**Analyzing the use of Prepositions in English Grammar**

In [English grammar](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-english-grammar-1690579), a preposition is a word that shows the relationship between a [noun](https://www.thoughtco.com/noun-in-grammar-1691442) or [pronoun](https://www.thoughtco.com/pronoun-definition-1691685) and other words in a sentence. Prepositions are words like *in* and *out*, *above* and *below*, and *to* and *from,* and they're words we use all the time.

How useful are prepositions? Just look at how many prepositions are italicized in this simple sentence from E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web*: "*For* the first few days *of*his life, Wilbur was allowed to live *in* a box *near*the stove *in* the kitchen."

**Prepositions in English Grammar**

Prepositions are one of the basic [parts of speech](https://www.thoughtco.com/part-of-speech-english-grammar-1691590) and are among the words that we use most when composing sentences. They are also a member of a [closed word class](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-closed-class-words-1689856), meaning that it is very rare for a new preposition to enter the language. There are only about 100 of them in English.

Prepositions often refer to location ("*under* the table"), direction ("*to* the south"), or time ("*past* midnight"). They can also be used to convey other relationships: agency (*by*), comparison (*like, as . . . as*), possession (*of*), purpose (*for*), or source (*from, out of*).

**Simple Prepositions**

Many prepositions are made up of only one word and are called simple prepositions. These include short and very common words like *as, at, by, for,* and *of.* You also use prepositions such as *about, between, into, like, onto, since, than, through,* *with, within,* and *without* to show a relationship between words.

There are many occasions where you might confuse prepositions. For example, sometimes it is difficult to know [when you should use *in, into, on,* or *at*](https://www.thoughtco.com/preposition-practice-in-into-on-1692228)*.*This is because their meanings are very similar, so you have to look at the context of the sentence.

Many prepositions have an opposite as well. For instance, you can use *before* or *after, inside* or *outside, off* or *on, over* or *under,* and *up* or *down.*

Quite a few prepositions express the relationship of things in space. Examples of these include *aboard, across, amid, among, around, atop, behind, beneath, beside, beyond, near, over, round,*and *upon.*

Prepositions can also refer to time. Among the most common are *after, before, during, till,*and *until.*

Other prepositions have unique uses or can be used in multiple ways. Some of these include *about, against, along, despite, regarding, throughout, toward,*and *unlike.*

**Complex Prepositions**

In additionto the simple prepositions, several word groups can perform the same grammatical function. These are called [complex prepositions](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-complex-preposition-1689896). They are two- or three-word units that combine one or two simple prepositions with another word.

Within this category, you have phrases like *in addition to* and *such as.*Whenever you say*thanks to* or *in between*, you are also using a complex preposition. For example, …………

**Identifying Prepositional Phrases**

Prepositions are not in the habit of standing alone. A word group with a preposition at the head followed by an [object](https://www.thoughtco.com/object-of-a-preposition-op-1691447) (or complement) is called a [prepositional phrase](https://www.thoughtco.com/prepositional-phrase-1691663). The object of a preposition is typically a noun or pronoun: Gus put the horse *before the cart.*

Prepositional phrases [add meaning to the nouns and verbs](https://www.thoughtco.com/sentence-building-with-prepositional-phrases-1692198) in sentences. They usually tell us where, when, or how and the words of a prepositional phrase [can often be rearranged](https://www.thoughtco.com/arrange-and-rearrange-prepositional-phrases-1689685).

A prepositional phrase may do the work of an [adjective](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-adjective-clause-1689064) and modify a noun: The student *in the back row*began to snore loudly. It may also function as an [adverb](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-adverb-1689070) and modify a verb: Buster fell asleep *during class.*

Learning to [identify prepositional phrases](https://www.thoughtco.com/identifying-prepositional-phrases-1689676) is often a matter of practice. After some time you will come to realize how frequently we rely on them.

**Ending a Sentence With a Preposition**

You may have a heard the "rule" that you should never [end a sentence with a preposition](https://www.thoughtco.com/ending-sentence-with-preposition-4173131). This is one of those "rules" that you don't have to put up with. It is based on the etymology of "*pre*position," from the Greek for "put in front," as well as a false analogy to Latin.

