

## Johnson County Community College

# PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

Prepositional phrases include two main ingredients:

The preposition (in, through, after, of, to, for, etc.)

The noun or pronoun (house, snow, bout, game, you, etc.)

The combination of preposition and noun/pronoun gives us a prepositional phrase.

of many          after the game          to the house          for you

As can be seen, the phrases may also contain an article (a, an, the).

Prepositional phrases modify other parts of a sentence and may be found in several places within a sentence:

Initial: **In the big house with his dog at his side**, Mike felt safe.

Medial: I was walking rapidly **through the snow**, but I was still getting cold.

Final: Ali slumped like a broken doll **after the boxing match**.

(Note that prepositional phrases are generally not set off with commas. However, in the first example three prepositional phrases introduce the sentence, thus are set off with a comma.)

### Practice Exercise A

Make prepositional phrases out of these words by drawing lines from one column to the other.

|       |            |
|-------|------------|
| in    | the movies |
| over  | the water  |
| under | the couch  |
| at    | the ground |

As you make these phrases, you will notice that many of the nouns can be interchanged with each other. These prepositional phrases can be used in many, many ways to help a writer add details to his or her writing.

## Practice Exercise B

Underline the prepositional phrases in the following sentences.

1. Everything she did for him was entirely for her own sake. --Tolstoy
2. Again she kept her kind eyes on him. --James
3. Seated on the bucket, my hands on the handle, the simplest kind of bridle, I propel myself with difficulty down the stairs.
4. At last he suddenly stopped forcing his horse into the mechanical gallop, and slid down.  
--Lawrence
5. The man leaned further over the fence. --Steinbeck

Prepositional phrases can sometimes be confusing. Often, prepositions can be used as introductory words of clauses, not of prepositional phrases.

When you find such clause arrangement, you can identify the clause from the phrase because the clause has a subject and a verb; the phrase does not.

**s v**

Introductory phrase: After I came home, I went to bed.

**n**

Prepositional phrase: After the game, I went to bed.

Infinitive phrases (*to* plus a verb) also cause trouble in identifying prepositional phrases. Infinitive phrases always use the word *to* with a verb, while the word *to* with a noun creates a prepositional phrase.

**v**

**n**

Infinitive: I wanted to go.      Prepositional phrase: I went to the game.

### Practice Exercise C

Underline the prepositional phrases in the following sentences.

1. After I fell, I needed a bandage for my elbow.
2. During the war, I went to Germany.
3. Through the water I could see into the ship.
4. To see England was my dream.
5. In the hallway, I saw a man going to the office.
6. When he called, I ran to the telephone.
7. As soon as I got home, my mom wanted to leave.
8. We went to the baseball game on Saturday.
9. To get to Westport, you need to drive on the highway.
10. While in Westport, try not to get into trouble.

***For more practice and for a list of prepositions, see the handout on Phrases.***