

PREPOSITIONS

1. A **preposition** is a word that connects a noun or a pronoun to another word in the sentence.

Common Prepositions

about	behind	down	next	to
above	below	during	of	toward
across	beneath	except	off	under
after	beside	for	on	unlike
against	besides	from	onto	until
among	between	in	opposite	unto
around	beyond	inside	out	up
as	but	into	outside	with
at	by	like	over	within
before	despite	near	past	without

two- and three-word prepositions: *along with, because of, next to, except for, in spite of, out of, up to, instead of, with regard to*

2. **Prepositions** form nouns or pronouns (plus any modifiers) into word groups called: "**prepositional phrases.**"
3. A **prepositional phrase** is a group of words that begins with a preposition (a word like "in," "from," "of," "with," "for", "to," and ends with a noun, a pronoun, or a word group serving as a noun) - called the **object of the preposition**. Examples:

in the house
from the market
of the world
with your permission
for the last time
to make one more attempt

4. **Prepositional phrases** modify other parts of a sentence. They may be found in several other places in a sentence. Examples:

(Initial) *In the big house*, Monica felt safe.

(Medial) I was walking rapidly, *through the snow*, and I was getting cold.

(Final) Ali slumped like a broken doll, *after the fight*.

5. A **prepositional phrase** used as an *introductory element* that begins a sentence and modifies a word or words in the main clause that follows - is usually followed by a **comma**. Example:

In a debate that has lasted centuries, scientists use identical twins to argue for or against genetic destiny.

6. **Idioms with Prepositions**

Idioms are groups of words that, when used together, do not fit the rules for meaning or grammar. People who "run for office," for example, need not be track stars; this idiom means they are seeking public office. Combinations of verbs or adjectives and prepositions can be confusing for both native and nonnative speakers of English. Examples of **idioms with prepositions** are:

abide by a rule (a decision)	differ with (a person)
accountable for (actions)	differ from (something being compared)
accountable to (a person)	involved in (a task)
agree on a plan (terms)	involved with (a person)
agree with (a person)	liable for (actions)
agree to (a proposal)	liable to (an authority)
argue for, against (a policy)	part from (a person)
argue with (a person)	part with (a possession)
compare to (an unlike thing)	sensitive about (an offense)
compare with (a thing of the same kind)	sensitive to (an external condition)
differ about or over (an issue)	unequal in (qualities)
	unequal to (a challenge)

7. The **Subject** and **Prepositional Phrases**

The **subject** of a sentence is **never part of a prepositional phrase**. As you look for the subject of a sentence, it may help to cross out the prepositional phrases. For example, look at the following sentence. Find the preposition and cross out the prepositional phrases. Then, underline the subject.

Example: A student in the class fell asleep during the long lecture.

In and **during** are prepositions. You should cross out the prepositional phrases **in the class** and **during the long lecture**. When you do this, you are left with the sentence **A student fell asleep**. Ask yourself, "**Who** fell asleep?" The answer, **student**, is the subject of the sentence.

Exercise Cross out the one prepositional phrase in each sentence. Then underline the subject of the sentence.

Example: The pack of cookies disappeared quickly.

1. The blueberries in this pie are bitter.
2. Leaves from our neighbor's tree covered our lawn.
3. One of my best friends is a computer programmer.
4. A crowd swarmed around the injured boy.

8. The **Object** and **Prepositional Phrases**

The noun or pronoun that a preposition connects to another word in the sentence is called the **object** of the preposition. A group of words that **begins** with a preposition and **ends** with its object is called a **prepositional phrase**.

Example: A man **in the bus** was sleeping soundly.

The words **in the bus**, for example, are a prepositional phrase.

Example: The man **with the long beard** left the restaurant quickly.

The noun *beard* is the **object of the preposition "with."** The prepositional phrase **with the long beard** describes the word **man**. It tells us exactly which man left the restaurant quickly.

Exercise: In each slot, insert the following prepositions: **of, by, with, in, without**. Use each preposition once.

1. The letter from his girlfriend had been sprayed _____ perfume.
2. Don hungrily ate two helpings _____ french fries.
3. _____ giving any notice, the tenant moved out of the apartment.
4. The weedkiller quickly destroyed the dandelions _____ our lawn.
5. The crates _____ the back door contain old magazines.

9. The **Adjective** and **Prepositional Phrases**

It's easy to find how prepositional phrases are used in sentences. *All prepositional phrases are used as either adjectives or adverbs*, and the adjective and adverb questions will identify them for you. For example, **prepositional phrases used as adjectives:**

SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT
.	.	.
Adjectives	Adverbs	Adjectives

When prepositional phrases act as adjectives, they answer one of the four adjective questions: *Which? What kind? How many? Whose?*

However, most *adjective prepositional phrases* answer the question “**which?**”

Consider the following sentence:

The horse **in the third stall** is mine.

