

## CHAPTER

## 5 Prepositions

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

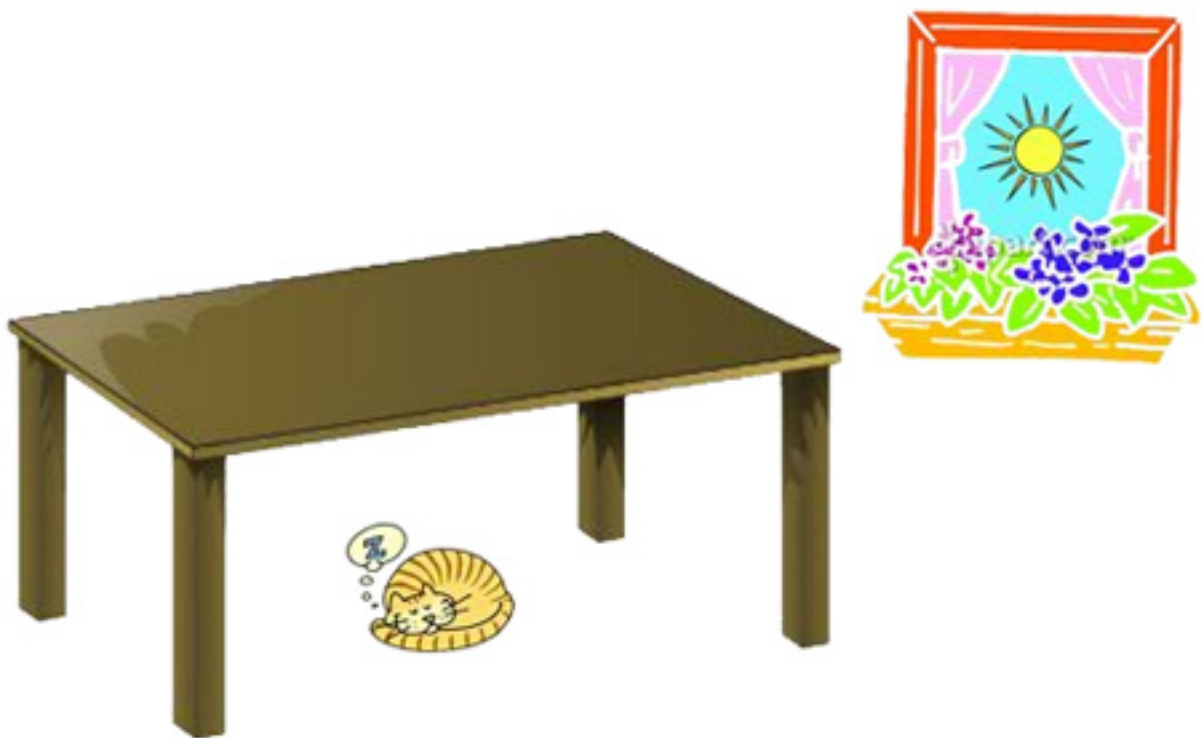
1. Define what a preposition is and state its function;
2. Differentiate between a preposition and a compound preposition;
3. Identify some common problems with the use of prepositions and how to avoid/correct them; and
4. State what a prepositional phrase is and understand the way it is used.

## INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we are going to learn about prepositions. A preposition connects nouns and pronouns to other words in a sentence. The word or phrase that the preposition introduces is called the object of the preposition.

A preposition would normally tell us about the relationship between the object and its space/time in the rest of the sentence. It may also tell us about the logical relationship between the object and the rest of the sentence.

Consider the following sentences:



### 1. The cat is sleeping **beneath** the table.

In the sentences, a preposition tells us about the relationship between the noun “cat” with the space or time within which the cat is located.

1. The cat is sleeping **on** the table.
2. The cat is sleeping **beneath** the table.
3. The cat is leaning **against** the table.
4. The cat is **beside** the table.
5. The cat jumped **over** the table.
6. The cat slept **during** the day time.

