

Prepositional Phrases

A preposition describes a relationship between other words in a sentence. By themselves, words like “in” or “after” are rather meaningless and difficult to define. Prepositions are almost always combined with other words in structures called *prepositional phrases*. Prepositions are used to locate something in time and space, modify a noun, or tell when, where, or under what conditions something happened. Prepositional phrases, in theory, can modify sentences infinitely. Therefore, it is important for writers to understand their form and function in order to make appropriate stylistic choices.

Frequently Used Prepositions

about	away from	beside	during	on	underneath
above	apart from	besides	except	onto	until
according to	around	between	for	out (out of)	up
across	aside from	beyond	from	outside	upon
after	at	by	in (into)	over	with
against	because of	by means of	including	past	within
along	before	by way of	like	through	without
along with	behind	concerning	near	to	
amid/amidst	below	despite	of	towards	
among	beneath	down	off	under	

Prepositions of Time

At, On, In

These prepositions are used to show the time and date of events, activities, and situations.
E.g. My ballet audition will be **at** three o'clock **on** the first Monday **in** June.

For, Since

These prepositions explain **how long** an event, activity, or situation has continued.
E.g. I have worked continuously on my final project **for** three days **since** last Thursday.

During, While

These prepositions explain a **period of time** in which an event, activity or situation took place.
E.g. **During** my last vacation, I spotted a barracuda **while** swimming.

By, Until

These prepositions describe a time limit for commencement/completion of an activity.
E.g. **By** Sunday of next week, I will clean the house **until** it is sparkling.

From, To

From to/until defines the beginning and end of a period of time: present, past, or future.
E.g. Jane lived a fulfilling life **from** 1930 **to** 2015.

Prepositions of Place

At, On, In

These prepositions show the position of people, places, and things.

E.g. **At** a restaurant **in** southern Spain, I noticed many beautiful paintings **on** the walls.

Preposition Exceptions

In English, certain expressions are idiomatic (culturally engrained). Below are a few examples:

At this/that moment	At the end/beginning
On holiday	On the radio
In a loud/angry/quiet... voice	In a good/bad mood

Both **at** and **to** can follow certain verbs; the meaning of the verb is different in each case: to throw, run, or shout.

E.g. Bill threw a stone **to** me/ran **to** me/shouted **to** me. (a friendly action)

Compare the above with the following:

E.g. Bill threw a stone **at** me/ran **at** me/shouted **at** me. (a hostile action)

Use of Prepositions

There are no rules that govern how much nouns and verbs can be modified. However, when used excessively, they can sound somewhat comical in an attempt at over clarification. Compare, for example, the following sentences:

1. Here **is** an example **of** the use **of** the rule **of** justice **in** argumentation.
(many prepositional phrases)

This passage exemplifies argumentation using the rule **of** justice.
(a single prepositional phrase)

2. Grassroots peace movements **are** vital **in** ensuring the future well-being **of** the international community.

Grassroots peace movements help maintain international security.

References

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