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 propositions. 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alongside of</th>
<th>In Front Of</th>
<th>In Regards To</th>
<th>Out of</th>
<th>Together With</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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.

**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.

**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?

**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.

**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.

**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).

**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.

**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).

**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.

**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.

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

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

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

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

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**For:** Reveals intended ownership; shows causal relationships.

Ex. Is that gift for me?
Ex. This step is crucial for our plan to succeed.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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!

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

Ex. The cat jumped onto the chair again.

**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.

**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.

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

Ex. The papers fell over the coins.

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

Ex. Send me an email regarding those books.

**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!

**Toward:** Demonstrates motion coming near an object.

Ex. The ball flew toward my head by mistake.

**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.

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

Ex. The cat remained underneath the bed.

**Up:** Indicates movement of one object over another.

Ex. The car raced up the hill.

**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.

**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.