## 5.1 PREPOSITIONS

Prepositions link an object to the rest of the sentence in terms of either a spatial, temporal or logical relationship. There are many prepositions in the English language and it would be useful to consult a good dictionary to learn more kinds of prepositions.

For the purpose of this chapter, we will consider six groups of prepositions as shown in Figure 5.1.



Figure 5.1: Six groups of prepositions

### 5.1.1 Prepositions of Time

Prepositions of time include the following:



The train arrived **at** 4.30 p.m. this afternoon.



He graduated from the university **at** the age of twenty.

**On**

We use **on** to talk about day and dates.

**On** Sunday, we went to the zoo.



We exchanged a lot of presents **on** Christmas day.

My sister visits me **on** the 23rd of every month.



**In**

We use **in** to talk about an unspecific time during the day, week, month, etc.

She likes to jog **in** the morning.



He started working with that company **in** 1985 and resigned **in** 1999.

**By  
and  
Before**

We use **before** when we mean before a certain time.  
We use **by** when we mean before a certain time or exactly on time.

We were in school **before** the bell rang.



We were in school **by** ten o'clock.

**After**

We use **after** when we mean after a certain time.

Can we eat **after** we watch the show?





### Until

We use **until** to talk about a time when a certain event or action will end.

Mrs. Tan continued shopping **until** her husband arrived.



### Since

We use **since** to talk about an event or action that began in the past but continues to happen up to the point we are talking about it.

I have been married **since** 1996.



### For

We use **for** to measure time.

She held the breath **for** one minute.



Mr. Roslan has lived in that house **for** the last seven years.

## ACTIVITY



Fill in the blanks with the correct preposition of time.

1. I will be ready to leave \_\_\_\_\_ about twenty minutes.
2. I will wait \_\_\_\_\_ 6:30, but then I'm going home.
3. They have been waiting for the train \_\_\_\_\_ 11 o'clock last night.
4. I told mother we would be home \_\_\_\_\_ an hour or so.
5. It's been raining \_\_\_\_\_ the last three hours.
6. The workers have been busy \_\_\_\_\_ this morning trying to meet a deadline.
7. I started collecting stamps \_\_\_\_\_ the age of 10. I now have almost 5000 stamps from all over the world.
8. We had better eat \_\_\_\_\_ we watch the game. That way, we won't be hungry.
9. She has to finish her task \_\_\_\_\_ the time her teacher gets back or she will be disciplined.
10. Mr. and Mrs. Wong have been married \_\_\_\_\_ forty years.
11. The mail arrived \_\_\_\_\_ Monday but I only managed to read it today.
12. I attended university \_\_\_\_\_ 1991 and graduated \_\_\_\_\_ four years of studies.

### 5.1.2 Prepositions of Place and Location

Prepositions of place and location include the following:

**At**

**On**

**In**

**By**

**Beside**

**Above**

**Beneath**

**Between**

**Inside**

**Outside**

**At**

We use **at** to talk about a specific address or place.

I live **at** 4 Narayan Road, Matunga East.



She is **at** home now. Why don't you go visit her?

**On**

We use **on** to designate names of streets, avenues, etc.

My shop is located **on** Station Road.





**On**

We use **on** to talk about specific location.

I'm afraid you are too late. She is **on** the train now.



Don't let the baby crawl **on** the floor. It is dirty.

**In**

We use **in** for the names of specific places (town, country, state, continent, etc.)

The Taj Mahal is located **in** India.



India is a country **in** Asia.

**By  
and  
Beside**

We use **by** and **beside** when we want to talk about something situated next to a particular place or area.



He parked his car **beside** the supermarket.

### Above and Beneath

We use **above** when we are talking about something being on top of a particular location. We use **beneath** when we are talking about something being under a particular location.

The plane flew **above** the padi field.



The cat is sleeping **beneath** the table.

### Between

When we want to talk about being in the middle of two objects or locations, we use **between**.

The man stood **between** the chair and the table.



Abdul parked his car **between** the café and the cinema.



Fill in the blanks with the correct preposition of place.

