

Prepositional Phrase

Definition of Prepositional Phrase

Prepositional [phrase](#) is a group of words comprising a preposition, its [object](#), and a modifier of the object. In a longer [sentence](#), this phrase modifies verbs, nouns, clauses, and phrases.

A prepositional phrase usually comes at the start of a sentence, though it might also appear inside another prepositional phrase. As a preposition cannot stand alone, it needs a word to make a complete and coherent phrase. This word is called an object of a preposition.

For instance, in the sentence, “I was thinking that we all learn by experience, but some of us have to go to summer school” (*The Tunnel of Love*, by Peter De Vries), “experience,” “us,” and “school,” are objects of prepositions, creating the prepositional phrases.

Common Examples of Prepositional Phrase

Prepositional phrase functions as either an [adjective](#) phrase, or an [adverb](#) phrase, within a sentence.

Prepositional Phrase as an Adjective Phrase

The girl with her is her daughter.

Here, “with” is a preposition, and together “with her” is a prepositional phrase. It serves as an adjective phrase.

I have brought a white dog with black paws.

“With” is a preposition and, as a whole, “with black paws” is prepositional phrase, performing the task of an adjective phrase.

Prepositional Phrase As an Adverb Phrase

Sara looked under the table for her book.

Here, the preposition “under” is grouped with the words “under the table,” to create a prepositional phrase.

When she got to the airport, she hired a taxi.

“To” is the preposition and, as a whole, “to the airport” is a prepositional phrase.

Examples of Prepositional Phrase in Literature

Example #1: *A Hanging* (by George Orwell)

“We walked out of the gallows yard, past the condemned cells with their waiting prisoners, into the big central yard of the prison.”

Orwell has employed two lengthy prepositional phrases in this example. Both are a modifying noun “gallows yard,” performing the function of a noun.

Example #2: *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* (by Saul Bellow)

“Shortly after dawn, or what would have been dawn in a normal sky, Mr. Artur Sammler with his bushy eye took in the books and papers of his West Side bedroom and suspected strongly that they were the wrong books, the wrong papers.”

In these lines, four prepositional phrases are underlined. Each phrase begins with a preposition – “after,” “in,” “with,” or “of” – and ends with an object of preposition.

Example #3: *Walden* (by E. B White)

“Next morning early I started afoot for Walden, out Main Street and down Thoreau, past the depot and the Minuteman Chevrolet Company. The morning was fresh, and in a bean field along the way I flushed an agriculturalist, quietly studying his beans.”

White has used many prepositional phrases in the following lines. The first four phrases function as adverb phrases and the last one as an adjective phrase, modifying a noun.

Example #4: *Paul Clifford* (by Edward Bulwer-Lytton)

“It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents – except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is *in London* that our scene lies), rattling along the housetops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness.”

Lytton has used prepositional phrase working as an adverb phrase. All the phrases are modifying their respective objects and adding essential information to the text.

Example #5: *Unreliable Memoirs* (by Clive James)

“As proud parents sat open-mouthed on the surrounding benches, she came hurtling out of the back annex, along the corridor, through the connecting door, into the hall, up to the springboard and into space. She drove me into the floor like a tack.”

See at all the underlined prepositional phrases. They are performing adverbial role, and modifying and giving details about verbs. However, the final prepositional phrase is functioning as an adjective phrase, modifying [pronoun](#).

Function

The role of a prepositional phrase is significant because it allows the writers to provide complete information. In fact, many adverbial phrases occur in just a single sentence, as they are flexible in syntactic roles, modifying sentence positions, and functions. Also, prepositional phrases provide essential information about questions starting with how, where, what, what kind and when etc. Besides, a prepositional phrase also can modify a sentence with additional details.