

Prepositions

Prepositions: The Glue Holding the Nouns Together

Prepositions connect nouns by allowing writers to create complex sentences. Prepositions show the relationship between nouns by modifying the noun that follows them (also called the object of the preposition). Together, a preposition and its object are called a prepositional phrase. For example, if a writer needs to discuss a book on a table. He or she needs to use the following sentence: The book lies on (a preposition) the table (the object of the preposition). Anyone reading the sentence needs to know where the book is located, so the preposition on connects the table (a second noun) to the book.

Ex. Alongside the car (a complete prepositional phrase)

Ex. The cat ran under the bed.
(a preposition) (the object of the preposition)

The Most Common Prepositions:

About	Above	Across	After	Against
Along	Alongside	Amidst	Among	Around
At	Behind	Below	Beneath	Beside
Besides	Between	Beyond	By	Concerning
Down	During	For	From	In
Inside	Into	Near	Of	Off
On	Onto	Out	Outside	Over
Regarding	Through	Throughout	To	Toward
Under	Underneath	Up	Upon	With
Within	Without			

Using Articles with Prepositions

Many writers hesitate when using articles (a, an, the) and prepositions. They must decide if they are using the preposition to demonstrate a specific noun. When using a preposition and a noun, a writer often needs an article. (An adjective or pronoun can also be inserted after the preposition.)

Ex. The athlete threw the ball to me. Ex. The pianist composed a song for the symphony.

This informal rule also applies to plural nouns.

Ex. The dog happily played with the boys. Ex. The pilot soared above the clouds.

Verbs That Take Prepositions

A few verbs take prepositions when conveying the action of a sentence. For these verbs, the preposition completes their meaning. A few examples include:

Account For	Agree On	Agree With	Angry At	Angry With
Apply For	Argue About	Compare To	Compare With	Conform To
Consists Of	Convenient For	Correspond With	Differ From	Identical to
Interested In	Speak To	Speak With		

Ex. You must account for your actions. Ex. I was angry with Sally last night.

Ending a Sentence with a Preposition

When composing formal documents, such as academic essays, writers should avoid ending sentences with a preposition. The rule also applies to questions ending in prepositions. Admittedly, this rule changes depending on the formality of the piece being written, but for essays and most materials used in classes, writers should avoid ending a sentence with a preposition whenever possible. Yet, remember to watch out for awkward sentences when avoiding the error as well.

Ex. Incorrect Sentence: The party is where I want to be at. (Ending a sentence with a preposition)

Ex. Repaired Sentence: I want to be at the party.

Ex. Incorrect Question: Who are you going to the party with? (Ending a question with a preposition)

Ex. Repaired Sentence: With whom are you going to the party?

Ex. Incorrect Sentence: I saw the swimming pool that I wanted to jump into. (Ending with a preposition)

Ex. Incorrect Sentence: I saw the swimming pool into which I wanted to jump. (Correct but Awkward)

Ex. Repaired Sentence: I saw the swimming pool and wanted to jump into it.

Unneeded Prepositions

Watch out for unnecessary use of prepositions. Often, writers only need to use one preposition at a time. Frequently, multiple prepositions can be eliminated by relying on a single preposition or by rewording the sentence.

Incorrect Sentence: The girl is identical to with the actress on Broadway. (To and With create redundancy)

Repaired Sentence: The girl is identical to the actress on Broadway.

Incorrect Sentence: I don't think you should go out with her. (Out and With are informal)

Repaired Sentence: I don't think you should date her.

Prepositional Units

Yet, sometimes prepositions form larger groups. Writers become familiar with these larger units with experience, but a few of the most common are listed below.

Alongside of

In Front Of

In Regards To

Out of

Together With

Ex. The man ran alongside his girlfriend's car, begging her to come back.

Ex. Unfortunately, it would be an unhappy ending. She ran him over as he raced in front of the car.

Capitalizing Prepositions in Titles

When using prepositions in a title, do not capitalize them unless they are the first word of the title or the first word following a subtitle. Also, capitalize the first word following a colon in a title.