In this sentence, the prepositional phrase *in the third stall* (preposition - **in**; object - **stall**) answers the question “which horse?” Therefore,

Adjective question: *Which* horse?
Answer: The horse *in the third stall*

Exercise In the sentences below, the verb, subject, and object or complement, if any, have been marked for you. Mark each **adjective prepositional phrase** with parentheses and an arrow.

Example: The sign (on the lawn) is new.

1. The men from his department will arrive soon.
2. A bracelet with emeralds was shown Saturday.
3. The answers to these questions will be discussed tomorrow.
4. Mr. Baxter just changed the schedule of deliveries.
5. One of the graduate students will help you.

6. The paper has printed most of her letters.
7. One of us should answer the letter from Dr. Jones.

10. The **Adverb** and **Prepositional Phrases**

Prepositional phrases can also act as adverbs describing verbs:

SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT
·	·	·
·	·	·
Adjectives	Adverbs	Adjectives
(word or phrase)	(word or phrase)	(word or phrase)

When prepositional phrases act as adverbs, they answer one of the five adverb questions: *When? Where? Why? How? Under what conditions?*

Example: We stood **in the rain** **for hours**.

This sentence contains two prepositional phrases used as adverbs. **In the rain** tells us *where* we stood, and **for hours** tells us *when* we stood.

Example: Congress passed the Mining Act **for the wrong reasons**.

Adverb question: Passed *why*? **Answer:** *for the wrong reasons*.

“Prepositions” used as Adverbs: Keep in mind that many of the prepositions listed on **Page One** can be used by themselves as **adverbs**. For example, the following sentence **does not** contain a prepositional phrase: **Turn off the light**.

Off is an adverb that describes the verb **turn**, and **light** is the object of the verb (*not* the preposition). **Light** answers the question “turn what?”, not the question “off what?”

Exercise In the sentences below, the verb, subject, and object have been marked for you. Which of the five **adverb** questions does each prepositional phrase answer? Mark each adverb prepositional phrase with (parentheses) and an arrow.

Example: The laundry room is located (in the back) (of the house).

1. The mail is usually delivered in the morning on Saturdays.
2. She looked at the baby for hours.
3. In a few minutes the candle will burn out completely.

4. This week our new teacher canceled all of his classes.
5. The students passed in the final copies of their essays.

11. Indirect Objects and Prepositions

Another phrase with a **hidden preposition** is the “**indirect object.**”
An **indirect object** looks like an object of the verb.

Example: Mr. Potter showed (to) **Ms. Calendar** a better way.

An indirect object is really an object of the “hidden” preposition *to*, *for*, or *of*.

Use the “indirect object question:”

Indirect object question: Showed **to whom?**

Answer: To *Ms. Calendar*

Mark indirect objects like other adverb phrases, with (parentheses) and an arrow.
Then write the hidden preposition above its object. (This will make you more aware of indirect objects in other sentences). Example:

Mr. Porter showed (Ms. Calendar) a better way.

Exercise The subject, verb, and object have been marked for you.
Use the **indirect object question** to *avoid* marking indirect objects as objects of the verb. Insert “**hidden**” *prepositions*. Add (parentheses) and arrows for prepositional phrases.

Example: They gave (him) their complete attention.

1. He asked us several unusual questions.
2. His superiors offered Colonel Johnson several options.
3. Our math instructor awarded each of his students high grades.
4. We wrote the district manager a strong letter of protest.
5. A bonus was offered the production company for an early completion.
6. The police officer handed Mr. Thompson a ticket for speeding.

7. She offered them a fair settlement.

12. Finding Subjects in Difficult Sentences

Many sentences contain a **prepositional phrase between the subject and the verb.**

Example: The color of my brother's tennis shoes is brown. *Is* = the linking verb.

What is the subject? Because *shoes* is a noun close to the verb, you may try to select shoes as the *subject*; however, *shoes* is the object of the preposition **of**.

Prepositional phrase:: of my brother's tennis shoes

Object question:	Of <i>what</i> ?
Answer:	shoes

The subject of a verb is never the object of a preposition. We can avoid mismarking the subject by finding and marking the prepositional phrase **of my brother's tennis shoes** first. Then we can find the correct subject - **color** - more easily. Correctly marked, the sentence looks like this:

The **color** (of my brother's tennis shoes) is brown.

Resources

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Writing Center