called Dylan silly. {object complement}

Janey, the imp, danced toward the books. {appositive. Janey, who is the imp, danced toward the books.}