1. My best friend lives \_\_\_\_\_ Cross Road.
2. Since my brother started dating, he never seems to be \_\_\_\_\_ home.
3. I think she spent the entire evening \_\_\_\_\_ the phone.
4. The Lims bought a house \_\_\_\_\_ a lake. It is very beautiful.
5. I think there is a cockroach \_\_\_\_\_ the bed. Please use a broom to sweep it out.
6. The police caught the robber \_\_\_\_\_ the corner of Mahul Road and Port Trust Road.
7. They plan to visit Anwar \_\_\_\_\_ the hospital tomorrow afternoon.
8. I'll see you \_\_\_\_\_ the library when I get there.
9. The shop is located \_\_\_\_\_ the Laundrymat and the grocery shop. You can't miss it.
10. I saw a bird hovering \_\_\_\_\_ the building this morning.

### 5.1.3 Prepositions of Movement

Prepositions of movement include the following:

**To**

**Towards**

**From**

**Along**

**To  
and  
Toward/s**

We use **to** or **toward/s** when we want to express movement towards a place.

I am going **to** the library this evening.



They are walking **toward** the football field.

**From**

We use **from** when we want to express movement from a place.

Her family migrated **from** Indonesia last year.



**Along**

We use **along** when we want to express a parallel movement.

The railway line runs **along** the main highway of the city.



#### 5.1.4 Prepositions of Manner

Prepositions of manner include the following:

**In**

**With**



**In  
and  
With**

We use **in** and **with** when we want to provide additional information about the manner of a particular event/action/object.

They left **in** a hurry after they heard the bad news.



The children left the party **with** happy faces.

**5.1.5 Other Prepositions**

When we want to talk about a topic or a title, we normally use **of**, **about** or **on**.

Examples:



This is a story **about** love and jealousy.

Kassim painted a portrait **of** his mother.



They watched a film **on** the Second World War.



We use **of** when we want to talk about something being made of, or consisting of.

**Examples:**

This chair is made **of** plastic.



The set of encyclopedia consists **of** twelve volumes.

She kept her feelings **of** doubt to herself.



We also use **of** to talk about ownership or affiliation.

**Examples:**

John is the owner **of** the car.



Miriam is a student **of** communications at the university.



Fill in the blanks with the correct prepositions from the list provided.

*Note: Not all prepositions need be used.*

about	above	of	after	against	among	at	in
behind	beside	below	between	down	for	from	
before	across	on	by	to			

1. If Sumitra doesn't arrive \_\_\_\_\_ five minutes, she will not be \_\_\_\_\_ time to catch the opening ceremony of the games.
2. Take a look \_\_\_\_\_ this picture. The woman standing \_\_\_\_\_ the tree looks like a cousin \_\_\_\_\_ mine.
3. The sun has gone \_\_\_\_\_. It is now too dark \_\_\_\_\_ you to go home \_\_\_\_\_ yourself.
4. It is difficult \_\_\_\_\_ anyone \_\_\_\_\_ speak a new language but with practice, you will succeed.
5. They are travelling \_\_\_\_\_ the five o'clock bus \_\_\_\_\_ Taiping.
6. He worked \_\_\_\_\_ the math problems \_\_\_\_\_ going to bed.
7. Mrs. Lim was very happy \_\_\_\_\_ her son's results. His grades \_\_\_\_\_ his report card were all \_\_\_\_\_ average.
8. The blind man thanked Ramli \_\_\_\_\_ helping him \_\_\_\_\_ the street.
9. I bought a book \_\_\_\_\_ the Chinese Revolution \_\_\_\_\_ watching a documentary on television.
10. The price \_\_\_\_\_ the washing machine that you are pointing \_\_\_\_\_ cost \_\_\_\_\_ one thousand ringgit.
11. We don't know anything \_\_\_\_\_ this little girl. We found her \_\_\_\_\_ the bridge when we were walking \_\_\_\_\_ this afternoon.
12. The wealthy man did not want his sons to fight \_\_\_\_\_ themselves over his property \_\_\_\_\_ his death. So he divided half \_\_\_\_\_ what he owned \_\_\_\_\_ the four of them and donated the rest \_\_\_\_\_ various charity.
13. The river was flooded \_\_\_\_\_ the heavy downpour yesterday. Several villages located \_\_\_\_\_ the river had to be evacuated.
14. Stop hiding \_\_\_\_\_ the door. Come out and say hello \_\_\_\_\_ all our guests.

