Using Prepositions

In this activity, you will learn when to use prepositions and how to include them in your writing.

What is a Preposition?

A **preposition** connects a noun or a pronoun with other parts of a sentence. It usually indicates direction, location or time.

eg. The girl on the horse raced by.
— "on" (the preposition) connects the girl and the horse

Common prepositions

- About
- Before
- Down
- Of
- Toward
- Concerning
- Above
- Throughout
- Without
- Despite

Example: Alex left the party **without** Mike.

Example: She loved brie cheese **despite** being lactose intolerant.

For more common prepositions, visit the [prepositions tip sheet](#).

Prepositions that contain more than one word

- According to
- By way of
- In spite of
- Ahead of
- Contrary to
- Instead of
- As well as
- In case of
- Out of
- Because of

Example: Many construction projects were completed ahead of the Olympics.

Example: Scott was late for work because of the construction.

For more prepositions with more than one word, visit the prepositions tip sheet.

**Prepositions of time**

1. **One point in time**
   - **on** (use with days, but it can sometime be left out in informal writing.) Example: I will see you on Saturday.
   - **at** (use with noon, night, midnight, or with the time of day.) Example: Our Criminal Law class starts at 2 p.m.
   - **in** (use with other parts of the day, with months, with years, with seasons). Example: Our family always has a big reunion in the spring.

2. **Extended time**
   - **since, for** (sometimes left out in informal writing when there’s a definite quantity),
   - **by, from...to, from...until, during, (with)in**.

   Example: We’ve known each other since kindergarten.

   Example: He said it would be fixed by this evening.

**Prepositional phrases**

A **prepositional phrase** occurs when a preposition is followed by a noun, with or without an article or a possessive pronoun in between.

Prepositional phrases can have three functions:

1. **adjectival**
2. **adverbial**
3. **nominal**

1. **Adjectival Prepositional Phrases**

An **adjectival prepositional phrase** functions as an adjective. It appears after the noun it modifies.

Example: The most beautiful building on our campus has lots of natural light.

2. **Adverbial Prepositional Phrases**

An **adverbial prepositional phrase** functions as an adverb. It has three possible positions in a sentence:

   1. initial – example using the prepositional phrase is ‘In spite of her handicap’: In spite of her
handicap, the blind girl did well in school.
2. mid – example: The blind girl, in spite of her handicap, did well in school.
3. final – example: The blind girl did well in school in spite of her handicap.

3. Nominal Prepositional Phrases

A nominal prepositional phrase functions as a noun. Like a noun, it can be the subject of a sentence (1), the object of the verb (2), or the subject complement (3). Nominal phrases can appear on either side of a verb.

1. Example (subject of a sentence): His failure to commit cost him the loss of a great relationship.
2. Example (object of the verb): His failure to commit cost him the loss of a great relationship.
3. Example (subject complement): She is the top student in the course.

Test Your Knowledge

Now that you’ve learned about prepositions, and when and how to use them, it’s time to test your knowledge.

1. Select the preposition in the sentence below.
   “Meet me here at midnight.”
   Correct response: The preposition is ‘at’.

2. Which word in the following phrase is the preposition? “She jumped over the small stream.”
   Correct response: The preposition is ‘over’.

3. Which word in the following phrase is the preposition? “The hairy troll lived underneath the bridge.”
   Correct response: The preposition is ‘underneath’.

4. Which preposition would you use in this sentence? “I went to the dentist Wednesday.”
   a. On
   b. At
   c. In
   d. Within
   Correct response: Answer ‘a’. The preposition ‘on’ is used for days, such as Wednesday.

5. In the following sentence, what is the adverbial prepositional phrase? “Sarah ran to school.”
   Correct response: The prepositional phrase is ‘to school’. It is made up of the preposition ‘to’ and the noun ‘school’.

6. In the following sentence, what is the adjectival prepositional phrase? “The house beside the river.”
   Correct response: The prepositional phrase is ‘beside the river’. It is made up of the preposition ‘beside’ and the noun ‘river’.