English grammar rules

Direct - indirect object

The English verbs are followed by two different kinds of objects - the direct object and indirect object.

I sent Mary some flowers.
I sent some flowers to Mary.

These sentences contain both direct and indirect objects. Flowers are the direct object and it refers to what I sent. Mary is the indirect object and it refers to whom I sent it.

Use

1. If the indirect object comes before the direct object, there is no preposition.

   They gave Harold a new car.

2. If the indirect object comes after the direct object, a preposition must be used.

   They gave a new car to Harold.

3. If the direct object is a pronoun (it, this ... ), it comes before the indirect object and a preposition must be used.

   I bought it for my sister.
   Can you send it to him?
   (Not: I bought my sister it. Can you send him it?)

Notes

1. If the verbs read and write are only followed by the indirect object, a preposition must be used.

   Please, read to me. (Not: Please, read me).
   But: Read me the letter. Read the letter to me. (There are two objects in these sentences.)

   I'll write to you soon.
   But: I'll write you a letter. I'll write a letter to you. (two objects)

2. We can use the verbs promise, show, and tell with the indirect object only, but without a preposition.

   I can't promise you. (Or: I can't promise it to you. – with two objects)
   Show him. (Or: Show it to him.)
   Can you tell me?