### 5.1.6 Compound Prepositions

Not all prepositions are made of single words.



Let's take a look at the list of some familiar compound prepositions in Figure 5.2.

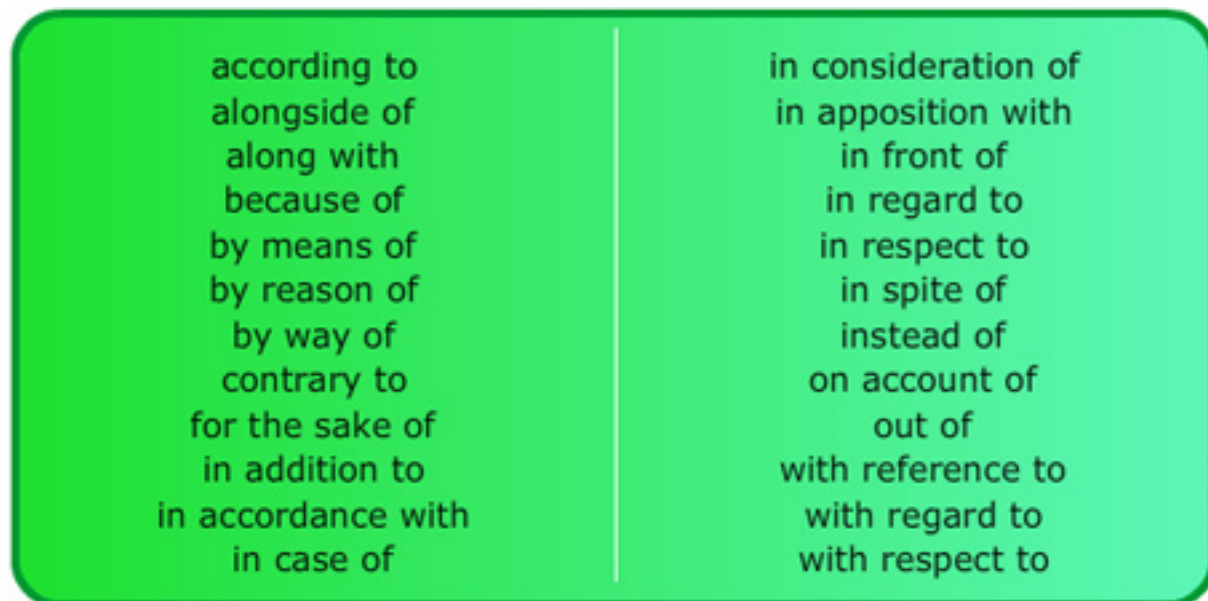


Figure 5.2: List of some familiar compounds prepositions



For a full list of prepositions, visit:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_English\\_prepositions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_English_prepositions)

## 5.2 PREPOSITIONS WITH NOUNS, ADJECTIVES AND VERBS

Figure 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 show some examples of certain nouns, adjectives and verbs that can only take specific prepositions.

Nouns		
admiration for approval of answer to attack on awareness of belief in battle for/against concern for contrast to contribution to cure for desire for date with	dealing with dislike for disloyalty to disregard for effect on encounter with fondness for familiarity with grasp of hold on hope for identification with interest in	love of/for link to need for participation in quarrel with regard to reason for respect for reference to remedy for success in taste for understanding of

Figure 5.2: Examples of nouns that can only take specific prepositions

Adjectives		
afraid of angry at aware of capable of careless about familiar with	fond of happy about interested in jealous of made of married to	proud of similar to sorry for sure of tired of worried about

Figure 5.3: Examples of adjectives that can only take specific prepositions

Verbs		
ask about/for/of apologise for belong to care for/about find out	give up/in grow up look for/up look forward to make up	pay for/up study for talk about think about trust in work for

*Figure 5.4: Examples of verbs that can only take specific prepositions*



### 5.3 COMMON PITFALLS IN THE USE OF PREPOSITIONS

#### 5.3.1 Compound Prepositions

Because there are many different kinds of prepositions in English, and some of which can be used in a variety of ways (for example, **in** and **at** can be used as both prepositions of time and place), it is likely that their use can be confusing.

