

Grammar Prepositions

Prepositions begin phrases that modify other words in the sentence. Often, they describe time or space relationships, showing how a noun or pronoun relates to another word within a sentence.

COMMON PREPOSITIONS

The most frequently used prepositions are *at, by, for, from, in, of, on, to,* and *with*. Below is a list of these and other common prepositions. (Note: A preposition may be more than one word.)

about	as	but	in addition to	outside	under
aboard	at	by	inside	over	underneath
above	because of	down	in spite of	past	until
according to	before	despite	like	since	unto
across	behind	during	near	through	up
after	below	except for	of	throughout	upon
against	beneath	for	off	till	with
along with	beside	from	on top of	to	within
among	between	in	out	toward	without

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

A preposition is most often followed by a noun or pronoun that serves as the **object of the preposition**. The preposition, its object, and all words that modify the object make up a **prepositional phrase**.

Prepositional Phrase	Preposition	Modifiers	Object
under my old table	under	my old	table
because of his horrible attitude	because of	his horrible	attitude

THE ROLE OF PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

Prepositional phrases normally function as adjectives or adverbs within a sentence.

- ◆ **Adjectival Prepositional Phrases**—As adjectives, prepositional phrases usually follow the noun or pronoun they modify and answer questions like *Which one?* or *What kind?*
EXAMPLES: The girl **from Canada**. (Which girl? The girl *from Canada*. The phrase modifies *girl*.)
A day **like today**. (What kind of day? A day *like today*. The phrase modifies *day*.)
- ◆ **Adverbial Prepositional Phrases**—As adverbs, prepositional phrases modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. They answer questions such as the following: *When? Where? How? Why? To what extent? Under what conditions?*
EXAMPLES: I slept **in the barn**. (The phrase modifies the verb *slept*. It answers the question *Where?*)
For you, I'll do it! (The phrase explains *under what conditions* you'll do it.)
I am tired **of this show**. (The phrase, *of this show*, modifies the adjective *tired*.)

IDENTIFYING PREPOSITIONS

In certain settings, a word that is usually a preposition may actually be a conjunction instead. If the word introduces an object of a preposition (**noun + words that modify the noun**), then it is a preposition:

PREPOSITIONS: **Before school** (The phrase contains a preposition and a noun, so *before* is a preposition.)
He works **as a full-time doctor**. (The phrase contains the word *as*, a noun [*doctor*], and its modifiers [*a full-time*], so *as* must be a preposition. *A full-time doctor* is its object.)

If the word introduces a clause (group of words containing both **a noun subject and a verb**), then it is not a preposition, but a **conjunction**. (See *Conjunctions* handout.)

CONJUNCTIONS: **Before you went to school** (The group of words is a clause because it contains a noun subject [*you*] and a verb [*went*]. Therefore, *before* is a subordinating conjunction.)
I will watch **as the doctor operates**. (*The doctor operates* is a clause because it has a subject [*The doctor*] and a verb [*operates*]. Thus, *as* must be a subordinating conjunction.)