

MPC English & Study Skills Center

Prepositional Phrases

Prepositions

The word “**preposition**” means “placed before.” It is placed at the beginning of a group of words called a **prepositional phrase**. A preposition is usually one word, but it can be two or three words. A preposition must be followed by a noun or pronoun, but there may be an article, adverbs, and adjectives between the preposition and the noun or pronoun.

Examples: The prepositional phrases are underlined in the following sentences. Note that several prepositional phrases may be grouped together.

In the morning, the men will come at exactly 8 o'clock and put the papers on the big desk for the President of the United States, and after a big lunch, they will take him to the Rose Garden for a speech. One of the men is a friend of his press secretary.

Note: An important thing to remember about prepositional phrases is that the noun or pronoun in a prepositional phrase (the object of the preposition) cannot be a subject or a direct object of a sentence. It cannot do anything except be the object of the preposition.

The Most Common Prepositions

at	for	in	of	to	with
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Other Common Prepositions

about	below	excepting
above	beneath	excluding
according to	beside	following
across	besides	forward of
after	between	from
against	beyond	in addition to
ahead of	by	in between
along	by way of	including
amid/amidst	circa	in favor of
among	close to	in front of
apart from	considering	in lieu of
around	contrary to	in place of
as	depending on	in regard to
aside from	despite	inside/inside of
away from	down	in spite of
because of	due to	instead of
before	during	into
behind	except/except for	like

minus
near/near to
next to
off
on
on account of
opposite/opposite to
other than
out
out of
outside/outside of
over

owing to
past
pending
per
plus
regarding
regardless of
since
than
through
throughout
till

together with
toward/towards
under
underneath
unlike
until
up/upon
up to
versus
with/within
without

Functions of Prepositional Phrases

A prepositional phrase is used to modify other words in a sentence. It usually works either as an adjective (to modify or describe a noun or pronoun) or as an adverb (to modify a verb). These functions are described as “to locate in time,” “to locate in space,” and “other.”

Locate in Time:

‡ Prepositional phrases often tell **when** something happens.

In the morning, I like to read the newspaper.
I went home **around noon**.
The girls went **in the afternoon** to see a movie.
The work needs to be done **after lunch** but **before dinner**.

Locate in Space:

‡ Prepositional phrases often tell **where** something happens.

On the street corner, the woman stood watching the cars.
I put the paper **on the desk underneath the book next to the lamp**.

Other:

‡ Prepositional phrases also provide a number of descriptions that are not related to time or space. Review the list and become familiar with common prepositions. Be especially aware of the following prepositions:

Of

This is always a preposition. It has no other job in English.
One **of the girls** wants to buy that book. (Note: "One" is the subject of this sentence, not "girls".)
I would like a piece **of cake**.
The reading **of the will** takes place at 6 p.m.

Like

This preposition should not be used as a conjunction followed by a subject and verb as in "I feel like I need a break." This is a common error. This sentence should read, "I feel as though I need a break."
Juanita wants to marry a man **like her father**.

I feel **like studying**.

With/ Without

These are always prepositions.

I went **with my sister**.

Without the wig, Captain Picard looks very distinguished.

Quick Test for Prepositional Phrases

There is a quick test to determine if a word is a preposition. Put the word in the blank, and if it makes sense, it is probably a preposition. Unfortunately, this test won't work with all of the prepositions.

Test: I ran _____ the bridge. (over, under, through, etc.)

Confusion with Infinitives

Don't be fooled by an **infinitive**. An infinitive is the word "to" plus the root form of a verb (to study, to think, to sleep, etc.). It can be used as a noun or adjective in the sentence but it is not a verb, and it is not a preposition--even though it looks a bit like one.

Examples: I like **to swim**, but Sarah wants **to play** golf. **To breathe** is **to live**.