

Subjects and Objects

“Subjects” and “objects” are defined structurally. In other words, you can’t tell whether a word or string of words is a subject or object without knowing its position in a sentence and its relationship to other words in the sentence.

A **subject** is generated as an extension of a finite verb; more metaphorically, it is “in a relationship” with a finite verb. (You can also say that a finite verb is generated as an extension of a subject.) Either way, a subject will not exist apart from a finite verb, and vice versa. What is *doing* or *being* the finite verb? That’s your subject. Typically, in English, the element to the left of the finite verb is the subject.

An **object** is also “in a relationship” with verbs; however, it is the element that the verb is *doing something to*. What is being affected by the verb? That’s your object.

The cat bites the dog

Subject Verb Object

An object in this post-verbal position is traditionally known as a **direct object**. But words that appear after prepositions are also objects.

The cat sits on the mat

Subject Verb Preposition Object

When I submitted the technical documents,

Sbj. Verb Obj.

the systems engineers read them and returned them to me.

Sbj. Verb Obj. Verb Obj. Prep. Obj.