As long ago as 1926, Henry Fowler dismissed the rule about "[preposition stranding](https://www.thoughtco.com/preposition-stranding-grammar-1691666)" as "a cherished superstition" ignored by major writers from Shakespeare to Thackeray. In fact, in "A Dictionary of Modern English Usage" he said, "the remarkable freedom enjoyed by English in putting its prepositions late and omitting its relatives is an important element in the flexibility of the language."

Essentially, you can ignore this rule, and you can cite Fowler to anyone who tells you otherwise. Go ahead and end your sentence with a preposition if you want to.

**Prepositions Functioning as Another Part of Speech**

Just because you see one of the prepositions we've mentioned used, does not mean that they are being used as a preposition. It depends on the circumstances, and this is one of those tricky parts of the English language, so don't let these fool you.

Certain prepositions (*after, as, before, since, until*) serve as [subordinating conjunctions](https://www.thoughtco.com/subordinating-conjunction-1692154) when they're followed by a [clause](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-clause-grammar-1689850):

* You better get out of town *before*sundown. (*Before* is used as a preposition.)
* Many people run out of ideas long *before*they run out of words. (*Before* is used as a conjunction.)

Some prepositions (including *about, across, around, before, down, in, on, out,* and *up*) also moonlight as [adverbs](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-adverb-1689070). These are sometimes called [prepositional adverbs](https://www.thoughtco.com/prepositional-adverb-1691528) or adverbial [particles](https://www.thoughtco.com/particle-grammar-term-1691585).

* Beth walked *up*the driveway. (The preposition *up* is followed by the object.)
* Beth looked *up*. (The prepositional adverb *up*is modifying the verb *looked.*)

**Deverbal Prepositions**

Transitive prepositions that take the same form as [*-ing* participles](https://www.thoughtco.com/present-participle-1691671) or [*-ed* participles](https://www.thoughtco.com/past-participle-1691592) are called [deverbal](https://www.thoughtco.com/deverbal-grammar-term-1690384) prepositions. It is a rather short list, but it is important to understand that these are also prepositions.

* according (to)
* allowing (for)
* barring - except
* concerning
* counting
* excepting
* excluding
* failing
* following
* given
* gone
* granted
* including
* owing (to)
* pertaining (to)
* regarding
* respecting
* saving
* touching
* wanting

***Source:***

*Fowler H. A Dictionary of Modern English Usage. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 1965.*

https://www.thoughtco.com/preposition-english-grammar-1691665

**Preposition Basics**

A preposition is a word or group of words used before a [noun](https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/writingcenter/grammar/partsofspeech#s-lg-box-9131415), [pronoun](https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/writingcenter/grammar/partsofspeech#s-lg-box-9131415), or noun phrase to show direction, time, place, location, spatial relationships, or to introduce an object. Some examples of prepositions are words like "in," "at," "on," "of," and "to."

Prepositions in English are highly idiomatic. Although there are some rules for usage, much preposition usage is dictated by fixed expressions. In these cases, it is best to memorize the phrase instead of the individual preposition.

**A Few Rules**

**Prepositions of Direction**

To refer to a direction, use the prepositions "to," "in," "into," "on," and "onto*."*

* She drove ***to*** the store. towards
* Don’t ring the doorbell. Come right ***in(to)*** the house.
* Drive ***on(to)*** the grass and park the car there.

**Prepositions of Time**

To refer to one point in time, use the prepositions "in," "at," and "on."

Use"in" with parts of the day (not specific times), months, years, and seasons.

* He reads ***in*** the evening.
* The weather is cold ***in*** December.
* She was born ***in*** 1996.
* We rake leaves ***in*** the fall.

Use "at"with the time of day. Also use "at" with noon, night, and midnight.

* I go to work ***at*** 8:00.
* He eats lunch ***at*** noon.
* She often goes for a walk ***at*** night.
* They go to bed ***at*** midnight.

Use "on" with days.

* I work ***on*** Saturdays.
* He does laundry ***on*** Wednesdays.

I’ll see on Monday / I’ll see you ~~on~~ next Monday

I’ll see you ~~on~~ tomorrow

I’ll see you in fortnight/ in a fortnight

I’ll see you in two weeks/ in a two weeks

To refer to extended time, use the prepositions "since," "for," "by," "during," "from…to," "from…until," "with," and "within."