Ex. Across the Pond: Dickens's View of America Ex. Love in the French Court: 1475-1561

Ex: Examining Difficult Verse: From "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

Archaic and Idiomatic Usage

Sometimes words fade away with time, and upon is becoming one of those words. Although the word can be used to describe someone or something that has moved up and then onto something else, most writers use up or on now. For example, the cat jumped on the table. Instead of, the cat jumped upon the table.

Often prepositions can bend their rules of usage. Sometimes, a writer will need to decide if a preposition is warranted, and a few prepositions may seem to go against common sense. Yet, with time, a writer can master these smaller units of grammar.

Prepositions: Definitions and Examples

Below are a list of basic definitions and examples for when and how to use each preposition.

About: Shows approximation; describes a topic of discussion.

Ex. The cord should be about three inches long.
Ex. We talked about Susie for an hour.

Across: Demonstrates distance between objects. Often useful when giving directions.

Ex. He could not get across the chasm.
Ex. Do you see the building across the street?

Against: Shows a lack of distance between objects. Reveals a negative reaction to a situation or person.

Ex. Push the chair against the wall.
Ex. He was against the plan already.

Alongside: Shows one object next to another, usually in close proximity.

Ex. The police cruiser pulled alongside my car.
Ex. The gerbil ran alongside the chair.

Among: Describes the closeness of objects, usually used with groups; indicates fellowship.

Ex. The dog sat among the tulips.
Ex. He felt welcomed sitting among the students.

At: Demonstrates specific location. When describing future locations or goals, often used in place of toward.

Ex. I am at home.
Ex. I am aiming at having a degree in five years.

Below: Reveals an object's location underneath another object. When used figuratively, indicates substandard performance.

Ex. Many organisms live below the water's surface.
Ex. The test scores were below average.

Above: Illustrates an object in relation to another object. The first item is represented over the second object.

Ex. The picture hangs above the television.
Ex. The shelf sits above the door.

After: Suggests the passage of time and prior events. Establishes cause/effect relationships; demonstrates the position of one object behind another object.

Ex. After the movie, I read an exciting book.
Ex. After he failed to appear, I left.
Ex. She trailed after her sister.

Along: Illustrates one object following another. Often used in place of with or beside.

Ex. We left the yard, and the dog followed along.
Ex. If you behave, we will take you along (with us).

Amidst: Describes a noun's location between two other nouns; refers to the middle of an event or occurrence, often used in place of middle.

Ex. The trophy lay amidst the messy clothes.
Ex. Amidst the meeting, she called.

Around: Illustrates movement that bypasses without harming an object. When used figuratively, implies dodging an area of concern or worry.

Ex. I crashed my bike when I did not go around the tree.
Ex. I must find a way around my financial problems.

Behind: Shows an object's location in relation to another. The first object precedes the second one. When used figuratively, implies procrastination or delay.

Ex. The magazine fell behind the couch.
Ex. I am behind on my project (because I was sick).

Beneath: Suggests the location of one object below another object; often used in place of under.

Ex. The cat raced under the table after his toy mouse.

Beside: Shows one object's position next to or alongside another object.

Ex. The trashcan sits beside the desk.

Between: Reveals the location of one object in the middle of two others.

Ex. Put the tomato between the lettuce and the meat.

By: Demonstrates responsibility of passive actions; illustrates how to complete an action; indicates authorship.

Ex. The riddle was solved by me.

Ex. Cut the rope by using the three-inch blade.

Ex. The book is by Sharon Shinn.

Down: Indicates a direction beneath or away from a central position. When used figuratively, suggests a drop in value or price.

Ex. The store is down the street from her house.

Ex. After the rumors, the stock market finished down.

For: Reveals intended ownership; shows causal relationships.

Ex. Is that gift for me?

Ex. This step is crucial for our plan to succeed.

In: Suggests motion moving toward and inside an object; indicates a moment of time; marks a specific location.