Consider the following two sentences. Which do you think is correct?

1. I am so bored **of** reading this novel.
2. I am so bored **with** reading this novel.



We often hear people say the first, when it is actually the second sentence that is correct.

Misusing preposition is quite common and can happen in two ways.

#### Misusing



It is the wrong use of preposition altogether, as in sentence one in the example above.

In other words, the preposition just does not go with the word that precedes it.

Saying, for example, "apologise with" or "study on" or "happy of", are all instances of using the wrong prepositions.




Sometimes a preposition fits the word preceding it, but you want to mean something else.

A preposition can be used in various ways so it is not uncommon that we say or write something using a preposition when we want to mean something else.

Consider the following sentences. Do they mean the same thing? Are they different?

1. He ran **into** the Headmaster.

2. He ran **to** the Headmaster.



- In the first sentence, running “into” suggest something like “bumping into” the Headmaster. The boy, for example, may have been running without seeing where he was going when he crashed into the Headmaster.
- The second sentence suggests a conscious action. The boy was deliberately going to the Headmaster, maybe to report an incident.


Here is another example using the same two prepositions:

He jumped **in** the lake.

He jumped **into** the lake.

**Explanation:**

The boy is already in the lake when he started to jump up and down.



**Explanation:**

The boy is probably in a boat when he decided to go for a swim. Therefore, he jumped **into** the lake.

Both are correct but they mean different things.

It is clear from these examples that when a different preposition is used, the meaning of the sentence will change as well.

Here are some other commonly misused prepositions:

#### (a) Like versus As

**As** is a conjunction (see previous chapter) used to compare between two nouns or pronouns.

**Like** is a preposition used to introduce a phrase of comparison.

Consider the following examples:

He is tall **as** his father is.



The perfume smells **like** a rose.



(b) **Beside versus Besides**

**Beside** means “next to”, whereas **besides** means in addition to.

The cow is **beside** the barn.



**Besides** organising the trip, she is also chartering the bus.



(c) **Between versus Among**

We use **between** when it involves only two items. We use **among** when there are more.

**Examples:**

I parked my bicycle **between** the two trees.





She is mingling **among** the children.

(d) **Due to**

**Due to** is often used wrongly to mean “because of”.

Due to his tiredness, he could not sit for the exam. ✗

Because of this tiredness, he could not sit for the exam. ✓



(e) **Inside/outside of.**

The **of** is always unnecessary.



Did you know that “versus” is also a preposition?

**5.3.2 Double Preposition**

Look at this sentence:

The house to which he is walking to is situated on the hilltop.

Do you notice that there is an error in this sentence, one that is very commonly made? The preposition to is repeated twice, once before “which” and the other after the



verb.

The correct sentence should be:

The house to which he is walking is situated on the hilltop.



The repetition of the preposition is unnecessary.

A prepositional phrase should only have one preposition. This error is known as “double preposition”.

**ACTIVITY**

Correct the following double preposition error.

- He told us that there were meetings in which he did not take part in.

Another type of double preposition occurs with “off of”.

Both of these words are prepositions, so a phrase should have only one of them.

Look at the following sentences:

The dog fell off of the couch. ✗

The dog fell off the couch. ✓







Correct the misused prepositions or double preposition in the following sentences.