* I have lived in Minneapolis ***since*** 2005. (I moved there in 2005 and still live there.)
* He will be in Toronto ***for*** 3 weeks. (He will spend 3 weeks in Toronto.)
* She will finish her homework ***by*** 6:00. (She will finish her homework sometime between now and 6:00.)
* He works part time ***during*** the summer. (For the period of time throughout the summer.)
* I will collect data ***from*** January ***to*** June. (Starting in January and ending in June.)
* They are in school ***from*** August ***until*** May. (Starting in August and ending in May.)
* She will graduate ***within*** 2 years. (Not longer than 2 years.)

**I’m in the train/on the train**

**I’m in/on the bus**

**I’m in/on the van**

**I’m in/on the car**

**Prepositions of Place**

To refer to a place, use the prepositions "in"(the point itself), "at"(the general vicinity), "on" (the surface), and "inside" (something contained).

* They will meet ***in*** the lunchroom.
* She was waiting ***at*** the corner.
* He left his phone ***on*** the bed.
* Place the pen ***inside*** the drawer.

To refer to an object higher than a point, use the prepositions "over" and "above." To refer to an object lower than a point, use the prepositions "below," "beneath," "under," and "underneath."

* The bird flew ***over*** the house.
* The plates were on the shelf ***above*** the cups.
* Basements are dug ***below*** ground.
* There is hard wood ***beneath*** the carpet.
* The squirrel hid the nuts ***under*** a pile of leaves.
* The cat is hiding ***underneath*** the box.

 To refer to an object close to a point, use the prepositions "by," "near," "next to," "between," "among," and "opposite."

* The gas station is ***by*** the grocery store.
* The park is ***near*** her house.
* Park your bike ***next to*** the garage.
* There is a deer ***between*** the two trees.
* There is a purple flower ***among*** the weeds.
* The garage is ***opposite*** the house.

**Prepositions of Location**

To refer to a location, use the prepositions "in"(an area or volume), "at"(a point), and "on"(a surface).

* They live ***in*** the country. (an area)
* She will find him ***at*** the library. (a point)
* There is a lot of dirt ***on*** the window. (a surface)

**Prepositions of Spatial Relationships**

To refer to a spatial relationship, use the prepositions "above," "across," "against," "ahead of," "along," "among," "around," "behind," "below,"  
"beneath," "beside," "between," "from," "in front of," "inside," "near," "off," "out of," "through," "toward," "under," and "within."

* The post office is ***across*** the street from the grocery store.
* We will stop at many attractions ***along*** the way.
* The kids are hiding ***behind*** the tree.
* His shirt is ***off***.
* Walk ***toward*** the garage and then turn left.
* Place a check mark ***within*** the box.

**Prepositions Following Verbs and Adjectives**

Some verbs and adjectives are followed by a certain preposition. Sometimes verbs and adjectives can be followed by different prepositions, giving the phrase different meanings. To find which prepositions follow the verb or an adjective, look up the verb or adjective in an online dictionary, such as [Merriam Webster](http://www.merriam-webster.com/), or use a corpus, such as [The Corpus of Contemporary American English](http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/). Memorizing these phrases instead of just the preposition alone is the most helpful.

**Some Common Verb + Preposition Combinations**

**About:** worry, complain, read

* He ***worries about*** the future.
* She ***complained about*** the homework.
* I ***read about*** the flooding in the city.

**At:** arrive (a building or event), smile, look

* He ***arrived at*** the airport 2 hours early.
* The children ***smiled at*** her.
* She ***looked at*** him.

**From:** differ, suffer

* The results ***differ from*** my original idea.
* She ***suffers from*** dementia.

**For:** account, allow, search

* Be sure to ***account for*** any discrepancies.
* I returned the transcripts to the interviewees to ***allow for*** revisions to be made.
* They are ***searching for*** the missing dog.

**In:** occur, result, succeed

* The same problem ***occurred in*** three out of four cases.
* My recruitment strategies ***resulted in*** finding 10 participants.
* She will ***succeed in*** completing her degree.

