

5. PREPOSITIONS

A preposition is a word which shows a relationship between a noun or pronoun (called the **object of the preposition**) and another word in the sentence.

Common prepositions: *about, above, across, after, against, along, among, around, as, at, before, behind, below, beneath, beside, besides, between, beyond, but (except), by, concerning, down, during, except, for, from, in, into, like, near, of, off, on, out, outside, over, past, round, since, through, till, to, toward, under, underneath, until, up, upon, with, within, without*

Sometimes two or more words are used to form a preposition: *because of, on account of, by means of, in spite of, apart from, in place of, instead of, according to, out of, as to*

Earlier in this book you have learned that prepositional phrases may be used as adjectives or adverbs. As such, prepositional phrases serve many purposes:

to indicate direction or place	We climbed <i>toward the summit</i> . The goldfish swam <i>in the bowl</i> .
to establish time relationships	I left <i>before intermission</i> . They played <i>after finishing their homework</i> .
to provide identification	You should read the report <i>of the committee</i> . There was nothing <i>concerning the budget</i> .
to make a comparison	Your violin sounds <i>like a cat stuck in a drainpipe</i> . He has a beard <i>like Abraham Lincoln's</i> .
to provide narrative detail	She entered the water <i>without a splash</i> . He pointed to the boats <i>in a sweeping gesture</i> .
to provide descriptive detail	He looked silly <i>without his false teeth</i> . She stood covered <i>in green and red paint</i> .

A **narrative detail** lets the reader see the action of the verb more clearly. A **descriptive detail** lets the reader perceive the noun or pronoun more completely.

The prepositional phrase is usually found immediately after the word it modifies, as in the examples above. But it may also be used to begin or end a sentence, often in combination with other grammatical constructions.

Without a penny between them, my grandparents set out for Alaska.
Like a ballerina playing the dying swan, my sister threw her hand to her forehead and fell onto the couch.
The horse cantered around the corral, *with a magnificent tossing of its head and snorting from its nostrils*.

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE ISSUES

Although the prepositional phrase is a natural and common construction in our speaking and writing, it can present occasional problems.

Compared to what? When making comparisons, make sure they say what you want them to.

Incorrect: He has a beard *like Abe Lincoln*.
Correct: He has a beard *like Abe Lincoln's*.

The right case? If the object of the preposition is a personal pronoun, make sure it is in the objective case.

They played a great game against *us* boys.
 Everyone except *him* received an invitation.
 That's a secret between *her* and *me*.
 From *whom* did he buy the Model T Ford?

If the object of the preposition is a noun clause, you might again need to determine whether to use *who* or *whom*. Which form to use will be determined by its use in the noun clause, not by the fact that it follows a preposition.

We have no information about *who* was on the train. (subject of *was*)
 Our whole senior year depends on *whom* we elect today. (direct object of *elect*)

See Chapter 7, "Pronouns," for more practice with pronoun case.

Preposition or adverb? What might look like a preposition may actually be an adverb, and the noun which follows it is a direct object, not the object of the preposition. Consider these sentences:

He wrote down the license number. He skied down the mountain.

In the first sentence, *the license number* is the direct object of the verb *wrote down*. In the second sentence, *the mountain* is the object of the preposition *down*.

Usually you can tell the difference by rearranging the word order of the sentence.

He wrote the license number down.

It is now clear that *down* is an adverb, not a preposition. A similar rearrangement of the second sentence would make little sense.

There are several other prepositions which can stand alone as adverbs. Consider these sentences, then try to find others on the preposition list that could also be adverbs.

She put her arms *up*. It's cold *outside*. The children ran *around* wildly.

Preposition or conjunction? In the next chapter, you will learn about conjunctions, another part of speech. Many conjunctions also look like prepositions. For now, you should just remember that a preposition is followed by some form of noun, creating a prepositional phrase which may then be used as an adjective or an adverb.

Another -ing ending? You have learned about the present participle verb form, the present participial phrase, and the gerund phrase. Although they function in very different ways in a sentence, as verb, adjective, and noun, they all end with *-ing*. Now you see *during* and *concerning*. It can get confusing. To remember that *concerning* and *during* are prepositions, try substituting other prepositions in simple prepositional phrases.

