# 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.)