**Of:** approve, consist, smell

* I ***approve of*** the idea.
* The recipe ***consists of*** three basic ingredients.
* The basement ***smells of*** mildew.

**On:** concentrate, depend, insist

* He is ***concentrating on*** his work.
* They ***depend on*** each other.
* I must ***insist on*** following this rule.

**To:**belong, contribute, lead, refer

* Bears ***belong to*** the family of mammals.
* I hope to ***contribute to*** the previous research.
* My results will ***lead to*** future research on the topic.
* Please ***refer to*** my previous explanation.

**With:** (dis)agree, argue, deal

* I ***(dis)agree with*** you.
* She ***argued with*** him.
* They will ***deal with*** the situation.

Although verb + preposition combinations appear similar to phrasal verbs, the verb and the particle (in this case, the preposition) in these combinations cannot be separated like phrasal verbs. See more about this on our [verb choice page](https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/writingcenter/scholarlyvoice/verbchoice).

**Some Common Adjective + Preposition Combinations**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **About** | **At** | **By** | **From** | **For** | **In** | **Of** | **To** | **With** |
| Accustomed |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |  |
| Aware |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |  |  |
| Beneficial |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |  |
| Capable |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |  |  |
| Characteristic |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |  |  |
| Composed |  |  | X |  |  |  | X |  |  |
| Different |  |  |  | X |  |  |  |  |  |
| Disappointed |  |  |  |  |  | X |  |  | X |
| Employed |  | X | X |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Essential |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |  |
|  | **About** | **At** | **By** | **From** | **For** | **In** | **Of** | **To** | **With** |
| Familiar |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |
| Good |  | X |  |  | X |  |  |  |  |
| Grateful |  |  |  |  | X |  |  | X |  |
| Interested |  |  |  |  |  | X |  |  |  |
| Happy | X |  |  |  | X |  |  |  | X |
| Opposed |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |  |
| Proud |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |  |  |
| Responsible |  |  |  |  | X |  |  |  |  |
| Similar |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |  |
| Sorry | X |  |  |  | X |  |  |  |  |

**Ending a Sentence With a Preposition**

At one time, schools taught students that a sentence should never end with a preposition. This rule is associated with Latin grammar, and while many aspects of Latin have made their way into English, there are times when following this particular grammar rule creates unclear or awkward sentence structures. Since the purpose of writing is to clearly communicate your ideas, it is acceptable to end a sentence with a preposition if the alternative would create confusion or is too overly formal.

**Example:** The car had not been paid for. (Ends with a preposition but is acceptable)

**Unclear Revision:** Paid for the car had not been. (Unclear sentence.)

**Example:** I would like to know where she comes from. (Ends with a preposition but is acceptable)

**Overly Grammatical Revision:** I would like to know from where she comes. (Grammatical but overly formal. Nobody actually speaks like this.)

However, in academic writing, you may decide that it is worth revising your sentences to avoid ending with a preposition in order to maintain a more formal scholarly voice.

**Example:** My research will focus on the community the students lived in.

**Revision:** My research will focus on the community in which the students lived.

**Example:** I like the people I am working with.

**Revision:** I like the people with whom I am working.

**Prepositional Phrases and Wordiness**

Like with [pronouns](https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/writingcenter/grammar/nounpronounagreement), too many prepositional phrases can create wordiness in a sentence:

***Example*:** The author chose the mixed-method design to explain that the purpose ***of*** the study was to explore the leadership qualities ***of*** the principals***in*** the schools as a means to gauge teacher satisfaction ***in*** the first year ***of*** teaching.

This type of sentence could be shortened and condensed to minimize the prepositional phrases and bring [clarity to the writer's intent](https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/writingcenter/scholarlyvoice/clarity):

***Revision:*** The author chose the mixed-method design to explore the principals' leadership qualities and their impact ***on*** first-year teachers' satisfaction.

**Unnecessary Prepositions**

If the preposition is unnecessary, leave it out. This creates more clear and concise writing.

**Example:** Where are the plates ***at***?

**Revision:** Where are the plates?

**Example:** She jumped ***off of*** the balance beam.

**Revision:** She jumped ***off*** the balance beam.

https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/writingcenter/grammar/prepositions