<i>concerning</i> the story	<i>about</i> the story	<i>in</i> the story
<i>during</i> the concert	<i>before</i> the concert	<i>after</i> the concert

PREPOSITIONS

Name: _____

EXERCISE A: objects of prepositions

Accuracy _____ Creativity _____

Directions: In this exercise, we have provided some prepositions, preceded by words for the prepositional phrases to modify. You need to complete those prepositional phrases by supplying the objects of the prepositions, using the type of noun indicated. You may wish to turn back to Chapter 2 to review nouns. Notice that you will be graded on both accuracy and creativity.

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES AS ADJECTIVES

1. a first edition of _____
(common noun)
2. every President since _____
(proper noun)
3. anything except _____
(noun clause)
4. nobody apart from _____
(proper noun)
5. great success without _____
(gerund phrase)
6. no choice but _____
(infinitive phrase)
7. six members in addition to _____
(common noun)

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES AS ADVERBS

8. drove without _____
(gerund phrase)
9. stood during _____
(proper noun)
10. built according to _____
(noun clause)
11. flew beyond _____
(proper noun)
12. tasted like _____
(common noun)
13. read instead of _____
(gerund phrase)
14. missing since _____
(proper noun)

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15. sad *because of* _____
(gerund phrase)
16. red *like* _____
(common noun)
17. tired *from* _____
(gerund phrase)
18. undecided *as to* _____
(noun clause)
19. lonesome *without* _____
(common noun)
20. hidden *beneath* _____
(proper noun)

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EXERCISE B: prepositional phrases

Accuracy _____ Creativity _____

Directions: In this exercise, we have provided only the prepositions. Fill in the blank preceding the preposition with the indicated part of speech. Then, complete the prepositional phrase by writing an object of the preposition in the form indicated, as you did in Exercise A.

EXAMPLES:

chicken (noun)	with	no feathers (common noun)
something (pronoun)	from	Montreal, Canada (proper noun)
will leave (verb)	instead of	hanging around here all day (gerund phrase)
sold out (adjective)	according to	what I read in the paper (noun clause)

1. _____ besides _____
(noun) (gerund phrase)
- ✓ 2. _____ but _____
(noun) (infinitive phrase)
- ✓ 3. _____ according to _____
(noun) (noun clause)
4. _____ like _____
(pronoun) (proper noun)
5. _____ out of _____
(verb) (common noun)
6. _____ until _____
(verb) (proper noun)
7. _____ against _____
(verb) (noun clause)
8. _____ by _____
(verb) (gerund phrase)
9. _____ from _____
(adjective) (gerund phrase)
10. _____ because of _____
(adjective) (noun clause)

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EXERCISE C: prepositional phrases by purpose

Accuracy _____ Creativity _____

Directions: Fill in the spaces below with prepositional phrases as indicated. Once you have written the prepositional phrase, you may add further information that you feel is appropriate.

1. The senior _____ kept giggling throughout the school meeting.
(descriptive detail)
2. No one knew the name _____ .
(identification)
3. His little sister kept squirting the hose _____ .
(direction or place)
4. The jet plane smoothly rolled through the 360-degree turn, _____ .
(comparison)
5. The yapping dog chased the terrified kitten _____ ,
(direction)
_____, and _____ .
(direction) (direction)
6. He looked like a pirate, with _____ , _____ .
(object 1) (object 2)
_____, and _____ .
(object 3)
7. _____ , we loaded the station wagon and went home.
(time)
8. Her pet hamster, _____ , hopped out of the cage and ran behind the bookcase.
(time)
9. Most of the trees _____ will have to be cut down.
(place)
10. _____ , she ran her fingers up and down the piano keys.
(comparison)

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EXERCISE D: reading for prepositional phrases

_____ Accuracy _____

Directions: Read in a good book of fiction and look for ten prepositional phrases being used as adjectives and ten being used as adverbs. In the parentheses, write the word the phrase modifies. On the line, write the phrase itself. At the bottom, write the name of the book and its author.

adjective phrases

1. (_____) _____
2. (_____) _____
3. (_____) _____
4. (_____) _____
5. (_____) _____
6. (_____) _____
7. (_____) _____
8. (_____) _____
9. (_____) _____
10. (_____) _____

Book title and author: _____

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adverb phrases

1. () _____
2. () _____
3. () _____
4. () _____
5. () _____
6. () _____
7. () _____
8. () _____
9. () _____
10. () _____

Book title and author: _____