1. The woman to whom you were talking to was the chief librarian in my school.
2. I ran in my cousin at the mall last night.
3. I can't keep with this work schedule.
4. After a long night of questioning from the police, the criminal finally gave up.
5. I am bored of this colour. Let's repaint the house.
6. The plate fell off of the table.
7. The horse is standing among the two ponies.
8. Maimunah placed the lamp besides her bed so that she could read at night.
9. Please look up for a red car. It should be passing by shortly.
10. The university consists from seven faculties.
11. The man threw a big rock in the river and created a huge splash.
12. Sarah came with bus after she missed the train.
13. The country from which Chandran came from is now facing a drought.
14. She was very tired and fell to a deep sleep the moment her head touched the pillow.

## 5.4 PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

Prepositional phrases consist of two parts:

- The preposition
- The object (noun or pronoun).

In formal English, a preposition *must always be followed* by an object. Sometimes, the two may be separated by adjectives, but as long as there is an object after the preposition (even a compound preposition), this is fine.

Consider the following examples of prepositional phrases:

	Preposition	Adjective	Object
He ran	to		him
He ran	up		the stairs
He ran	down	the red	ladder
He rode	in	my new	car

Prepositional phrases can function as either adjectives or adverbs in a sentence.

### (a) Prepositional Phrases as Adjectives.

When they function as adjectives, they tell us more about the noun or the pronoun in the sentence.

Also, prepositional phrases that are adjectives answer the following questions:



Let's take a look at the following sentence:

The salesman **with gray hair** spoke to my mother.



The prepositional phrase tells:

Which salesman spoke to my mother?

The one with the gray hair.



### (b) Prepositional Phrases as Adverbs.

When prepositional phrases are adverbs, they tell us more about the verbs, adverbs, and adjectives.

Prepositional phrases that are adverbs answer the following questions:

**How?**

**When?**

**Where?**

**Why?**

Look at the following sentence:

Mr. Selvaraju took a trip **to an island in the Pacific Ocean.**



The prepositional phrase “to an island” functions as an adverb because it tells us to where the trip was taken; hence it gives us more information about, or modifies, the verb. The second prepositional phrase “in the Pacific Ocean” is also an adverb because it modifies the prepositional phrase “to an island”.

Since prepositional phrases are either adjectives or adverbs, the object of the preposition can never be the subject of a sentence. This is important when forming subject-verb agreement because the object of the preposition must not be confused with the subject, or the subject and verb will not agree.

### (c) Prepositional Phrases can have Two or Three Objects

The sentence has two objects:

She flew **to Malaysia and Singapore.**



The prepositional phrase “to Malaysia and Singapore” has two objects: “Malaysia and Singapore”.

## 5.5

## GRAY AREA: PREPOSITIONS AT THE END OF THE SENTENCES

It is traditionally the case that in formal English, it is unacceptable to end a sentence with a preposition. This is because, as noted, prepositions must always be followed by an object, which is why a sentence cannot end with a preposition.

Let's consider the following example:



The sentence is wrong in formal English for two reasons:

First reason	Second reason
There is no object after the preposition.	If we move the object to the position after the preposition, the sentence is still incorrect.

But “To who are you talking?” is clearly wrong because “who” should be “whom”.

The correct structure of the question should be:





But today, it is no longer considered wrong to end a sentence with a preposition, at least in some cases (especially when speaking). Consider the following sentences:



Although both are correct, it is evident that the second sentence is a clearer construction and less labored. Certainly, it will be very uncommon to hear someone say “on what did you step?”.

There are also occasions when a sentence must end with a preposition, or it will not sound right at all.

**For example:**



To say “This is for what?” is rather clumsy, and to say “For what is this?” is just unfamiliar. Hence, it is useful to remember that although it is okay to end a sentence with a preposition, try to avoid this in formal situations (like writing a resume, an academic essay or a formal letter).

## SUMMARY

1. Prepositions have a relating function: they establish relations between nominal units, mainly nouns and nominal groups, and other units in the surrounding discourse.
2. The prepositional phrase consists of a preposition together with its complement, typically a nominal group as in *under the chair*.
3. Prepositions may consist of one word (*from*), two words (*because of*) or three (*in contact with*) and occasionally four (*with the exception of*). All are single prepositions.

## KEY TERMS

Prepositions

Nouns

Adjectives

## REFERENCES

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