Ex. Place the cereal in the cupboard.

Ex. In the future, cars will run on less gasoline.

Ex. I found my book in the den.

Into: Demonstrates motion moving between objects. Figuratively, suggests inner workings of problems.

Ex. Everyone needs to move into the museum.

Ex. We need to delve into his psyche.

Of: Shows the relation of one object to another; suggests kinship; indicates possession.

Ex. I am aware of your plans.

Ex. She is from the Kansas part of the Ross family.

Ex. This is the book of the girl.

Besides: Illustrates extra information. Often used in place of in addition.

Ex. Besides snacks, he brought music for the party.

Beyond: Indicates extended distance between objects; shows an object as out of reach.

Ex. Her house lies beyond the shopping center.

Ex. The shelf is too high. It is beyond my reach.

Concerning: Suggests a degree of action. Often used in place of about.

Ex. The letter is concerning your meeting with Charles.

Ex. If reading magazines concerning cars, check that you have a reputable source.

During: Shows action taking place in the midst of a particular event; indicates a specific moment in time.

Ex. During the argument, the cat innocently meowed.

Ex. We shall discuss it during lunch.

From: Demonstrates prior ownership; reveals causal relationships.

Ex. The gift is from all of us.

Ex. She learned French from the language tapes.

Inside: Describes a location within another place. Also, indicates motion toward a specific location.

Ex. The key lies inside the decorative box.

Ex. We will go inside the museum at 2:00.

Near: Reveals the proximity of one object to another; also suggests that a desire is within reach.

Ex. The creamer is near the sugar.

Ex. He is near his goal of graduating.

Off: Suggests a change in location. Idiomatically, recommends avoidance of a subject or person.

Ex. The cat fell off of the chair.

Ex. Get off the subject already.

On: Shows location at a specific place, usually atop something. Idiomatically, indicates preciseness.

Ex. Set the book on the table.
Ex. Your numbers are dead on!

Out: Illustrates movement when exiting a location; indicates a lack of resources.

Ex. She needed to get out of the building.
Ex. He realized that he was out of paper.

Over: Indicates the location of one object above another one.

Ex. The papers fell over the coins.

Through: Illustrates motion that moves inside of an object. Idiomatically, indicates finality.

Ex. The train raced through the tunnel.
Ex. I'm glad that project is through!

To: Indicates changes in possession or location.

Ex. I returned the book to the shelf.

Under: Shows an object's location below another one. Figuratively, implies a lack of something.

Ex. The ball rolled under the table.
Ex. The numbers are under the CEO's expectations.

Up: Indicates movement of one object over another.

Ex. The car raced up the hill.

With: Implies a method of action; suggests association.

Ex. She quickly recorded the number with her pen.
Ex. He left with Mike and Rachel, not Chris.

Without: Shows the importance of a crucial yet lacking object; figuratively, applies to people as well as objects.

Ex. We cannot make the cake without flour.
Ex. I cannot finish the project without her.

Onto: Reveals movement from one location to the top of another locale.

Ex. The cat jumped onto the chair again.

Outside: Demonstrates the relationship between objects separated by a wall or partition. Implies a distance between objects or ideas.

Ex. The cat watched the dogs play outside.
Ex. Your paper is outside the assignment parameters.

Regarding: Shows a degree of concern; used in place of about or concerning.

Ex. Send me an email regarding those books.

Throughout: Suggests permeation of an object or idea; implies a duration.

Ex. The rumors spread throughout the school.
Ex. Throughout the project, track your eating habits.

Toward: Demonstrates motion coming near an object.

Ex. The ball flew toward my head by mistake.

Underneath: Describes the location of an object under another one.

Ex. The cat remained underneath the bed.

Upon: Demonstrates location, (archaic) used in place of on; denotes a temporal occurrence.

Ex. The car sat upon the hill.
Ex. Upon finishing the book, loan it to Rasheeda.

Within: Illustrates an object's position inside of another.

Ex. The project fits within the assignment boundaries.